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Why Teach Fluency?

Reading fluency: Although it's currently a hot topic in education, it's not a phrase you heard often until a few years ago. Of course when you listened to others reading, you recognized fluency when you heard it, and you certainly knew it when you didn't hear it; in fact, disfluent reading may have caused you to wince. Still, why do you need this large notebook about teaching reading fluency? For years—years in which you may have been a student or were training to be a teacher—fluency was largely ignored. Yet you and many of the people you know read fluently. So why is everyone urging you to teach fluency?

The answer is simple: Fluency is important. It is important to oral *and* silent reading. It is important for deep processing and recall. It is essential for reading enjoyment—enjoyment that is crucial to ensure that a person will read frequently and for enjoyment. The National Reading Panel (2000) found fluency to be an essential component of the reading process that must be taught to developing readers. Indeed, the Panel described fluency as “a bridge between phonics and comprehension.” Perhaps Richard Allington (1983) summed it up best: “The most compelling reason to focus instruction on fluency is the strong correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension.”

Some people argue that you can just provide your students with more sustained silent reading (SSR) time in school and that will lead to increased reading fluency. That will work—for students who are already proficient readers. However, struggling readers never read the volume of material that those who enjoy reading

do. Also, if they do not hear sufficient texts read fluently, they may never understand what truly fluent reading sounds like.

In addition, there will always be a few students (generally the ones most in need of reading help) who spend their SSR time merely looking at the pages as if engaged with the print or repeatedly choosing and then discarding books without ever reading any of them. Griffith and Rasinski (2004, 134) collected some quotes from challenged readers about how they spent their sustained silent reading time. The quotes suggest that extended periods of sustained silent reading may not be the most effective use of your class time. Here are a few of the students' statements:

“I started at the top, skipped a hunk, and then read the bottom.”

“I looked at the pictures and then told the story by the pictures.”

“I only read the third paragraph of each page. My teacher was always at her desk grading papers, so it didn't really matter.”

“I lifted up the book in front of my face and looked for the fancy words.”

The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that while there is a strong correlation between independent reading and improved fluency, no convincing research exists to prove that increasing the amount of independent reading will increase fluency or boost reading achievement. Instead, students need

direct instruction in how to read fluently and in what to do when their fluency breaks down.

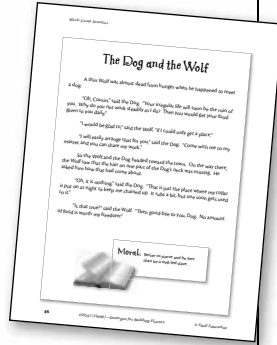
“The fluent reader is always thinking ahead, anticipating the next word, sentence, paragraph . . . the thinking works ahead of the eyes” (Fountas and Pinnell 2006, 81). Good readers read fluently without giving much thought to how they are reading; almost all of their attention is focused on constructing meaning. However, disfluent readers may read word by word in a droning monotone or a rapid-fire staccato, or devote so much of their time trying to decode and pronounce words that they have little energy to expend on comprehension.

Know this: A student who is a disfluent reader will never choose to read during his or her free time. Instead, he or she will choose to play video games, watch TV, ride a bike, or draw pictures. While there is nothing wrong with these other pastimes, they will not contribute to the student’s academic development. Reading books during one’s spare time is perhaps the single best way to improve academic performance. Only after a student experiences fluency will he or she opt to read independently. This means that reading fluency sets up a cycle of success. The more a person reads, the more that person knows. Then the person reads even more and learns even more. The converse is also true: The less a person reads, the less that person knows. If the person reads less than his or her peers, that person will know less than the peers. This gap will grow wider with time and may eventually impede learning content-area material.

- Providing you with this information allows you to preteach words apt to cause your students to stumble.

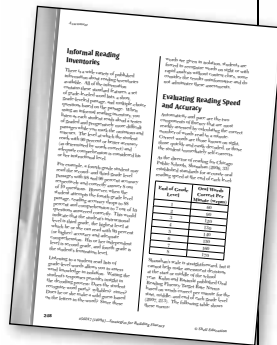
Student Texts

- A chart lists the titles and specific reading levels of the texts for that section.
- These texts were chosen because they work particularly well with the strategies for that section.
- The reading levels were determined by the Flesch-Kincaid method.



Assessment Tools

- This section provides you with the tools that you will need to evaluate your students' fluency, including rubrics and checklists.



Appendices

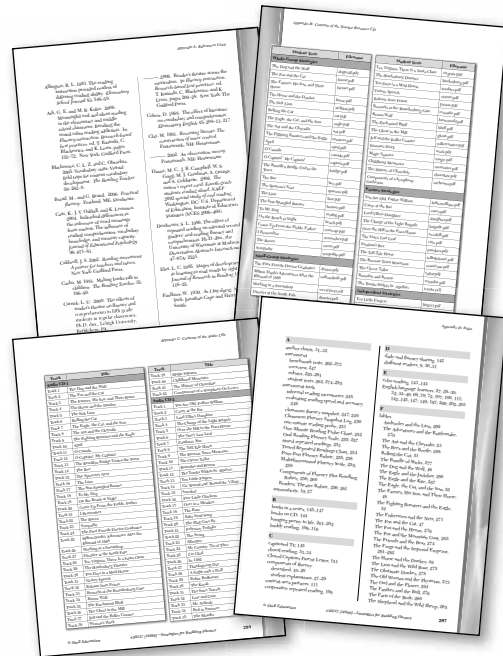
- Appendix A contains the References Cited for the notebook. Here you can find the information that will allow you to locate the exact book or journal article to do more exploration of a particular topic.
- Appendix B lists the contents of the Teacher Resource CD.
- Appendix C lists the contents of the Audio CDs.
- Appendix D is the index for the notebook. It includes the strategy names and the titles of the student texts.
- Appendix E tells about the author of the notebook.

