

# Using Repeated Reading and Readers Theater to Increase Fluency

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## What is Reading Fluency?

**Reading Fluency** is made up of at least three key elements: **accurate** reading of connected text at a conversational **rate** with appropriate **prosody** (expression). A fluent reader can maintain this performance for long periods of time, retains the skill after long periods of no practice, and can generalize across texts (Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2006, p. 702).

Another way to think of it is **decoding and comprehending text at the same time** (Samuels, 2006). When you do two things at once, one must become automatic. Because one has to pay attention in order to monitor and comprehend text, word reading is the process that must become automatic (Ladinger & Samuels, 1979).

Because reading fluency depends so much on the difficulty of the text, it is important to think about what text is being read. The question truly is whether a student is fluent in a particular text, not whether he is fluent in general.

Reading fluency is a **multifaceted skill** that requires orchestration of many different processes and subskills (Breznitz, 2006; Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001; Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001). A fluent reader effortlessly coordinates a large number of processes while reading.

When a student is dysfluent, teachers need to gather more information to determine what particular area is the trouble. Without this knowledge, it is impossible to what areas need strengthening and additional instruction.

**Without fluency, a reader is far less likely to . . .**

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## Who needs fluency intervention? What should we teach them? Questions of Assessment

Although **all** readers need many opportunities to practice reading in text at their independent level in order to become fluent readers, not every student needs instruction focused on building fluency. Determining who needs such instruction and what specific areas they need to work on is not as easy as it might seem at first glance.

## Curriculum-Based Measurement

A quick and easy way to assess the reading fluency of a student is to listen to her read and time how many correct words she can read in a minute in a grade-level text while simultaneously listening to her prosody. This will tell you how she compares to grade-level expectations.

Curriculum-based measurement (Progress Monitoring) answers two questions:

1. Is this reader reading as quickly and accurately as she should be for her grade level?
2. Is she making sufficient progress to end the year on target?

An oral reading fluency score will tell you who is having problems. It will NOT tell you why or what to do about it. It is just like a thermometer---it tells you if you have a fever, but not what the cause of the fever is or what the treatment should be.

When a student is dysfluent, teachers need to gather more information to determine what particular area is causing the student trouble. Without this knowledge, it is impossible to know what areas need strengthening and additional instruction.

## Is the student dysfluent because she...

...is slow?	...is inaccurate?	...lacks prosody?
– Decodes letter by letter?	– Missing phonics skills?	– Doesn't notice punctuation?
– Takes too many tries to read the words?	– Doesn't know many sight words?	– Lacks syntactic knowledge?
– Doesn't read words automatically?	– Doesn't have the oral vocabulary to match her decoding attempt to?	– Isn't paying attention to the meaning?
– Doesn't understand what she is reading?	– Not using all information in the text?	– Can't pay attention to meaning because of attention to decoding?
– Is making a speed accuracy trade off?	– Not monitoring?	

**After you do diagnostic assessment of your students, the answers to the question of why a student is dysfluent will lead to very different instructional decisions.**

## Research-Based Methods to Improve Reading Fluency

### What is required for fluent reading?

- A solid base of phonological knowledge
- Automatic word recognition
- The ability to apply phonetic, morphemic, and contextual analysis skills to recognize unfamiliar words
- The ability to segment text into meaningful syntactic chunks
- Extensive practice with materials that are easy to read

### The Bottom Line

As with any skill that requires an individual to coordinate a series of smaller actions to create a unified process, it is \_\_\_\_\_ that allows the learner to develop expertise.

(Kuhn & Stahl, 2002)

### Keep in Mind:

Accuracy, rate, and prosody are quite intertwined, and working on one area often means simultaneously working on another.

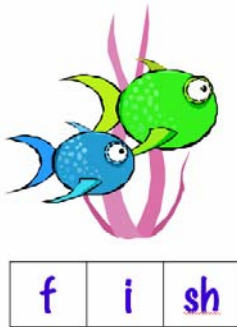
For example, increasing a student's accuracy will also improve her rate because she can now read more words correctly, and is likely to improve her prosody because she can now pay attention to it rather than decoding the words.

In fact, a teacher can focus simultaneously on a student's expressiveness and phrasing while also doing timed repeated readings to develop a faster rate.



