

Improve Your Materials

PART 1 OF READING FLUENCY

What is Reading Fluency?

Literacy experts David Liben and David Paige explain the characteristics of reading fluency

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How do you define “reading fluency?” For many, the term may be a little hazy – something to do with being able to read “well,” but they aren’t exactly sure what “well” encompasses.

It’s important for educators to be able to define the characteristics of reading fluency and have materials to help their students gradually build those skills through consistent practice.

[Achieve the Core’s Fluency Packets](#) are sets of materials uniquely designed to address the skills needed to read fluently. The packets are intended for use in grades 2-12 (although in some instances, advanced students can start in grade 1). Each packet contains about 40 passages (enough to use one passage per week), along with comprehension questions, vocabulary, and instructions for use.

What is reading fluency, however? What skills should you focus on when you allocate class time to working on reading fluency? The following are the characteristics of reading fluency:

Word Identification Accuracy

Students who understand the principles of phonics know the sounds of the English language are represented by printed letters and letter combinations, and when combined into letter strings make the words we use in speech. They have also learned the numerous rules and exceptions that regulate how these words are transferred from print to speech, a process we call decoding. With sufficient practice, readers learn to accurately and instantly recognize a large number of words without applying their decoding knowledge. These words become part of the reader's long-term memory. The "automatic" retrieval from long-term memory is accomplished without conscious awareness and consumes little if any of the reader's mental resources, allowing them to focus on comprehension. The extent to which a reader correctly identifies words in text is called word identification accuracy and reflects the efficiency with which the student has learned and can decode words. Thus, decoding knowledge provides the reader with a "bootstrapping" capability to self-learn new words. Unfortunately, disfluent readers with an insufficient knowledge of the decoding system can become quickly frustrated with what they may consider to be an exhausting and uninteresting activity of little value. In sum, the accuracy with which a reader decodes words in connected text is one reflection of an efficient reading system and an important indicator of fluent reading.

Pacing

The second indicator of smooth reading is the ability to read the text at an appropriate pace. Pacing is affected not only by accurate and automatic word reading, but also by familiarity with the syntax used by the author. Other factors involving comprehension processing can also affect the pace at which text is read. What is an appropriate pace? It is not speed reading. Encouraging students to read unnaturally fast will almost certainly result in poorer comprehension because the student must focus their attention on reading words quickly rather than on constructing deep meaning. Experts who study reading fluency suggest that the pace at which humans engage in conversation can be considered a rough approximation for appropriate oral reading. Of course we all know people who speak quickly and others who speak more slowly. The point here is that as teachers, we allow for the normal variance in speech when determining what represents conversational pacing for fluent reading. The goal for instruction, then, is to encourage students to read at a conversational pace that mimics their normal speech. As students grow in their reading ability they often read at a faster pace when reading silently because the articulation used to produce speech is not required.

Prosody

Like the other two, this third indicator of reading fluency occurs in both oral and silent reading. Reading with prosody, or expression, is what the reader does to make the text mimic normal

speech. Prosody is critical to human language because it acts as a sort of “cognitive framework” that helps us to comprehend when engaged in speaking and listening. Imagine listening to a fast-talking, monotone individual – it quickly becomes difficult to make meaning and stay engaged as a listener. Perhaps you’ve heard two people talking in a language you don’t understand. After listening carefully you’ll hear a “rhythm” to their speech that consists of pauses, inflections, phrases, and expression. What you’re hearing is prosody and it helps the listener understand what’s being said. Research suggests that students who read with prosody are more likely to understand what they read than those who do not.

For a deeper look at what reading fluency is and how to achieve it, see the *Reading Fluency Overview* attached at the bottom of this blog post.

Associated Files

Reading Fluency Overview

FILE TYPE	FILE SIZE
doc	85KB

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About the Author: David Liben is the Senior Content Specialist of the Literacy and English Language Arts team at Student Achievement Partners. David has taught elementary, middle school and high school students in public and private schools, as well as community college and teacher preparation courses, in New York City and Vermont. David still spends as much time as possible in schools with teachers and children. Together with Meredith Liben, David founded two innovative model schools in New York City - New York Prep, a junior high school in East Harlem, and in 1991, the Family Academy - where he served as Principal and lead curriculum designer. David holds a bachelor’s degree in Psychology from the University of Wisconsin and a master’s degree in school administration from Teachers College, Columbia University.

About the Author: David D. Paige is Associate Professor of Education at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. After a 20-year career in business, Dr. Paige began his educational career as a special educator in an urban middle school in Memphis, TN. After completed his doctoral studies at the University of Memphis, Dr. Paige entered higher education where his work in schools includes early reading instruction, reading fluency, assessment, vocabulary, and comprehension in children from poverty. Dr. Paige presents regularly at national conferences such as the International Reading Association, the Association of Literacy Researchers and Educators, the American Educational Research Association, the Consortium for Research Accountability and Teacher Evaluation, the Standards Institute and Student Achievement Partners. In the summer of

2015 Dr. Paige was the recipient of the Jay and Maureen McGowan Presidential Award where he visited to Oxford University as a visiting research scholar. Dr. Paige has published his research in a variety of national journals including Reading & Writing, The Journal of Literacy Research, The Reading Teacher, Reading Psychology, Reading Horizons, Literacy Research and Instruction, the Yearbook of the Association of Literacy Researchers and Educators, the Journal of Adult and Adolescent Literacy, Cogent Education, and the Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, as well as several book chapters. Dr. Paige is Executive Director of the Thinking Schools Academy, an initiative to improve teaching and learning in India, and holds credentials as a special educator and school administrator. Dr. Paige is President-Elect of the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers, a national literacy organization.

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