

# Fluency



## What is fluency?

Fluency is the ability to read text accurately, quickly and with expression.

Fluency is one of the *five key essential skills* for proficient reading. All high quality literacy programs should include this component.

[https://cer.schools.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/doe/sws/schools/c/cer/localcontent/konza\\_fluency\\_pdf.pdf](https://cer.schools.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/doe/sws/schools/c/cer/localcontent/konza_fluency_pdf.pdf)

Oral reading fluency (ORF) refers to reading text passages aloud. When students first begin to read, their efforts at decoding consume most of their attentional resources, and their reading will be tentative rather than smooth. As their familiarity with written words increases, their reading rate increases.

## Why is fluency so important?

There is a strong correlation between reading fluency and reading comprehension. If a child is not fluent (i.e. they still sound out the words they read / read words inaccurately) there is no cognitive energy left to focus on meaning.

Oral reading fluency acts as the link or bridge between word reading and reading comprehension, and reading fluency difficulties have been shown to be the single biggest concern for more than 90% of children with under-developed reading comprehension (Hempenstall, 2016).

## How do children develop fluency?

According to Kilpatrick (2015), automatic and accurate word level reading is achieved through the integration of 3 important factors:

- Automaticity with letter / sound knowledge (phonics)
- Phonemic awareness proficiency
- Repeated opportunity for the reading of connected text

*Accuracy* is the first requirement in achieving fluency. The more children read and the more exposures they have to a word, the faster they will develop accuracy. *Speed* (a rapid rate of reading) has also been found to be almost as important as word reading accuracy (Kuhn & Stahl, 2000) and is strongly correlated with reading comprehension (Fuchs et al, 2001). When a reader is both accurate and rapid, it means that the word identification processes have become automatized - they no longer require conscious attention. This frees cognitive space for higher order comprehension processes and reading with prosody, the third core element of fluency which is defined as reading with expression.

## How can fluency be supported during Tier 1 classroom literacy instruction?

For beginning readers who are still learning to read words accurately (typically Foundation and Year 1 students), repeated opportunities for reading decodable text is the best choice. The text should correspond with their progress on their phonics scope and sequence. Texts for

fluency instruction and intervention should have familiar letter–sound correspondences and high frequency sight words so students can focus on fluency rather than decoding.

For students who have good decoding ability and are reading connected text with some proficiency (typically Year 2 and above), fluency instruction can be conducted using any passage, short story, poem or play that meets the criteria above.

Texts chosen for fluency instruction should be at a level that students can read with few errors. As with beginning readers, the focus of fluency instruction for older readers is on rate and prosody rather than effortful decoding (Five from Five, 2021

<https://fivefromfive.com.au/choosing-texts-for-fluency-instruction-and-intervention/>)

For students with strong letter / sound knowledge and phonemic proficiency, repeated reading, shared reading and paired partner reading are evidence based approaches effective for building fluency (National Reading Panel, 2000).

### **Why should fluency be assessed?**

Because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends so strongly on the development of word recognition accuracy and reading fluency, both the latter should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely and effective instructional response when difficulty or delay is apparent (National Reading Panel, 2000).

The fluency measure of words correct per minute (WCPM) has 30 years of validation research conducted over three decades, indicating it is a robust indicator of overall reading development throughout the primary grades.

Assessing fluency allows educators to answer two important questions:

- How does this student's performance compare to his/her peers?
- Is this student at-risk of reading failure?

Assessing ORF is an accurate and efficient way to monitor reading progress in the primary grades. ORF demonstrates higher diagnostic accuracy for correctly identifying at risk students (80%) compared to a levelled benchmark assessment (54%) and only takes 3–5 minutes per student to conduct (Burns et al, 2014).

### **How is fluency assessed?**

Teachers should assess fluency regularly in addition to other important elements of reading. Tracking children's WCPM throughout the year provides a clear record of their reading progress in terms of accuracy and rate (Konza, 2011).

Each WCPM fluency assessment takes 1minute.

A simple, step by step guide on how to assess WCPM:

- 1) Choose an appropriate 'at level' unseen text passage. A text that is on a single page is best \*Pictures and page–turning can affect time\*
- 2) Have a teacher copy of the text for each child being assessed. Add the word count line by line, already totalled, down the RHS of the text
- 3) Have a timer set for 60 seconds with an alarm (phone works well)

- 4) Student and teacher sit side by side. Read title of text to student. Show them the starting point for the oral reading. Teacher says, "This text is called .....I want you to read this text out loud to me starting from here... (Point to first word) It's important that you try and read each word correctly. I will ask you a few questions about the text after. You can stop reading when you hear the timer alarm go off."
- 5) As child reads, teacher marks their own text copy, using marking key and recording observations
- 6) Clearly mark the last word read by the student as the timer goes off
- 7) Ask the child (if you have time and wish to do so) a few quick questions about the text to check basic comprehension. E.g. where did the character go? What was 'the flash of silver'?
- 8) Count and record the total number of words read correctly
- 9) The WCPM = the total number of words read - number of errors
- 10) Note any important observations about the oral reading: guessing words, code knowledge errors, omitting words, pointing to words, ignoring punctuation, sounding out, etc. These become teaching focuses in future lessons

### How to know if a student is where they should be for fluency?

Norms for oral reading fluency (ORF) can be used to help educators make decisions about which students might need intervention in reading and to help monitor student progress once instruction has begun.

Hasbrouck and Tindal (2017) have published comprehensive fluency norms for Grade 1–Grade 6 based on a sample size of 6,886,582 ORF scores collected from DIBELS 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, DIBELS Next and easyCBM assessments.