### What the research says about developing reading fluency...

- Fluency develops most readily from practice (National Reading Panel, 2000).
- An NAEP study (1995) revealed that 44% of fourth graders lacked fluency levels necessary for grade-level comprehension.
- Adequate progress in learning to read...depends on sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).
- Classroom practices that encourage repeated oral reading with feedback and guidance lead to meaningful improvements in reading expertise (Snow et al., 1998).



### Improving Accuracy

- Focus of early reading instruction (phonics)
- Explicit, systematic instruction
- Can be accomplished with a variety of manipulative materials that make the alphabetic principle concrete and understandable for readers.

### Improving Reading Rate

- Ensure fluency in subskills needed for reading
- Repeated readings
- Timed readings



### Ensure fluency in subskills needed for reading

- It is not enough for children to be accurate in phonemic blending, letter sounds, and decoding. They also must be fluent in these skills to be able to use them when it really matters---in connected text with an unknown word.
- Teachers must attend to automaticity in their phonics instruction to be sure all their students can apply the phonics skills when they encounter unknown words in connected text.
- Fluency in phonemic blending, letter sound knowledge, and larger letter patterns (phonograms) predict decoding fluency in young children (Hudson, Torgesen, Lane, & Turner, 2006).



## What the research says about repeated reading:

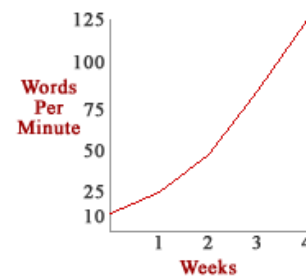
A meta-analysis of repeated readings research by Theirran (2004) found that these elements are **critical for success**:



- All students should read passages to an adult (ES=1.37) rather than a peer (ES=.36)
- Instructors should provide direct corrective feedback after every session
- Students should read until they reach a rate and accuracy criterion (ES=1.78) rather than a set number of times (ES=.38)

### Timed Repeated Readings

- Connected text for timed repeated readings can come from anywhere. As long as it is interesting to the student and at the right reading level, you can use it.
- Good ideas for students are nonfiction passages, excerpts of favorite stories, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, *Time for Kids*—whatever is interesting and motivating to the student.



**A great website to use to make your own reading passages for building fluency is OKAPI!: The Internet Application for Creating Curriculum-Based Assessment Reading Probes.**

**URL: <http://www.interventioncentral.org/htmldocs/tools/okapi/okapi.shtml>**

### **To conduct timed repeated readings, follow these steps three or four times a week:**

#### **1. Preview**

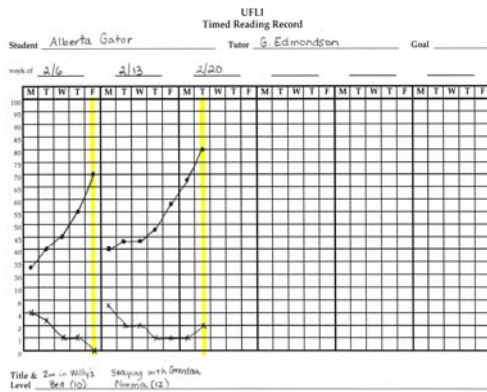
The student reviews and/or practices the timing probe. The instructor models the correct responses for any unknown words before beginning the timing.

#### **2. Review Data and Set Goal**

The student and instructor look at the graph of the previous session to review progress made to date and set a progress goal for today's session. For example, "I am going to read 10 more words than I did the last time" or "I am going to work on making 2 less mistakes than last time."

#### **3. Student Reads**

After instructor modeling, the student is asked to read as many words as possible in one minute from his or her copy of the reading materials. The instructor times the student for 1 minute and records errors on the instructor's copy of the page.



#### 4. Instructor Records

The instructor circles all errors on the instructor's copy of the page. In addition, the instructor offers the correct pronunciations during the timed reading if the student hesitates for more than 3 seconds.

#### 5. Record Data

The instructor or student accurately records all data on the student's *Progress Chart*.

#### 6. Review

The instructor and student review the student's performance on the task, correcting errors and practicing the correct pronunciation of words. Students should be encouraged for the progress they have made and set a goal for the next attempt.

