



NetNews

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Fluency Training

This is a fourth issue on the essential components of reading instruction. Previous issues covered phonemic awareness, beginning phonics instruction, and intermediate decoding. A complete **Adult Reading Toolkit (The ART)** will be available by August 2004 for adult literacy providers.

Fluency refers to reading text accurately, quickly, and with good expression.

In the past, researchers believed that reading fluency developed as a result of good word recognition skills; however, it is now believed that fluency must be explicitly taught and practiced orally in order to develop. Research from the K-12 literature shows that readers who are not fluent rely more heavily on decoding strategies for word recognition and may process written symbols more slowly.¹ Readers who aren't fluent in reading will be less motivated to practice, have more difficulty learning academic content, and suffer poor comprehension of what they read.² In contrast, a fluent reader has "automated" many of the decoding processes and is able to devote full attention to the meaning of the text.

A parallel analogy is the difference between a beginning manual driver and an experienced manual driver. The new driver is more focused on the mechanics of the clutch and gas pedal (decoding), possibly at the expense of attending to traffic. The fluent driver has automated the

process and is able to focus on the situation and the environment (comprehension). He or she drives smoothly and expertly and can easily move with the ebb and flow of traffic.

According to *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*,³ there are big differences between adults with good fluency and those with poor fluency. Beginning adult readers' fluency is similar to the fluency of children learning to read. Current research indicates that readers of all ages and at all levels can benefit from oral fluency training. Training a beginning reader to read quickly and accurately will assist with phrasing or chunking. Training a reader to chunk text into phrases and clauses with appropriate intonation has been linked to improved comprehension skills in beginning to advanced readers, English as a second language (ESL) learners, and accurate-but slow readers. Fluency will also increase as the learner develops more knowledge within a topic area. Prior knowledge about a topic speeds up comprehension and leaves working memory free to make connections to new material; therefore, oral fluency training should also be imbedded within vocabulary and comprehension instruction for intermediate or advanced learners.

¹ National Reading Panel. 2000. *Report of the national reading panel: Teaching children to read*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, DC.

² Kuhn, M. & S. Stahl. 2003. *Fluency: A review of developmental and remedial practices*. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 95(1), 3-21.

³ Kruideneir, J. 2002. *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*. National Institute for Literacy, Washington, DC.



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4301 Highway 7, Suite 160 ■ Minneapolis, MN 55416
(952) 922-8374 ■ www.ldaminnesota.org
Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota

In this issue...

- Fluency Training... page 1
- Assessment... page 2
- Fluency Activities... page 2-3
- Using Authentic Materials... page 4
- Curriculum & References... page 4

Assessment

The assessment method an instructor chooses should reflect the instructional goal of either improving rate/accuracy *or* reading with intonation. The following pages mostly include ideas for measuring and improving rate and accuracy. Other ideas for improving intonation will be covered in The Adult Reading Toolkit.

To measure rate and accuracy, an instructor can use formal or informal assessment. An example of a **formal** assessment used by LDA is *The Gray Oral Reading Test or GORT-4*⁴. This individualized assessment results in four scores: decoding ability, reading accuracy, reading rate, and oral reading comprehension. The *GORT-4* takes approximately 20-30 minutes to administer.

An **informal** assessment of rate and accuracy can be created from reading materials at or slightly below the learner's current reading ability. Materials may be from fluency training curricula, from texts used in daily instruction, or from real-life reading materials. After an appropriate passage has been selected, have the learner read the material aloud for one minute. The instructor should have a clean copy to record misreads, omissions, and hesitations longer than 3 seconds. Miscues and substitutions should not be counted as long as the learner self-corrects in less than 3 seconds. Reading rate can be calculated by taking the total number of words read within one minute and subtracting the errors. The result is a score that reflects WCPM (Words Correct Per Minute).

EXPECTED READING RATES (WCPM)

First grade	60 wcpm
Second grade	80-100 wcpm
Third grade	100-120 wcpm
Fourth grade	120-180 wcpm
Ninth/tenth grade	200-245 wcpm

For ESL learners, instructors need to consider if mistakes are a result of the learner's accent, difficulty in pronouncing certain sounds in English, or are real errors in decoding. Instructors will be able to differentiate real mistakes from pronunciation differences by seeing if the error changes the meaning of the

sentence or compromises the learner's comprehension of the sentence. In order to ensure that learners do not solely focus on fluency at the expense of comprehension, the instructor should ask a few comprehension questions after passages are read.

Fluency Activities

Modeling Fluent Reading

Demonstrate fluent reading by orally modeling both rate and accuracy. Use examples of phrases and sentences before moving to paragraphs and stories. It is important to explain that good readers read groups of words instead of reading one word at a time. With older and experienced learners, it is also important to model why learners should adjust their reading pace to fit their purpose for reading. When modeling, make errors to show how a good reader adjusts for mistakes. Model when it is appropriate to repeat the word, decode an unknown word, or keep reading because the error did not change the meaning of the phrase or passage. After reading, ask learners to tell you what you did that good readers do. Ask learners how a fluent reader keeps him/herself interested in what is being read. This method is good for one-to-one or small group instruction.

Providing Repeated Reading

Step 1. Learner is given a sentence, passage, or book to read that is within his/her instructional level. This means the learner can read the text with 90% accuracy or only 1 in 10 words is difficult. The instructor may provide a brief summary of the passage or pre-teach vocabulary words to facilitate comprehension.

