



## Target the Problem: Fluency

Fluency is defined as the ability to read with accuracy, good speed, and appropriate 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. Their reading is smooth and has expression.

Children who do not read with fluency sound choppy and awkward. Those students may have difficulty with decoding skills or they may just need more practice with speed and smoothness in reading. Fluency is also important for motivation; children who find reading laborious tend not to want read! As readers head into upper elementary grades, fluency becomes increasingly important. The volume of reading required in the upper elementary years escalates dramatically. Students whose reading is slow or labored will have trouble meeting the reading demands of their grade level.



### What the problem looks like

#### A kid's perspective: What this feels like to me

Children will usually express their frustration and difficulties in a general way, with statements like "I hate reading!" or "This is stupid!". But if they could, this is how kids might describe how fluency difficulties in particular affect their reading:

- I just seem to get stuck when I try to read a lot of the words in this chapter.
- It takes me so long to read something.
- Reading through this book takes so much of my energy, I can't even think about what it means.

#### A parent's perspective: What I see at home

Here are some clues for parents that a child may have problems with fluency:

- He knows how to read words but seems to take a long time to read a short book or passage silently.
- She reads a book with no expression.

- He stumbles a lot and loses his place when reading something aloud.
- She reads aloud very slowly.
- She moves her mouth when reading silently (subvocalizing).

## **A teacher's perspective: What I see in the classroom**

Here are some clues for teachers that a student may have problems with fluency:

- Her results on words-correct-per-minute assessments are below grade level or targeted benchmark.
- She has difficulty and grows frustrated when reading aloud, either because of speed or accuracy.
- He does not read aloud with expression; that is, he does not change his tone where appropriate.
- She does not "chunk" words into meaningful units.
- When reading, he doesn't pause at meaningful breaks within sentences or paragraphs.



## **How to help**

With the help of parents and teachers, kids can learn strategies to cope with fluency issues that affect his or her reading. Below are some tips and specific things to do.

### **What kids can do to help themselves**

- Track the words with your finger as a parent or teacher reads a passage aloud. Then you read it.
- Have a parent or teacher read aloud to you. Then, match your voice to theirs.
- Read your favorite books and poems over and over again. Practice getting smoother and reading with expression.

### **What parents can do to help at home**

- Support and encourage your child. Realize that he or she is likely frustrated by reading.
- Check with your child's teachers to find out their assessment of your child's word decoding skills.
- If your child can decode words well, help him or her build speed and accuracy by:
  - Reading aloud and having your child match his voice to yours

- Having your child practice reading the same list of words, phrase, or short passages several times
- Reminding your child to pause between sentences and phrases
- Read aloud to your child to provide an example of how fluent reading sounds.
- Give your child 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.
- Use books on tapes; have the child follow along in the print copy.

## What teachers can do to help at school

- Assess the student to make sure that word decoding or word recognition is not the source of the difficulty (if decoding is the source of the problem, decoding will need to be addressed in addition to reading speed and phrasing).
- Give the student independent level texts that he or she can practice again and again. Time the student and calculate words-correct-per-minute regularly. The student can chart his or her own improvement.
- Ask the student to match his or her voice to yours when reading aloud or to a tape recorded reading.
- Read a short passage and then have the student immediately read it back to you.
- Have the student practice reading a passage with a certain emotion, such as sadness or excitement, to emphasize expression and intonation.
- Incorporate timed repeated readings into your instructional repertoire.
- Plan lessons that explicitly teach students how to pay attention to clues in the text (for example, punctuation marks) that provide information about how that text should be read.

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