#### 7. Decisions

If the student does not meet his or her rate and accuracy goals within one minute with two or fewer errors, the student will read that page again during the next instructional session and continue with that page until s/he masters it. If the student does successfully

read at his goal rate in one minute with two or fewer errors, he has met his goal and reads a more difficult passage during the next instructional session.

#### 8. Celebrate/Support

The instructor provides a reward any time students meet their goals. Students who do not are supported for their effort and new goals are set for the next time.

### Graphing Tips and Suggestions

- Use the graphs with students to provide critical information about progress and motivation
- Always use a pencil!
- Use a kitchen or other timer that counts down from 1 minute to keep your timing intervals consistent.
- Be consistent in what you chart—either the total words read/errors OR correct words read/errors. Whichever you choose, stick with it.
- Use dots for what you want to accelerate (words, sounds, phonograms, etc.) and Xs for what you want to decelerate (errors).
- Be sure to draw a line whenever something changes—new probe, long vacation, extra practice or instruction, illness, or anything else that might affect the student's performance.



- Never connect data points across a line. Only connect data points that are in the same passage and time frame.
- Three data points define a trend. Without at least three data points, you are unable to determine if the student is increasing or decreasing. Once a trend is established and it is not going to way you want, intervene. Don't wait to see if things get better.
- Teach students to do as much of the charting as possible.
- Draw an aim line for both the rate and the errors. Remember to stair step your interim goals to the final one. Manageable steps are better than huge jumps in rate.

### **After Students Read, Provide Direct Instruction and Feedback** (adapted from Blevins, 2000)

- Point out what they do right.
- Explain the return sweep eye movement if necessary
- Teach appropriate phrasing and intonation
- Teach letter-sound correspondences, decoding strategies, and a large core of high-frequency words.
- Provide practice reading new or difficult words prior to reading them in text.
- Teach students about “smooshing” words together

### **What the research says about the types of cues to give students before they read**



- Students read faster and comprehended better when students were cued to read for *both* speed and comprehension (Theirran, 2006)
- No difference in student’s reading fluency or correlation between fluency and comprehension based on cues to “do your best reading”, “read as quickly as possible”, and “it is important you read to understand the story” (Pressley, Hilden, & Shankland, submitted).
- Second graders had higher reading fluency when told to read “as fast as you can” than when asked to read “as carefully as you can”, but the correlations with a standardized comprehension test were not significantly different from each other (Hudson, Torgesen, & Schatschneider, 2006).

**Focusing on increasing reading rate and focusing on meaning are not mutually exclusive. In fact, teaching students that reading is only about reading words quickly misses the point of why we work to increase students’ fluency---so that they have sufficient attention to reach a deep understanding of the text they read.**

## Improving Prosody

- Reading with recordings
- Partner reading
- Assisted Reading
- Reader's Theatre

### Reading with Recordings

- Students read along as they listen to a fluent reader on audiotape
- Books should be at reader's independent level
- Integrate reading with recordings into repeated readings or timed repeated readings.
- Recordings should be free of sound effects, music, or other distractions



### Partner Reading



- Two students or a student and a tutor are paired to read the same text aloud
- Readers take turns reading
- Pair a more capable with a less capable reader; the more capable reader provides a model and offers support and feedback
- Equally capable readers reread text after hearing teacher read aloud, or after reading the passage during instruction

### Variations of Assisted Reading

#### *Echo reading*

- I read, then you read.
- Adult models accurate and prosodic reading (reads a line of text while pointing)
- Student 'echoes' the model (reads the same text while pointing)

#### *Duet reading or Choral Reading*

- We both read together (or as a group)

## What the research says about Readers' Theater

### Limited direct evidence of effectiveness in improving reading fluency



- Anecdotal stories of increased motivation or reading achievement (Worthy & Prater, 2002)
- Quasi-experimental study with small sample (& Rinehart, 1999) that found improvement in oral reading fluency and self-reported attitudes toward reading.
- Non-experimental pre-post studies (Corcoran & Davis, 2005; Keehn, 2003)
- Unpublished dissertations (Carrick, 2000; Maberry, 1975)

So, should we use Readers' Theater to build reading fluency?

