

what is the big deal about fluency anyway?

There are actually five key parts to reading: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Readers acquire each of them in time, focusing first on letter names and sounds and gradually learning to build them into words, sentences, paragraphs, passages, stories, books, and eventually novels. But simply building words is not reading. Reading comes when one begins to understand what the words mean. Vocabulary is key in building comprehension, but fluency is actually just as critical. Slowly, as these skills are practiced and perfected and a child learns to use all five of them together—that child becomes a reader.



It has been said several times over by several types of people, "I don't know why we're always measuring how fast a kid can read. Reading fast isn't all that important. It's *understanding* what you're reading that's important." Correct!

There are few that would argue that to be untrue. A mastery of reading comprehension, of course, is the ultimate goal when talking about one's reading abilities. So, why do we put so much emphasis on fluency in the primary grades? Well, a child cannot start to build comprehension until they become a fluent reader.

what is fluency?

Reading fluency is the ability to read a text easily. Reading fluency actually has four parts: Accuracy, speed, expression, and comprehension. Each part is important, but no single part is enough on its own. A fluent reader is able to coordinate all four aspects of fluency.

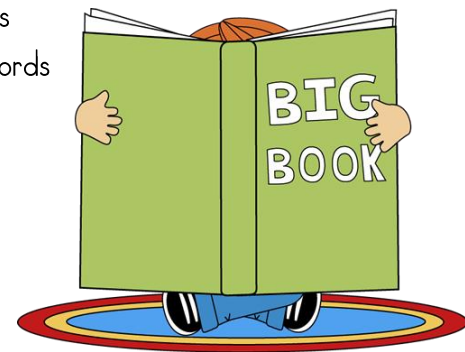
Accuracy: Reading words correctly is a key to developing fluency. Children need to be able to read words easily without having to stop and decode them by sounding them out or breaking them into chunks. When children can accurately and easily read the words in a text, they are able to think about what they are reading rather than putting all of their effort toward figuring out the words. To read a text fluently, a child should be able to read almost all of the words easily. In fact, a goal of fluent reading is for the child to read at least 98 of 100 words accurately and easily. Accuracy combines with the other three parts of fluency to produce fluent readers.

Rate: When children read fluently, they read at an efficient rate. An efficient rate does not mean that children should read as fast as they possibly can. Rate needs to be combined with accuracy, expression, and comprehension to produce fluent reading. By the end of third grade, the optimal rate of fluent readers is between 100 and 110 words correct per minute (WCMP). The grade level benchmark rates are important, but each child differs in reading ability. Personal goals may be set to encourage growth in reading rate within a given time period. Remember that rate is not the only goal for reading fluency. For example, if a child reads very quickly but does not read with expression or understand what is read, that child is not reading fluently.

Expression: Expression in fluency refers to the ability to read in a way that sounds like spoken language. This means that the child uses appropriate emotion to read aloud, pauses for periods and commas, and emphasizes important words. Expression also shows that the child understands what is being read.

Comprehension: Fluency is the bridge between being able to decode words on a page and the ability to read. Fluency leads to good reading comprehension and that is why there is such great emphasis placed on it in the middle grades. The real goal of reading fluency is to help children read a text with ease so they can focus on understanding what they read. The human brain is amazing, but it can only handle a limited number of tasks at the same time. If a child is struggling to identify words, the child's brain must focus all of its energy on figuring out words rather than understanding what is read. When the child is able to combine accuracy, rate, expression, and comprehension--that is reading fluency.

raising
readers:
helpful tips
for parents



what can parents do to practice reading fluency at home?

Here are 10 quick and easy activities parents can do to help their children build their reading fluency at home:

1. Reading and re-reading easy books is a great way to build your child's reading fluency. Have your child select a favorite book and read it aloud two or three times. This approach, called repeated readings, is one of the best ways to promote reading fluency.
2. Model fluent reading for your child by reading aloud daily. Be sure to use expression in your reading. You can even use funny voices for dialogue as you read aloud.
3. Echo reading helps to build reading fluency. You read a phrase, sentence, or paragraph aloud to model fluent reading. Your child then reads the same phrase, sentence, or paragraph afterwards, like an echo. Continue this pattern until you have read a book, story, or page of text with your child.
4. Have your child practice reading a simple book to share with a younger sibling or another young child. Once your child is able to read the book fluently,



ask him or her to share it with the other child. Both children will benefit from the reading experience.

5. Poetry and nursery rhymes can be used to practice fluency. Take turns with your child reading a short poem or nursery rhyme until he or she can read it fluently.



6. Use paired reading to build reading fluency with your child. First, you will read a poem or short passage to your child. Then, you and the child will read the poem or passage together several times. Finally, have your child read the poem or passage to you.
7. Review basic sight words with your child to make sure that he or she knows these words automatically. Knowing these common words on sight will help to improve your child's reading accuracy and rate. In class we use *Fry Words* and *Fry Phrases* to practice these drills. The word lists and phrase lists can be found online through a simple search using those keyword phrases.
8. Choose a comic strip from the newspaper. Read the comic strip aloud, using expression. Then ask your child to read the comic strip aloud. This is a fun activity to do at the breakfast or dinner table with the daily newspaper.
9. Have your child practice reading a text aloud while riding in the car or on the bus. Your child will stay busy and entertained, and this extra practice can make a big difference in your child's reading fluency.
10. Set aside reading practice time every day. Even 5 minutes of reading fluency practice using any of the activities listed above will help to develop your child's reading fluency.