The norms can be viewed here: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED594994.pdf>

\*\*As noted by Dr Konza (2011) basic reading comprehension requires a WCPM rate of between 90–100 words correct per minute, which is achieved around the end of Grade 2\*\*

As a rough guide, the target WCPM at the end of year level are:

Grade	WCPM Target - End of Year (Average - 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile)
1	60
2	100
3	112
4	133
5	146
6	146

A rubric which also includes prosody by Dr Rasinski can also be used to monitor progress in addition to WCPM. The link to this rubric is [http://www.timrasinski.com/presentations/multidimensional\\_fluency\\_rubric\\_4\\_factors.pdf](http://www.timrasinski.com/presentations/multidimensional_fluency_rubric_4_factors.pdf)

### What text can be used to assess fluency?

Any unseen, grade appropriate text can be used to assess fluency. This text should contain phonic code that the children have been already taught. Examples could be an unseen decodable reader or even list of words for younger beginning readers.

A number of freely available passages can be found at these sites:

- Achieve the Core Fluency Packets [https://achievethecore.org/category/411/ela-literacy-lessons?filter\\_cat=1153](https://achievethecore.org/category/411/ela-literacy-lessons?filter_cat=1153)
- TN Foundational Skills Grade 2 Fluency Packet [https://openedx.tneducation.net/asset-v1:TDOE+fs101+2020YL+type@asset+block@Grade\\_2\\_Fluency\\_Packet.pdf](https://openedx.tneducation.net/asset-v1:TDOE+fs101+2020YL+type@asset+block@Grade_2_Fluency_Packet.pdf)
- Wonders Fluency Assessment Grade 1–6  
<file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Unit%20%20Week%204%20Fluency%20Assessment-3.pdf>
- Readworks texts (non-fiction often more difficult than fiction due to content vocab)  
Yr 1 Decodable Texts: [http://www.freereading.net/wiki/Decodable\\_passages.html](http://www.freereading.net/wiki/Decodable_passages.html)

### How to monitor / track fluency development?

A tracking document can be used to track and monitor fluency progress for Foundation to Year 6. Normative data by Hasbrouck & Tindal from Grade 1 onwards has been used to automatically calculate WCPM and the percentile rank for the student at that point in the year. This colour coding allows for quick and easy identification of children below the average range for their age.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/16nmlmFM0cSYB-s2cBNJzKr\\_LtI6\\_yMAN/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/16nmlmFM0cSYB-s2cBNJzKr_LtI6_yMAN/view?usp=sharing)

### What are the implications of children not being fluent readers?

The rate required for basic comprehension is around 90–100 words per minute, a rate usually achieved around the end of year 2. At this stage, children should be able to read and understand simple text (Armbruster et al, 2001). If children are not reading at the required rate, with accuracy and prosody, higher order comprehension cannot occur. Having a large sight vocabulary and not needing to consciously attend to decoding the text, frees up a child's cognitive resources to understand what they are reading.

### What can be done if children aren't developing fluency at the required rate?

Children who are not progressing with rate and accuracy should be assessed for letter/sound knowledge and phonemic proficiency. A useful assessment which can be used to assess phonemic proficiency is the PAST, by Dr David Kilpatrick <https://www.thepasttest.com/>.

Children with poor phonemic proficiency lack the ability to orthographically map words into their sight word vocabulary. Training phonemic proficiency to the advanced level, combined with improving letter/sound automaticity and repeated opportunities for reading connected text is the fastest way to improve oral reading fluency.

Programs such as Equipped for Reading Success <https://equippedforreadingsuccess.com/> and Bridging the Gap <https://hegerty.org/product/bridge-the-gap/> bolster phonemic awareness and fluent word recognition in order to promote orthographic mapping and fluent word level reading.

### What commercial assessments are available for fluency?

- MultiLit – Wheldall Assessment of Reading Lists <https://multilit.com/programs/warl/>
- MultiLit – Wheldall Assessment of Reading Passages  
<https://multilit.com/programs/warp/>
- Acadience Reading K–6 (formerly DIBELS Next)  
<https://acadiencelarning.org/acadience-reading/k-grade6/>

## What professional learning is available for learning more about fluency?

- Dr Jennifer Buckingham: Fluency: The misunderstood middle child in the 'Big 5' of reading instruction  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=pR917xoy2Y0&fbclid=TwAR1f07E\\_tCZSFPKAKCdH5YP4m4sHu6UBLQ8w61HQa5Sm5aEgIOLQ-SbDBNY&app=desktop](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=pR917xoy2Y0&fbclid=TwAR1f07E_tCZSFPKAKCdH5YP4m4sHu6UBLQ8w61HQa5Sm5aEgIOLQ-SbDBNY&app=desktop)
- Dr David Kilpatrick: Advances in Understanding Word-Level Reading Problems— Implications <https://youtube/XysKoytD0hk>
- Dr Kastner/Eighmy – Building a Large Sight Word Vocabulary: It's Not Magic— It's Informed Instruction <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XwgT6n2-Jg>
- Dr David Kilpatrick – How we remember words.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54J5lllogLuc>
- Dr David Kilpatrick – Understanding the Role of Phonemic Proficiency in Boosting Reading Skills in Struggling Readers  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pnITn5JuiE>
- Dr David Kilpatrick – Understanding Reading Development and Difficulties  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBx3zBzrL5I>
- Advanced Phonemic Awareness  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o91\\_fCTPX4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o91_fCTPX4)