



Oral Reading Fluency

Teacher Handout

What is Oral Reading Fluency?

The National Reading Panel has defined fluency as the ability to read text with accuracy, appropriate rate, and with good expression (NICHD, 2000). The ability to read text fluently is necessary, but not sufficient for understanding the meaning of text. When students struggle with the mechanics of reading there is no mental energy left to devote to understanding what they are reading.

Why is Oral Reading Fluency Important?

Oral reading fluency is important because there is a strong correlation between a student's ability to read grade level text orally and the ability to comprehend text. A study by the US Department of Education found that 4th grade students' oral reading fluency is a strong predictor of silent reading comprehension.

How do I assess oral reading fluency?

The most efficient way to assess rate and accuracy is to provide the student with a grade level passage and have the student read for one minute. "Words correct per minute" (wcpm) can be calculated by subtracting the total words read in one minute by the number of errors. The student's score is then compared to what is expected at that grade level. Most schools screen students with standardized grade level reading passages three times a year. A student's performance can be compared to both national norms and district/school norms. The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and AIMSweb assessment system are commonly used in schools for this purpose. The use of the wcpm procedure to assess overall reading ability is supported by a body of research extending over the past 25 years (Fuchs et al., 2001; Shinn, 1998). Tindal and Hasbrouck (2006) developed the following norms for fall, winter and spring for grades 1 through 8.

	Fall	Winter	Spring
Grade 1		23	53
Grade 2	51	72	89
Grade 3	71	92	107
Grade 4	94	112	123
Grade 5	110	127	139
Grade 6	127	140	150
Grade 7	128	136	150
Grade 8	133	146	151

*Scores are reported at the 50th percentile—
words correct per minute*

Using the results to dig a little deeper

A wcpm score that falls significantly below what is expected for a student's grade level indicates that there is likely a reading difficulty; however, it does not reveal the cause. It is important that you "dig deeper" into what may be at the root of the reading problem. One way to do this is to analyze the student's performance on the reading passage. Students who read slowly but with a high degree of accuracy are likely to benefit from fluency-based interventions. A phonics-based issue may be revealed with students who have a low wcpm score along with many errors in the passage. Be sure to check the types of errors the student makes. For example, are the errors with sight words, multisyllabic words, etc.? Do the errors change the meaning of the passage? For students who make errors when reading, "digging deeper" assessments such as a phonics inventory will be helpful when designing interventions. Also pay attention to those students who read quickly with a large amount of errors as this may also affect comprehension.



How do I improve my students' oral reading fluency skills?

- **Model fluent reading.** Provide opportunities for your students to hear you read aloud.
- **Guided reading.** The National Reading Panel (NRP) concluded that repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers had a significant impact on word recognition, fluency and comprehension. Using the guided reading strategy, teachers work with small groups of students using the same text at the students' instructional level. Teachers first read the text to the students. Teachers then guide the students through before reading, during reading and after reading strategies with the goal of having the students eventually use the strategies in their own reading. Students are then provided with multiple opportunities to read the text aloud.
- **Repeated Reading.** One of the best strategies for developing reading fluency is to provide your students with many opportunities to read the same passage orally several times. Practice reading and rereading text aloud that is reasonably easy for them improves word recognition as well as expression.
- **Timed Repeated Reading.** Timed repeated reading is a technique used to monitor students' fluency development. Reading and rereading familiar text at the students' instructional level under timed conditions can improve students' speed of reading resulting in improved comprehension.
- **Choral Reading.** Having students read aloud and in unison provides the less skilled readers opportunities to hear and practice the text before having to read the text on their own.
- **Paired Reading.** Using the paired reading strategy, the teacher and the student reads the same passage aloud together. Be sure to read at the student's speed looking at each word as it is being read. If the student says a word incorrectly, say the word and have the student repeat the word.
- **Echo Reading.** Using the echo reading strategy, the teacher reads aloud a line from the text and asks the student to read the same line. The teacher and student take turns reading and rereading the same lines. When the student begins to read with more expression and fluency, he/she can be encouraged to read aloud on his/her own.
- **Tape Assisted Reading.** The tape assisted reading strategy can be used with an individual student or with a group of students. Using this strategy, the student reads along in the book as he/she hears a fluent reader read the book on audiotape. Listening to a good reader, either in person or on a recording, builds skills such as proper phrasing, reading with expression and sight word recognition.
- **Computer-based Programs.** There are several computer-based programs available with the goal of improving oral reading fluency. These programs use the repeated reading strategy with a timed component to improve fluency skills. Read Naturally and Raz-Kids are two programs commonly used in schools.
- **High Frequency Sight Words.** Teaching high frequency sight words and sight word phrases also helps in developing reading fluency. Sight word flashcards are helpful; however, some students have a difficult time recognizing the words they can identify on the flashcards in actual text. Using sight word phrases could be helpful in this transition.
- **Direct and Explicit Phonics Instruction.** Reading fluency depends upon quick decoding of unfamiliar words. In addition to intervention specific to improving fluency, students should receive phonics based interventions if indicated on digging deeper assessment results.