Step 2. The learner orally reads the text several times until the desired rate of reading measured in words correct per minute (WCPM) is reached. Each time the learner makes an error, the instructor stops the learner and provides an opportunity for the learner to self-correct or gives immediate feedback. All deviations from text are considered errors—insertions, self-corrections, repetitions, omissions, loss of place, changed words, misread words.

⁴ Wiederhold, L. & R. Bryant. 1992. *Gray Oral Reading Test, 4th Edition*. ProEd Publishing. <http://www.proedinc.com>

Step 3. Prior to the final timed reading, the instructor guides the learner to set goals for accuracy and rate as well as graph his/her score (WCPM). The goal should be approximately 10% higher than the previous score. This provides motivation and stimulates learner self-regulation. It may be that after 3-4 readings, the learner will have made the greatest gain they will make for that particular passage; therefore, it is helpful to have multiple passages at the same level in case they get bored.

Step 4. After reading two or three passages at criterion, move the learner to a more difficult passage.

Variations of Repeated Reading

Word lists: Sounds, sight words, or decodable words on flash cards or as lists can also be used as fluency materials for beginning readers. One second (1.0) per word is appropriate for beginning readers; for learners with severe reading problems, a rate of less than 1.5 seconds may be more appropriate. LDA staff have found that elementary students have a lower reading rate using flashcards than they do when reading phrases and passages. So if a learner seems to have plateaued with this technique, make phrase cards or move on to a fluency curricula.

Peer reading: Have the learner read aloud with a peer who is more fluent. The peer should set the pace and the learner working on fluency should keep pace. The peer should make gentle corrections and suggestions on how to improve speed.

Reader's theater: Learners are given scripts or plays to read. *Reader's Digest* plays, excerpts from fictional novels, or abridged versions of classic plays, make great resources. Learners should practice reading with expression until they can read with appropriate voice tone, inflection, and emotion. The play can be produced for classmates or their children if the learners participate in a family literacy program. In classrooms with diverse learners, instructors can have more advanced learners write the plays for less advanced learners to perform.

Read with a tape: Some reading materials come with audio-tapes. If not, audio-tapes can easily be made by having a fluent reader record his/her oral reading of the passage. The learner practicing fluency should read aloud with the tape. Headphones can be used so that others are not distracted by the sound of the tape. When the learner feels he/she can read at the criterion rate, the instructor tests the learner on the passage and charts the WCPM before moving on to a more difficult passage.

Sample Fluency Material

The following excerpts are from the curriculum *Great Leaps Reading-Adult*⁵ and provide a sample of appropriate content and repetition for beginning level fluency activities.

Can and Will (Emerging level #3)

Can you? I can.	Can he? He can not.
Will you? I will.	Will he? He will not.
Did you? I did.	Did he? He did not.

Important Message (Emerging level #16)

I must see my boss.
There is a big job I must do.
I need his help.
I must see him by five o'clock.
It is very important.
If he cannot see me in person, then I must call or fax him.
I will need at least fifteen minutes of his time.
I must get with him by five this afternoon.
It is very important.

⁵ Campbell, Kenneth U. (1998). Diarmuid, Inc., Gainesville, FL. <http://www.GreatLeaps.com>

Linda Strand, another Minnesota ABE supplemental service provider collaborating with LDA, is developing a **Listening and Fluency CD** for adult literacy. The CD will dictate word lists and sentences that beginning readers may follow along with using an accompanying script. For more information, contact: LStrand@aol.com

Using Authentic Materials

The teaching of fluency is very applicable to authentic content material. In fact, it is recommended that oral fluency practice come from classroom study or content materials from the home, community, or workplace. ESL learners *especially* need fluency phrases, sentences, and passages that are relevant to their everyday life. For any learner, it is very important to remember that fluency materials are to be **at or just below the learner's instructional level**. Select reading passages for fluency training that will not be too easy or too hard.

A quick method to determine readability (or the approximate reading grade level of a sentence or passage) uses Microsoft Word 2000 and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level.

Here are the steps:

1. Retype or scan the text using Word 2000.
2. Click on Tools at the top.
3. Click on Options.
4. Click on Spelling and Grammar.
5. Select the Check grammar with spelling and Show readability statistics checkboxes.
6. Click Spelling and Grammar (check ABC) for each document. After checking for spelling and grammar, Word 2000 will display information on the approximate reading level of that document.

Curriculum

Examples of **published curricula** for fluency activities include:

- Great Leaps. Diarmuid, Inc. Gainesville, FL. www.GreatLeaps.com
- Read Naturally. Read Naturally. St. Paul, MN. www.readnaturally.com
- Recorded Books. Recorded Books, LLD. Prince Frederick, MD. www.recordedbooks.com
- Jazz Chants. Carolyn Graham. Oxford University Press*
<http://www.oup.com/us/departments/esl>
- Rhythm and Role Play. Carolyn Graham. Oxford Press.*
<http://www.oup.com/us/departments/esl>

*These materials were developed for an ESL audience and provide oral and reading practice with the patterns of English. Select chants or plays carefully according to the learner's instructional level. They have been popular with ESL learners for many years.

This is the last issue of *NetNews* for FY 04. The complete Adult Reading Toolkit (The ART) covering all five components of reading instruction will be available by August of 2004.

Contact Marn Frank mf@ldaminnnesota.org for further information.