How fluently is your child reading?

Use this rubric to determine how fluently your child is reading. Your child may also use this to evaluate their own reading and reflect on ways to improve it for next time. Constructive feedback is a key to seeing improvement.

Are you...	4	3	2	1
reading the words correctly? <small>(To determine the accuracy, divide the number of correct words by the number of total words. ex. correct words-86, total words-90 is 86/90 or 95%)</small>	I read most of the words correctly and reached the goal of 98% accuracy.	I read most of the words correctly and reached a goal between 95% and 98% accuracy.	I read many of the words correctly and reached a goal between 90% and 95% accuracy.	I read with less than 90% accuracy.
reading at an appropriate speed?	I read at a consistent speed and was easy to follow along with.	I read with a mixture of slow and fast reading.	I read the whole passage too slowly or too quickly.	I was hard to follow along with.
reading smoothly with little hesitation?	I read smoothly with few breaks that were quickly corrected.	I read smoothly with some breaks in reading due to difficult words.	I read with pauses that caused the passage to sound broken.	I read with frequent pauses, sounded out words, or repeated words.
phrasing your reading appropriately?	I chunked my words together in meaningful phrases and read as if I were really talking.	I read with some choppiness and may have stopped mid-sentence to take breaths.	I read in a choppy way ignoring commas and ending punctuation marks.	I read with a monotone voice with no pauses for commas or periods.
understanding what you read?	I was able to give the main idea and several supporting details about the passage or story.	I understood the main idea, but the details were not correct or not in sequence.	I remembered a few details about the passage or story, but did not understand the main idea.	I did not know what the passage was about.

Observations and comments about your reading fluency

Total Points _____/20

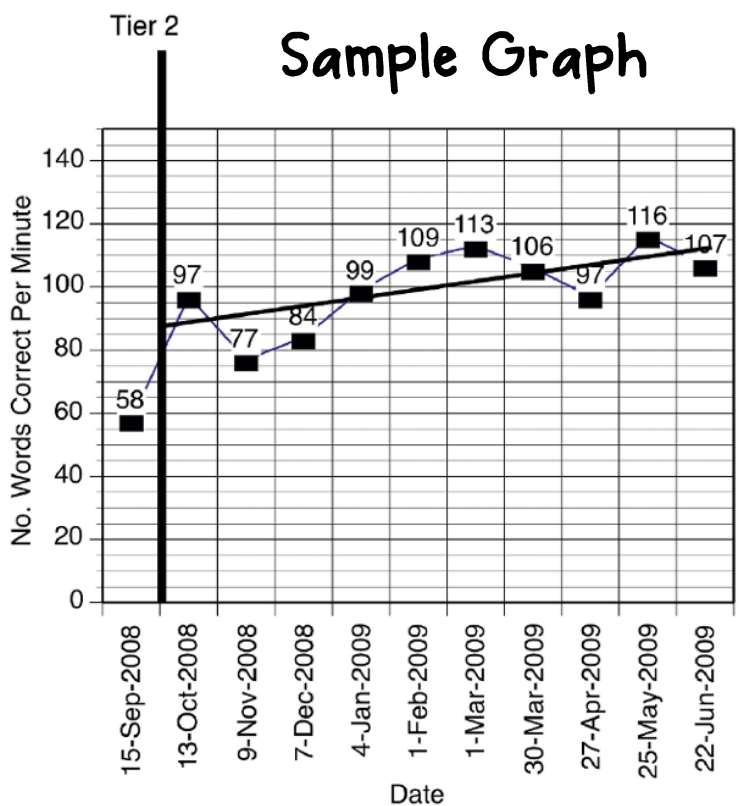
how do you know if your child is progressing?

It is often frustrating for parents and children when they practice reading often, but don't feel like they are seeing results. One way to help relieve that stress is to track the progress over time. This also helps your child by allowing them to see little by little how their hard work is paying off. The graph on the next page can be used to track this progress. It is recommended to use one minute timings on unfamiliar reading passages to see the most accurate results.



First, you should do a one minute timed reading on something they have not read before. Plot that score at the front of the graph. Next, decide on a time period to track the progress (maybe a school quarter or over a month or two). Once you have decided on the time period, plot that goal at the end of the graph then connect it in a straight line with the first plot from the timed reading. This creates an "aimline" and a visual guide as to whether or not they are on track for reaching the goal. Last is simply to record your child's reading rate each week and then connect the plots to form a line graph. If their rate is at or above the aimline, they have met their goal for that week. If it falls below, talk about what they will need to do to improve for next time.

You will find as you do this that your child will get really excited about meeting those goals. Remember to always be encouraging, especially if you have a struggling reader. Also remember to set realistic goals and adjust them if needed. Choose books or passages that are "just right" for their reading level. They will not be successful if the text is too hard, but will breeze through if it is too easy. There are several places online that have 3rd grade level reading passages that can be printed to use for this progress monitoring. An internet search of "third grade fluency passages" will usually turn up plenty of choices.



Fluency--Words Per Minute

