

TPRI newsletter

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A Focus on Fluency

Fluency, one of the five key components of early reading instruction, is assessed by the TPRI in first, second and third grade. In the following sections, Dr. Coleen Carlson and Ken Nieser provide a closer look at fluency and share successful practices for building fluency in the classroom.

What is Fluency?

Fluency is defined as the effortless reading of text with appropriate speed, accuracy, chunking, proper expression and prosody in order to ensure comprehension. Fluency IS NOT hurried reading or exclusively repeated reading of text. Fluency is important because it provides the bridge between phonics or word recognition and comprehension (Chard, Simmons & Kameenui, 1998; Rasinski & Griffith, 2011). The National Reading Panel (2000) recognized the importance of teaching fluency, concluding that direct teaching of fluency leads to improved reading, especially with students who struggle to read well. Let's discuss each component of fluency to see what it might look like in a classroom.

Components of Fluency

Reading with Appropriate Speed: The most common measure of fluency is reading rate or WRCPM (words read correctly per minute). There is no doubt that reading rate is a good indicator of automaticity and that automaticity is a crucial factor in reading comprehension. Thus, WRCPM is a good measure of a student's automaticity. However, reading rate should not be taught in isolation, nor should it be the main instructional focus of reading. The goal of any lesson on reading rate should be to improve comprehension, NOT simply to increase speed. It does not serve a student to read quickly with no or little comprehension. Students also need to read text at an appropriate rate. Some types of literature, such as poetry and speeches, are written to be read slowly and deliberately. Other text may be read quickly without loss of the author's intent. Students need to distinguish these types of text and select a rate that is appropriate to help them understand what they are reading. Neither the TPRI nor the Tejas LEE have a specific performance level for fluency. Rather, both instruments provide an approximate "target" number for each grade. For example, the end of year target in first grade is 60 WRCPM. However, if a student reads only 55 WRCPM but has good comprehension, the rate should not be considered problematic. In contrast, should a student read 70 words per minute but with poor comprehension, the teacher needs to work with that student.



TPRI continues our spotlight on the five key components of early reading instruction. Joining us this month are fluency experts **Coleen**

Carlson, Ph.D. and **Ken Nieser, M.A.**

Dr. Carlson is Research Assistant Professor and Associate Director of the [Texas Institute for Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistics \(TIMES\)](#) at the University of Houston. She is also an author of the [Tejas LEE](#) and is the Director of the Tejas LEE Development Team. Ken Nieser is a member of the Tejas LEE Development Team and a Project Manager at TIMES at the University of Houston.

Experts Say...

"When readers have to devote a significant amount of their cognitive resources to simply decoding and recognizing words, the cognitive resources available for paying attention and for processing information are limited, resulting in impaired comprehension."

(Hasbrouck & Hougan, 2012, p. 122)

"Skilled readers read words accurately, rapidly and efficiently. Children who do not develop reading fluency, no matter how bright they are, will continue to read slowly and with great effort."

(NICHD, 2000, p. 3-3)





Components of Fluency continued

Reading with Accuracy: Reading accuracy refers to error-free reading of text. Students achieve reading accuracy through decoding and sight word knowledge. A beginning reader uses much of their cognitive resources to sound out words and to search memory for a sight word match. However, as students become more automatic in these tasks, reading becomes more effortless and this frees up cognitive skills that can be applied to comprehension.

Phrasing or Chunking of Text: Chunking involves reading text in a manner that mimics natural speech patterns. Beginning readers often read haltingly—one – word – at – a – time, and reading this way can interfere with the reader’s ability to understand text.

Reading with Proper Expression and Prosody: Fluent readers also read text with proper expression—whether the hushed tones of criminals plotting their next heist or the thrill in the voice of a boy catching his first fish ever. Prosody goes even one step further. Prosody is the way that fluent readers bring words to life—combining accuracy, rate, chunking and expression to build suspense and draw the reader into the text. Imagine a child spelling the last word in a school spelling bee. A good reader hears in his mind’s ear the cracking of her voice as she spells the word, the excitement because she knows the word and even the distortion caused by the microphone as the letters she reads reverberate throughout the cafeteria.



Building Fluency

More fluent readers make connections among the ideas in a text and between these ideas and their background knowledge *while they are reading*. Therefore, they are able to focus on comprehension. So, how can a classroom teacher effectively teach each of these component parts of fluency? Let’s take a look at some ideas for helping students become fluent, lifelong readers.