Teacher Resource CD

- The Teacher Resource CD allows easy access to the resources in this book. The Teacher Resource CD includes PDFs of all of the student reproducibles.
- See Appendix B (pages 292–294) for a complete list of the files on the Teacher Resource CD.

Audio CDs

- Audio files of the student texts are included on the Audio CDs so that students can hear each text read fluently. These recordings are especially useful for independent practice and for partner and small group use in centers.
- See Appendix C (pages 295–296) for a complete list of the audio tracks and reading passage titles.



Special Guest Read-Aloud

At the start of each grading period, send out the invitation on page 41 to invite guest readers to read a favorite text to the class, thereby demonstrating fluent reading and a sincere enjoyment of books. Send the volunteer request to parents, school staff (such as lunchroom workers), and district administrators. Your goal is for one person to be a guest reader each week. Mark a calendar to set the schedule, and send the guest reader the bottom half of the letter on page 41 with the date he or she will read. You'll be amazed at the community's response and your students' enthusiasm for listening to guest readers.

Encourage ELL students to use cognates to help them understand English. Cognates are words that are similar in both languages and have the same meaning. They may be pronounced differently. English and Spanish have many cognates (e.g., *circulo*/circle). Try to learn some words in your students' languages so you will be able to point out the cognates.

Shared Reading

Shared reading lessons have five key steps (Fountas and Pinnell 2006). First, preview the text (use a big book or a text from this section of the notebook printed on a transparency or written chart paper). This introduction will pique students' interest and activate their background knowledge. Then read aloud the text while pointing to the words. You may stop occasionally to discuss punctuation or text features (boldfaced words, italics, etc.). Try not to overdo this, however, because it may interrupt the reading flow.

Next, read the text chorally, pointing to the words to help your students match word for word. As soon as possible, run your finger beneath the line to encourage reading. Then discuss the text. This helps students to comprehend and builds their ability to summarize a plot.

Finally, teach a specific strategy or concept. Keep it brief, but never omit this step. Revisit certain pages to discuss and reinforce strategies, such as how to decode words, draw conclusions, make predictions, or analyze or criticize the text. You can also work on improving fluency problems.

False cognates are words that look similar or even identical in both languages but mean very different things. Still, you may be able to use these to benefit your ELL students. For example, *pie* means *foot* in Spanish. Have students create cards with the word *pie* and draw pictures of a foot about to step into a pie.

Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI)

When reading expository materials, getting students to think about vocabulary and ideas will help them read more fluently as they work to “unlock” the text. One of the most effective ways to do this is by previewing the text, encouraging students to think about the title, captions, subtitles, sidebars, maps, graphs, and labels. Previewing will help them anticipate what is coming, and this boosts fluency. Here are some things to say to guide your preview:

- Read the subtitles and think about how they go with the title.
- Why do you think the publisher included this map? this graph?
- When is the best time to read the sidebars? (after reading the text on the page but before going to the next page)

Stahl et al. (2003) describes Fluency-Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI) for use in grades two and up with content-area textbooks. First, the text is read aloud by the teacher as students follow along in their copies. A discussion of the text follows to ensure students understand the importance of comprehension. Over the next three days, students reread the text by echo reading (see page 143), choral reading (see page 33), or using partner strategies (see pages 107–111).

On the third day, the text is taken home and read aloud to a family member. By this point, students have practiced the text and you can be confident that they understand it thoroughly. Thus, you can spend the final two days of the week doing related activities.

When you speak to an ELL student and there’s a long pause, it’s easy to feel like you have to jump in and continue speaking or answer your own question. But long pauses are vital as he or she processes or translates (depending upon the literacy stage). After waiting 60 seconds, you may wish to rephrase the question and then give more time for the student to answer.

The Sick Lion

One day, the Lion lay in his cave making faint, barely audible roars. The other animals had no idea what to do. The Lion had always made all their decisions. At last, they decided that they must visit him in his cave, for if they stayed away, he would certainly be angry and would be sure to punish them after his recovery.

Thus, some animals entered the Lion's cave carrying such gifts as the best bit of meat from a catch. Others went to inquire about his health. Large and small, each animal in the kingdom made his or her way to the Lion's dwelling, except for the Fox. Eventually, the Lion noticed the Fox's absence and sent the Hyena to confront him.

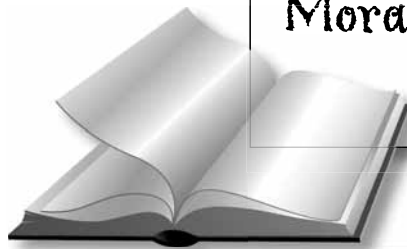
"Fox," said the Hyena, "You have displeased the Lion, for although he is desperately ill, you have not gone to his cave to see how he is feeling. Why are you so disrespectful?"

The Fox replied, "Hyena, I came right to the mouth of the Lion's cave bearing a luscious piece of meat as a get-well present. However, I was too frightened to enter."

"Why?" asked the Hyena.

The Fox responded, "I saw footprints from all sorts of animals. But they were all going one way—into the cave; not a single footprint came out. I did not want to enter a place from which I would never return."

The Fox had figured out the Lion's devious plan: Thinking he was sick and harmless, the animals he usually chased down for food had come right into his cave—and ended up as his next meal.



Moral: Think for yourself; don't just follow the crowd.

The Swing

How would you like to go up in a swing—
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it's the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!

Up in the air and over the wall
Till I can see so wide—
Rivers and trees and cattle and all
Over the countryside

Up in the air till I can look down
On the roof so brown.
Up in the air I go flying again!
Up in the air and down.

—Robert Louis Stevenson