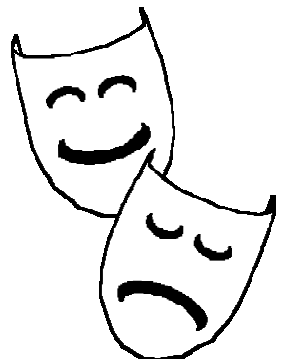
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Readers' Theater is valuable for providing the motivation to read text multiple times; an authentic reason to reread text.

For many struggling readers, the motivating factor is very strong and critical component of helping them develop into fluent readers.

### Benefits of Readers' Theater

- Provides an authentic purpose, legitimate reason, and motivation for rereading text multiple times.
- Through repeated readings, helps students develop accuracy, rate, and prosody.
- Helps students understand the importance of intonation and how it relates to context.
- Improves students' comprehension of text through repeated readings and variations in interpretation.
- Requires teamwork among students.
- Sanctions peer interaction and fun.



### Research-Based Components of Readers' Theater

- LOTS of practice, which means lots of reading, not listening to others
- Repeated readings of text with feedback—evidence suggests 3 to 4 readings
- Focus on helping students think about how to read the text to best represent the meaning

## Readers' Theatre

- Choose a pre-written script or adapt your own from a narrative, expository passage, poem, speech, or other interesting text that is rich in dialogue.
- Make sure the script is at the right reading level for your students and adapt as needed.
- Read aloud the text on which the script is based.
- Discuss characters' feelings and how they might sound as they speak.
- Have students practice reading and rereading entire script, then assign roles. Students can play both character and narrator roles.
- Students rehearse and perform play for peers.

### Helpful Hints for Teachers Beginning to Use Readers' Theater

Bafile (2005)

- Choose only scripts that are fun to do with fun characters, clear plots, and comfortable language that the students are familiar with.
- Start slowly and TEACH the procedures you will use while reading an easy script.
- Spend the time necessary so students feel comfortable in the performance mode.
- A stage is unnecessary—performances can take place in your classroom.
- At first, model each character's part and help match readers to roles.
- Combine parts if there are too many and cut out that which you don't need.
- Work with small groups whenever possible.
- Provide instructional support to students as needed for help reading words, understanding vocabulary, and understanding a character.
- Provide each reader with a separate script with his or her role highlighted in yellow. Storing scripts in binders or folders is a good way to keep them organized.



### Other Ideas to Ensure Sufficient Practice

- Pair students and have them read every other line, then switch.
- Have all students read all of the script before breaking into parts.
- Divide class into small groups and give a script to each group to maximize the amount of reading and allow matching of script to reading level of the students.

## Example of Process for Readers' Theater

from a study by Millin & Rinehart (1999)

### Day 1:

- Teacher reads story the script is derived from and then leads discussion focused on the characters, setting, plot, and student responses.
- Students put script in a ring binder.
- Teacher reads script to students, modeling reading with expression and attention to phrasing while students follow along.

### Day 2:

- Students practice reading scripts while listening to tape recording of the script.
- Students read their parts multiple times in pairs or small groups to give and receive feedback.
- Teacher circulates and provides instruction as needed.

### Day 3

- Teacher listens to whole group performance with focus on volume, expression, phrasing, and transition from one part to another and offers advice and help as needed.
- Group rereads script again.
- Students take script home to practice.

### Day 4:

- Dress rehearsal of story script with whole group.
- Individual practice of parts with tape, peer, or teacher.

### Day 5:

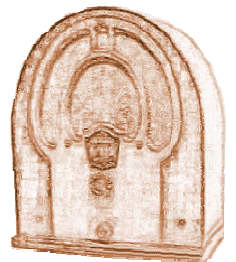
- Students performed readers' theater script for entire grade level.

### Subsequent Days:

- Each script is added to the same binder, and students are encouraged to reread previous scripts at home or during independent reading time.

### Radio Reading

- Similar to readers' theater, except with sound effects added to make it sound like an old-time radio show.
- Groups of students can create recorded versions of their "radio shows" that can become listening/read-along center readings for their classmates.
- Radio Reading reinforces the importance of prosody, because listeners will not understand without appropriate expression.



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## Internet Resources

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