Distributed Practice: Students need to practice fluency on a daily (ideally several times daily) basis.

More Turns to Read During Class: Reading lessons focused on oral reading and fluency should be structured to maximize time for student eyes on text. Students should be actively engaged in reading, NOT PASSIVE LISTENERS to single classmates reading. Techniques such as echo reading, whisper reading, pair reading, reading by the numbers, and jump-in reading keep students engaged with text.

High Frequency Words: High frequency word cards or lists are great for building automaticity. Provide each student (or pair) with a short deck of cards. Allow students a few minutes each day to practice reading these words during small group instruction, in pairs and independently. Also use high frequency phrase cards to help students begin to see how words are read in clusters. Examples might include “good morning,” “thank you,” “wait for me,” etc...

Phonics Instruction: Students with weak decoding skills will need systematic and explicit instruction in letter name/letter sound correspondences. Many helpful ideas can be found in the Graphophonemic Knowledge section of the TPRI Intervention Activities Guide.

Modeling: Teachers should read aloud to their classes on a daily basis—even in the upper grades. Remember for many students, their teacher is the only fluent reader in their lives. Teachers should explicitly point out when they are reading purposely slowly or quickly and why. Students need modeling of appropriate pausing, how a good reader builds excitement and other skills that bring words, sentences and stories to life. Occasionally, you may also wish to model disfluent reading—reading too fast or too slowly, reading without expression, or one word at a time. Students will see that such reading lacks meaning and enjoyment. They will learn that although the words may have been read accurately, they were not read fluently.

Building Fluency continued

Text Selection: Informational text does not have a strong voice and it is not intended to be read orally. It is difficult to give a rousing rendition of “Photosynthesis” or the “Water Cycle.” Rather, students should practice reading text that is written to be read aloud—speeches, dialogue, letters, scripts, poetry, song lyrics, etc. (Rasinski, 2009)

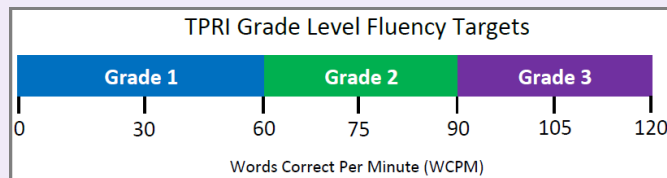
Repeated Reading: Although repeated reading should not be the only component of fluency instruction, it is a valuable tool. Research has shown that when students re-read text that is at their independent reading level, their reading rate and fluency improve. More importantly, the same research has demonstrated that those gains transfer to texts never before practiced and that overall reading achievement improves. (Samuels, 1979; Rasinski & Griffith, 2011)

Authentic Practice: Students benefit from real, rather than contrived reasons, to re-read and practice a selection. This reason could be some type of performance of the passage—for example, during story reading time, to another class, for recording or videotaping, for school announcements, etc.

Self-Critiquing Reading: Students need to hear themselves read. Often they are so focused on decoding that they are unaware of errors they are making as they read aloud. Students can listen to their own reading using whisper phones. Students can also be encouraged to record themselves and then to score their own reading accuracy.

A Final Word on Fluency

Measuring fluency provides information on growth to assist the teacher in designing targeted instruction. Growth in fluency suggests students are building vocabulary, recognizing more words automatically and decoding more efficiently. Because fluency is so closely tied to comprehension, monitoring growth and providing targeted fluency instruction are important.



The TPRI provides targets for each grade to use as a guide for monitoring fluency rates.

TPRI fluency scores are a measure of rate and accuracy, but not of students’ expressiveness or prosody. Teachers can make notes regarding students’ phrasing and expressiveness after the reading is complete. These notes may help when planning instruction to target specific aspects of fluency.

References

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Fluency Equating

TPRI Fluency Equating tables are an excellent tool designed to help teachers understand fluency scores more effectively. Equated scores help to show difficulties that might be missed by looking just at actual scores.

Click the icon to read more or to download the table for your grade level.



Check it Out!

We are pleased to announce training opportunities from the TPRI Development Team.

- **June 10-11, 2013—Houston Training-of-Trainers (TOT):** K-3 Administration & Instructional Modules
- **June 12, 2013—Houston TPRI PRO!: Putting the Pieces Together:** TPRI, RTI and More

Online registration is now available!
Visit the link below for additional information or to register.

[Register Online Now](#)