

# Reading Fluency

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## Reading Fluency

Teachers have long known that students learning to read written text fluently—with appropriate rate, accuracy, and expression—is important in the overall development of proficient reading. However, the essential link between reading fluency and comprehension may have been “new news” to some teachers. This lack of awareness about fluency may have contributed to the National Reading Panel’s conclusion (NICHD 2000) that fluency as a skill is “often neglected” (p. 3-1).



teachers can begin to encourage students to read text with increasing rate while maintaining their accuracy. Teachers should also promote the use of appropriate rhythm, phrasing, and expression, so that reading begins to sound like natural speech (Stahl & Kuhn 2002).

To help develop students’ fluency skills, teachers can use a variety of techniques, including modeling fluent reading by reading aloud to students, and at times by having

students read aloud with them. This technique is sometimes referred to as choral reading. Students also benefit from opportunities to read aloud to their peers, especially when partners have been trained to correct and encourage each other.

## Developing Reading Fluency

The ability to process text accurately and effortlessly develops over time as students initially master the fundamental skills involved in accurate text decoding. Teachers in kindergarten and early first grade should focus on developing students’ phonemic awareness and decoding skills, along with appropriate vocabulary development and beginning text comprehension skills. This will lay a foundation of accurate reading, a fundamental component of fluency. Because text contains a large proportion of irregular, nondecodable words (such as *have*, *one*, *was*, *to*), another key aspect of becoming a fluent reader is to develop an instantaneous recognition of these “high-frequency words”. This skill is often referred to as automaticity. As students gain confidence with reading text,

Another powerful technique for improving students’ reading fluency is to provide opportunities for repeated reading of text. Repeated reading is strongly supported by research as an effective strategy to develop fluency. Repeated reading can be encouraged by having students keep track of one-minute samples of reading on a graph, perhaps recording their first, unpracticed “cold reading” in one color and their final score in another color, after reading the same piece of text three to five times (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers 1999). These individual graphs offer immediate, concrete, and positive feedback that can

powerfully motivate students to keep practicing.

Readers' theater is another way teachers can promote repeated reading of text. Here, students rehearse a short drama or play, repeatedly reading rather than memorizing their individual parts.

### Assessing Students' Reading Fluency

Teachers often wonder how fluent their students should be and how to measure fluency. Listening to a student read aloud for one minute from an unpracticed piece of grade-level text can provide teachers with a great deal of valuable information.

### Assessing Expression

Students' expression can be assessed using the oral reading fluency scale from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP scale has four levels of proficiency that provide a guide to assessing how well students read: 1) group or phrase words and use intonation, stress, and pauses; 2) adhere to the author's syntax; and 3) use expression by interjecting a sense of feeling, anticipation, or characterization (National Center for Education Statistics 1995).

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### Assessing Rate and Accuracy

To determine the accuracy and rate of a student's reading, a teacher can assess his or her words correct per minute (wcpm). While the student reads aloud from the unpracticed sample of grade-level text, the teacher notes any errors (mispronunciations, substitutions, omissions, words read out of order, or words supplied for the student after a 3–5 second pause). At the end of one minute, the teacher directs the student to stop reading and subtracts the total number of errors from the number of words attempted. This resulting wcpm score can be compared to benchmark norms for oral reading fluency (Hasbrouck & Tindal 2005). If a student's wcpm score is within plus or minus 10 wcpm of the 50th percentile on the oral reading fluency norms, or is more than 10 wcpm

above the 50th percentile, the student can be considered to be making adequate progress in fluency, unless other indicators raise concern.

Teachers should conduct these fluency assessments probably at least three times per year, in the fall, winter, and spring, from mid-Grade 1 at least through Grade 5. Teachers can use the scores from these assessments to monitor each student's progress in fluency; however, the scores also can serve as a powerful predictor of overall progress in reading (Hasbrouck & Tindal 2005) when considered alongside other assessments and observations of each student's reading, writing, and spelling.

### Biography

Jan Hasbrouck is an educational consultant and trainer, and recently served as the Executive Director of the *Washington State Reading Initiative*. She worked in schools as a reading specialist for 15 years before becoming a professor at the University of Oregon and later Texas A&M University. She consults with districts and state departments with a focus on improving instruction for students who struggle with reading. Dr. Hasbrouck also provides educational consulting to individual schools across the

United States as well as in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, and Germany, helping teachers and administrators design and implement effective instructional programs for low-performing readers.

Dr. Hasbrouck earned her B.A. and M.A. from the University of Oregon, and her Ph.D. at Texas A&M University. Her research in areas of fluency, coaching and consultation, and second language learners has been published in numerous professional journals and books. Dr. Hasbrouck is an active member of the International Reading Association, the Council for Exceptional Children, the National Association of School Psychologists, the Council for Learning Disabilities, and other professional organizations.

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