

What is fluency?

Fluency is the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. The ability to *read fluently* helps a reader to understand what they read whether they are reading aloud or silently. Fluent readers will read in phrases and add intonation appropriately when reading aloud. Their reading is smooth and has expression.

Children who do not read with fluency sound choppy and awkward. Those students may have difficulty with decoding skills or they may just need more practice with speed and smoothness in reading. Children who find reading hard work, or laborious, tend to avoid reading for pleasure. Being fluent is important to help motivate children to read. Fluency becomes increasingly important in the upper elementary grades. The amount of required reading increases as students move up in grades. Students whose reading is slow or labored will have trouble meeting the reading demands of their grade level.

What difficulty with fluency looks like

A kid's point of view: What this feels like to me

Children will usually express their frustration and difficulties with statements like "I hate reading!" or "Reading is stupid!". If you ask a student who gets frustrated with reading how they feel about their fluency difficulties, this is how they might describe how fluency affects their reading:

- I seem to get stuck on a lot of words when I try to read a book.
- It sometimes takes me a long time to read.
- I get tired when I read,
- I lose focus about what I am reading.

A parent's point of view: What I see at home

Here are some signs for parents that a child may have difficulty with fluency:

- My child knows how to read. However, it sometimes take him/her a long time to read.
- My child reads with very little expression and reads in one tone.
- My child gets makes mistakes reading and gets confused. He/she loses his/her place when reading something aloud.
- My child reads slowly.
- My child moves his/her mouth when reading (subvocalizing).

How to help your child with fluency

Children can learn strategies from parents and teachers to help cope with fluency issues that may affect reading. Below are some helpful tips on how to help your child with fluency.

What kids can do to help themselves

- Use your finger as a way to keep track of what is read to you by a parent or teacher. Then try reading it yourself.
- Have a parent or teacher read aloud to you. Then, try to sound like them and match your voice to theirs.
- Read your favorite books, articles, and poems over and over again. Each time you reread, try to make it sound better than the first time. Practice getting smoother and reading with expression.

What parents can do to help at home

- Support and encourage your child. Realize that he or she is likely frustrated by reading, and try to provide reading material at a grade level that they can read on their own (independent level). If you are not sure what level may be good for your son or daughter, check with your child's teacher to see if they can provide that information for you.
- Go to parent conferences to keep updated on your child's progress in reading. Ask about your child's decoding skills.
- If your child can decode words well, help him or her build speed and accuracy by:
 - Reading aloud and having your child match his voice to yours
 - Having your child practice reading the same list of words, phrase, or short passages several times
 - Reminding your child to pause between sentences and phrases
- Model how fluent reading sounds by reading aloud to your child. Picture books aren't just for children in the younger elementary grades – adults and older children love them too! In today's world everyone is so busy. Picture books provide a quick (and fun) way for you to model fluency. Visit your local library for some wonderful books to read to your child.
- It is great for children to see how adults use reading every day of their lives whether it is reading a report from work, a letter in the mail, or a newspaper article. Share those things with your child and model how you read it fluently. Read aloud to your child to provide an example of how fluent reading sounds.
- Give your child books with predictable vocabulary and clear rhythmic patterns so the child can "hear" the sound of fluent reading as he or she reads the book aloud.
- Use books on tapes or CD; have the child follow along in the print copy.
- Have your child record him/herself reading aloud the same book several times. Then have your child play it back so they can hear how he/she improved with their fluency each time they reread the book.

If you have any questions or would like additional resources, please feel free to contact me.

Jennifer Donovan McGlade
5th and 6th Grade Reading Specialist
jdono@spring-ford.net