

Fostering Fluent Readers in the Classroom

by Becky L. Spivey, M.Ed.

Why is reading fluency important?

Reading fluently is as important in becoming a successful reader as any other dimension of reading ability. Reading programs and standardized tests focus on reading comprehension and decoding skills because these skills are precisely measurable. Even though reading fluency is not as easily measured, it is vital to reading accurately and quickly.

Teaching students to become fluent readers involves providing opportunities for practice. There are countless ways to incorporate fluency activities in your classroom and make them as routine as any other part of your instructional day. Try some of the helpful and effective strategies below to increase students' reading fluency.

Read Aloud to Students

Read aloud to your students several times daily. This is the perfect model for fluency. Whether reading math word problems, basal reading passages, social studies, science material, or just having story time, this is the most invaluable fluency instruction. Your students are able to hear you model correct inflection, feelings and emotions, and appropriate pauses and flow.

Preview Reading Selections

Preview lessons with students using a "story walk" procedure in any subject area. Ask questions about pictures/illustrations. Look at words that may be bolded or in italics and any information that may be in sidebars on the pages. This routine encourages students to preview material when reading independently at school or at home.

Come Read for Me!

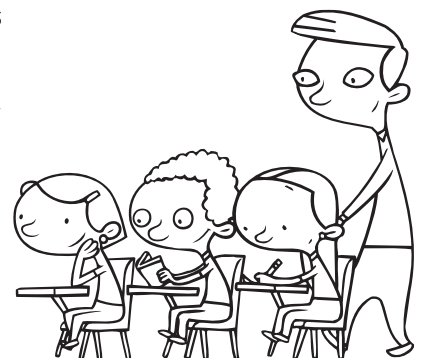
On note cards, write a message like "*Practice reading any passage from your lesson (social studies, science, or basal reader) and meet me at the reading table in 10 minutes.*" Make two or three cards (depending on the time you have to listen) and lay them randomly on students' desks as you walk by. This routine allows you to hear most of the class practice reading fluency during the week. Students will begin to anticipate that they will have a chance to read to you and begin viewing passages to read by themselves. Praise students for the slightest improvements in increasing their fluency and encourage them to practice reading aloud at home.

Select Appropriate-Level Texts

Choose storybooks and texts to read to the students or to have the students read to you. Students make gains in fluency when reading at their independent instructional range. Have students select a book from your choices and practice reading it aloud at home, knowing that they will be reading part of the selection to you. Again, praise them for any increases in speed and fluency.

Use a Reader's Theater Activity Weekly

Help students find and rehearse a joke or poem, or assign several students to perform a short script from a book, material from a story, lesson, speech, or writing exercise. Randomly choose names of students or groups who will perform each week. Students know that if they miss performing one week, they continue practicing their fluency activity in anticipation of performing the next week. Once students perform, they should choose another activity and begin preparing it for their next presentation.



Record Short Passages of Texts

Record short passages of texts or material that the class will be reading during the week. Parents, volunteers, or older students who demonstrate desired reading fluency can make these recordings for you at home or at your school. Students will emulate inflection, tone, and speed of the taped reader.



Take Notes on Student Progress

When listening to students read, use individual note cards to record improvements and other goals necessary to accomplish reading fluency. As students stumble on or miss a word completely, give corrective feedback and note it on the card. Copy the word(s) missed by the student on another note card to drill and practice. This will help the student reduce the number of errors while reading, and in turn, increase fluency. After practicing, have the student reread the passage to you or another accomplished, fluent reader.

Use Predictable Patterns of Texts

The rhythmic, repetitive language of nursery rhymes, poetry, or other pieces of children's literature can aid students in gaining fluency. Patterned texts are also available in literature for much older students. Don't ignore this activity for middle and high school students.

Utilize Volunteers

Parents, grandparents, and other adults (even older teens) can be helpful in listening to and reading to individual students who need to build fluency as well as confidence in their reading. Screen volunteers that can model the fluency you wish for your students to attain. Provide volunteers with reading materials, suggestions, and guidelines for helping students. Establish guidelines for the volunteers for reading aloud to the students (tone, inflection, rate, and emotion) so that they know what the students are to accomplish.

Help at Home

Encourage parents to increase the amount of time spent reading with their child at home. Create a checklist of things for parents to look for when reading to or listening to their child read. Have parents initial the reading assignment on the checklist or in the child's homework folder or student planner.

Get Social!

Social interaction is important in classrooms of all ages. Have your students participate in choral or paired reading where two or more students read the same passages in unison or in turn. Introduce phrase drilling by helping students chunk or group words instead of focusing on word by word reading. Assign a class/peer tutor that is helpful and encourages his/her peers to be successful.

Incorporate fluency activities in the classroom whenever possible. Practicing fluency is essential in gaining successful reading comprehension skills .

Resource

Welsch, Richard G. "20 Ways to Increase Oral Reading Fluency" Intervention , January 2006: 180-182.