

Fluency: A Guide for Parents

“Fluency,” is a buzzword in education, particularly when discussing a child’s behaviors as a reader. Teachers often comment that students need to work on fluency as readers and parents often feel lost in a sea of questions around this topic.

What is fluency?

Fluency in reading refers to much more than how fast a child reads. Reading fluency is an integration of many strategic actions within the brain of the reader. It is a complex process! When considering whether a child is demonstrating fluent reading of a certain text, there are six-dimensions of fluency that are analyzed. These include pausing, intonation, phrasing, stress, rate and integration. Each aspect of fluency can be prompted for and taught in isolation, however what we really want is for a reader to naturally integrate these dimensions to help them make meaning of the texts they are reading.

Words per minute?

In some schools, one of the most common methods to assess reading ability is through calculating the rate at which a student can read a text. Rate is just one aspect of fluency that we consider while a child reads! By calculating a reading rate, we get a glimpse into a reader’s level of automatic decoding at a certain text level. If the reading is slow, that may be an indicator that the text is too hard. Or, it may be an indicator that the child had to do some tricky word solving along the way while reading, which slowed down their words per minute. If a story has pictures, perhaps the reader took time to examine them. It’s important for teachers, parents and any evaluator of reading to consider rate among the other dimensions of fluency and not as the only indicator of fluent reading.

Things that you can do at home to support your child!

If your child is disfluent--this can be fixed! Here are some suggestions to implement today that will help!

Get that finger out of the book!

Once a child demonstrates that they can match word to word and has secure left to right directionality, they should no longer be pointing while they read. This is a behavior that should be firmed up for most students by mid to late kindergarten and early first grade. If your child is beyond this point as a reader, they most likely do not need their finger to help guide them while reading. Tell your child, “It’s your eyes and your brain that do the work while you are reading--not your finger!” If your child gets mixed up and needs to use their finger to find their place while reading, that’s appropriate. Once they are back on track, however, they should remove their finger from the text and keep going!

Think carefully about book selection and make sure to provide opportunities for easy reading!

If you are looking to provide your child with more opportunities to practice fluent reading, help them by choosing books that are rich in dialogue, have an exciting storyline, predictable oral language and have meaningful phrase groups. Allowing readers to experience familiar books multiple times will help them build fluency. Encourage your child to practice oral reading multiple times on the same book and praise them for making their reading sound like the author intended it to!

Be responsive!

If you find yourself listening to choppy, disfluent reading, intervene. Take a moment and model fluent reading for your child and ask them to “Try that again and try to make your reading sound like mine did.” When you do hear your child integrating the different aspects of fluency, praise them and remind them that you can understand what is happening in the story from the way their voice sounds while they are reading!

Be a model!

The best way for a young reader to experience fluent reading is to listen to a more proficient reader. *Read aloud to your child as much and as often as your life allows!* Snuggle up, laugh, cry and enjoy some good books together.

Resources:

Making the Most of Small Groups Differentiation for All. Debbie Diller

The Fountas and Pinnell Literacy Continuum, Grades PreK-8, Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

The six-dimensions of fluency- undone:

Aspect of fluency:	What this means:	Possible prompts for a reader (What you can say to help your child):
Pausing	Pausing refers to a the a reader's voice is guided by punctuation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Stop at the periods.</i> ● <i>Make your voice to up at the end of a question.</i> ● <i>Read it with excitement.</i> ● <i>Someone's talking. Sound like that character.</i>
Intonation	The tone of voice changes to reflect characters speaking or the action of the text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Make it sound interesting.</i> ● <i>Make your voice go up at the end when there's a question mark.</i> ● <i>Read it with excitement when you see an exclamation point.</i> ● <i>Your reading helps me know how the character feels.</i>
Phrasing	Phrasing is putting words together in meaningful groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Think about where you would pause if you were talking.</i> ● <i>Read to the punctuation and stop.</i> ● <i>Read it in phrases- make it sound like talking</i>
Stress	Stress in reading refers to putting emphasis on particular words or phrases to convey meaning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>How would the character sound at this part?</i> ● <i>Make this part sound important.</i> ● <i>How does the author want you to sound when you read this part?</i>
Pace/Rate	Rate refers to the speed of reading. Rate should be guided by the reader phrasing in meaningful units and using punctuation to guide their reading.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Speed up at the exciting parts.</i> ● <i>Use pauses to build anticipation.</i> ● <i>Try to make your reading sound like mine.</i>
Integration	Integration is working with all of the above dimensions smoothly and seamlessly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>You sound like the characters would.</i> ● <i>I can tell that this is an (exciting, scary, sad, etc.) part.</i> ● <i>Wow. Your reading sounds smooth like talking.</i> ● <i>Listen to how I read this page smoothly. Now you try it.</i>

