

Reading

BB – June 2022

Reading Fluency

Fluency is defined as the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. In order to understand what they read, children must be able to read fluently whether they are reading aloud or silently. When reading aloud, fluent readers read in phrases and add intonation appropriately.

Fluency: An Introduction

Fluency develops gradually over time and through practice. At the earliest stage of reading development, children's oral reading is slow and laboured because children are just learning to "break the code" – to attach sounds to letters and to blend letter sounds into recognisable words.

Even when children recognise many words automatically, their oral reading still may be expressionless, not fluent. To read with expression, readers must be able to divide the text into meaningful chunks. Readers must know to pause appropriately within and at the ends of sentences and when to change emphasis and tone. For example, a reader who lacks fluency may read, probably in a monotone, a line from Bill Martin Jr's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* as if it were a list of words rather than a connected text, pausing at inappropriate places:

Brown/
bear brown/
bear what/
do/
you see.

A fluent reader will read the same line as:

Brown bear/
Brown bear/
What do you see?/

The difference between fluency and automaticity

Although the terms automaticity and fluency often are used interchangeably, they are not the same thing.

Automaticity is the fast, effortless word recognition that comes with a great deal of reading practice. In the early stages of learning to read, readers may be accurate but slow and inefficient at recognising words. Continued reading practice helps word recognition become more automatic, rapid, and effortless.

Automaticity refers only to accurate, speedy word recognition, not to reading with expression. Therefore, automaticity (or automatic word recognition) is necessary, but not sufficient, for fluency.

Fluency instruction

Fluency is not a stage of development at which readers can read all words quickly and easily. Fluency changes, depending on what readers are reading, their familiarity with the words, and the amount of their practice with reading text. Even very skilled readers may read in a slow, laboured manner when reading texts with many unfamiliar words or topics. For example, readers who are usually fluent may not be able to read technical material fluently, such as a textbook about nuclear physics or an article in a medical journal.

The levels of texts used with children are very important.

It is important to note that fluency teaching should be with a text that a student can read at their independent level. It is at this level where children are able to practice on speed and expression rather than decoding. The chart below describes each reading level:

Independent Level	Relatively easy for the child to read (95% word accuracy).
Instructional Level	Challenging but manageable for the reader (90% word accuracy).
Frustration Level	Difficult text for the child to read (less than 90% word accuracy).

Repeated and monitored oral reading

- Repeated and monitored oral reading improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement.
- Children who read and reread passages orally as they receive guidance and/or feedback become better readers. Repeated oral reading substantially improves word recognition, speed, and accuracy as well as fluency. To a lesser but still considerable extent, repeated oral reading also improves reading comprehension. Repeated oral reading improves the reading ability of all children throughout KS1. It also helps struggling readers in Key Stage 2.

What can we do in school to improve reading fluency?

Children can learn strategies to cope with fluency issues that affect his or her reading. Below are some tips and specific things to do:

- Diagnose the problem – does the child have difficulties with decoding, word recognition, phrasing, reading speed, taking note of punctuation or use of intonation or expression?
- If decoding is a problem then additional phonics teaching & application is required. This should be focused at the sound & word level initially then can be incorporated into sentence level.
- If the child can decode words well, help him or her build speed and accuracy by:
- Model reading aloud to provide an example of how fluent reading sounds
- Model fluent reading aloud and have the child match his voice to yours (Shared Reading)
- Read a short passage and then have the child immediately read it back to you
- Having the child practice reading the same list of words, phrase, or short passages ***several times*** (consider use of Precision Teaching Grids/Fluency Grids)
- Reminding the child to pause between sentences and phrases
- Explicitly teach children how to pay attention to clues in the text (for example, punctuation marks) that provide information about how that text should be read
- Have the child practice reading a passage with a certain emotion, such as sadness or excitement, to emphasise expression and intonation
- Give children books with predictable vocabulary and clear rhythmic patterns so the child can "hear" the sound of fluent reading as he or she reads the book aloud
- Allow them to read their favourite books and poems over and over again. Encourage them to practice getting smoother and reading with expression.
- Give the child independent level texts that he or she can practice again and again
- Possibly think about timing the child and calculate words-correct-per-minute regularly