



News You Can Use

April 2007

Reading Fluency: What, Why, and How?

By Mike Dunn

During a recent staff development session, high school writing and reading teachers asked questions regarding the place of reading fluency in the reading/writing curriculum, something teachers at all grade levels question.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress found that 44% of the nation's fourth graders were low in fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000). Recently, Rasinski, Padak, et. al. (2005) found that a group of ninth graders' level of oral reading fluency was below the 25th percentile for eighth graders. They also found that 28% of the variation in student achievement on the state high school test could be accounted for by variation in a student's reading fluency. That is why fluency is an important component of the Literacy Roadmap.

What

The National Reading Panel (2000) identified fluency as one of the five major components of reading that teachers must include in their instruction. According to the National Panel fluency is reading text with **speed, accuracy, and expression**. Johns and Berglund (2006) extend the definition of fluency, to include the **ability to comprehend** the material being read. What does each of these components of fluency mean?

Speed refers to the number of words a person correctly reads per minute (WCPM).

Accuracy refers to reading the material with few errors. Johns (2005) suggests that if a student misses more than 10% of the words in a passage, the text is too difficult for instruction.

Expression refers to the ability of the reader to use correct phrasing, tone, and pitch while reading text aloud.

Comprehension refers to the ability to understand the text being read.

Why

The ability to read material fluently is a characteristic associated with being a good reader. A fluent reader is able to use his energy on comprehending the text versus identifying the words in the text. A fluent reader identifies words automatically. There is evidence that immature readers generally lack fluency which means they devote more energy to word recognition, and have less energy for meaning.

How Do I Measure Fluency?

A teacher can measure a student's reading fluency or rate of reading in the following way:

1. Ask the student to read a grade level passage that they have never seen or read before for one minute.
2. While reading the passage, the teacher notes any errors the student makes while reading.
3. Stop the student after one minute. Count the number of words the student read in the minute and subtract any errors made by the student. For example, if the student read 120 words in a minute and made five errors. The student's reading rate is 115 words correct per minute.
4. Using the chart below you can determine if a student's reading rate is on target. The chart is based on research by Johns (2005) for students in first through eighth grade. Unfortunately, there is little research on what an appropriate reading rate is for students beyond grade eight. If you are a high school teacher you can use the eighth grade reading rates as a minimum rate of reading.

Mean Words Correct Per Minute "Targets" for Average Students in Grades One through Eight

Grade	Fall Target	Winter Target	Spring Target
1	Not applicable	20	50
2	50	70	90
3	70	90	110
4	95	110	125
5	110	125	140
6	125	140	150
7	125	140	150
8	130	140	150

Johns, J. and Berglund, R. (2006). *Fluency strategies and assessments*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishers.

Activities and Information for Increasing Fluency

- The Fluent Reader
[http://www.nksd.wednet.edu/district/tl/ci/Languagearts/Web_Site_Files/The Fluent Reader.doc](http://www.nksd.wednet.edu/district/tl/ci/Languagearts/Web_Site_Files/The_Fluent_Reader.doc)
- Assessing Reading Fluency
http://www.prel.org/products/re_/assessing-fluency.htm
- 5 Surefire Strategies for Developing Reading Fluency
<http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4367>
- Improving Reading Fluency in Young Readers
<http://www.busyteacherscafe.com/units/fluency.htm>
- Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities in Reading: Developing Reading Fluency
<http://www.cldinternational.org/Infosheets/fluency.asp>
- Fluency: An Oft-Neglected Goal of the Reading Program
<http://www.reading.org/Library/Retrieve.cfm?D=10.1598/0872075931.5&F=bk593-5-Rasinski.pdf>

Reflection

- What conclusions can you make regarding the focus of fluency instruction in your building, department/grade level, and classroom?
- What activities do you include in your instruction that assist students in becoming fluent readers? Do I provide time for fluency instruction?
- In your building, department/grade level, and classroom, how do you monitor students' fluency?

Reference

Johns, J. (2005). Fluency norms for students in grades one through eight. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 33, 3-8.

Johns, J. and Berglund, R. (2006). *Fluency strategies and assessments*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel. *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Education.

Rasinski, T., Padak, N, McKeon, C., Wilfong, L., Friedauer, J. and Heim, P. (2005). Is reading fluency a key for successful high school reading? *The Reading Teacher*, 49, 22-27.