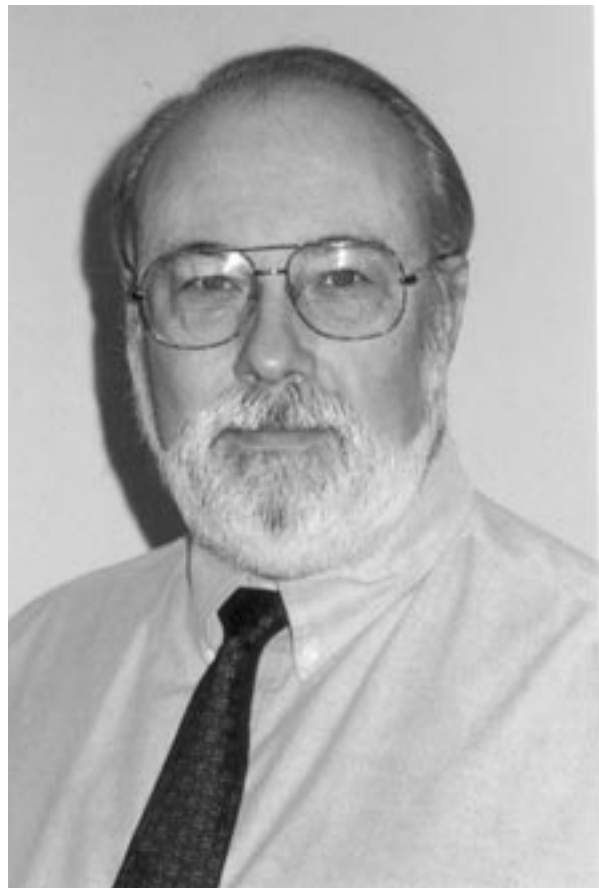


Guided Fluency Instruction:

Moving Students to Independence

by Timothy Rasinski

It is encouraging to see, in recent years, an increased recognition given to the importance of reading fluency as a factor in students' reading development (Kuhn & Stahl, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski, 2000, 2003). After years of neglect (Allington, 1983), fluency has come to be seen as a necessary (but not sufficient) element in successful reading development. Reading fluency, the ability to read accurately, at an appropriate rate, and with meaningful expression and phrasing has been shown to be associated with reading comprehension for students through the intermediate grades (Pinnell, et al., 1995). Moreover, specific instructional methods for teaching fluency have been identified and employed with a high degree of success in classrooms and clinics (Rasinski, 1988; 2003; Rasinski & Padak, 2001).



Guided Fluency

The teacher essentially models successful task completion for the student while drawing the student's attention to the key portions of the experience.

Methods and principles for teaching reading fluency include modeling reading fluency for students by reading to them on a regular basis and drawing their attention to the expressive portion of the teacher's reading, providing oral reading support to students while they themselves read (also known as reading-while-listening), repeated readings (practiced readings of a target text), focusing instruction on proper and meaningful phrasing, and providing readers with materials at their independent reading level (Rasinski, 1988, 2003). Although these individual methods and principles will have a positive impact on readers' fluency and overall reading development, it is important for teachers to combine, orchestrate or integrate these individual methods so that the instruction has a more powerful, synergistic effect.

Pearson and Gallagher (1983) suggest a model for comprehension instruction that, I believe, has important implications for reading fluency instruction. They suggest that academic teaching and learning are the responsibility of both the teacher and the learner—powerful instruction involves a gradual shift in responsibility for the completion of the learning task from the teacher to the student. Early in the teaching and learning task the teacher, or person playing the role of the teacher such as parent, teacher aide, or classroom or clinical tutor, takes on all or most of the responsibility for the completing of the academic task. The learner is actively engaged in observing the teacher, attempting to understand what the teacher is doing to complete the task successfully. The teacher essentially models successful task completion for the student



while drawing the student’s attention to the key portions of the experience.

After a period of modeling, responsibility for task completion begins to be shared by the teacher and the student. Pearson and Gallagher term this notion guided practice. The student works to accomplish the task, but the teacher is available to direct, guide, assist, and perhaps, relieve the student when necessary, in completion of the learning task. Teacher and student may go through several iterations of the task during which the teacher gradually provides the student with greater levels of responsibility and control over the task. Throughout this period, the teacher engages the student in a critical discussion of the task and the student’s performance.

Finally, at a point where the teacher feels that the student is able to complete the task on his or her own, the teacher allows the student to engage in and complete the task independently, without intervention from the teacher. Again, the teacher may require the student to go through several iterations of the task before moving on to another task or another level of the same task. A critical

discussion or debriefing may occur at this end point of the teaching and learning cycle.

This model of comprehension instruction has been used in the development of guided reading as a specific instructional methodology (e.g., Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001). I believe the same model can also be used as a framework for a generalized guided method of effective fluency instruction.

Guided Fluency Instruction—Modeling

Applying the Pearson and Gallagher model, effective fluency instruction should begin with a modeling component—helping see (and hear) what fluent reading of a targeted text is like. This usually means the teacher reads the assigned text to the student in an expressive and meaningful manner while the student observes the reading and/or follows along silently. The passage chosen for instruction can be fairly challenging (at the student’s instructional level, or even near his or her frustration level) as the student will be receiving ongoing practice and support in learning to read the text fluently. Care should be taken to choose a passage that is of some interest to the



Assisted Practice

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student and that may lend itself to oral interpretive reading. I find that poetry, essays, and oratory work quite well for fluency instruction.

The teacher will most likely choose to provide the student with several iterations of the modeling by reading the text several times, perhaps with differing levels of fluency with each reading for comparison. This period of modeling should normally be accompanied by the teacher and student discussing the nature and quality of the reading by the teacher. The teacher may point out various aspects of his or her reading, such as a change in volume or rate, a change in voice, or an extended pause, and use these as the basis for extended discussion and analysis.

Fluency Instruction—Assisted Practice

Modeling is followed by a period of assisted practice in which the teacher and student share responsibility for the reading. This is the point at which supported reading or listening-while-reading activities can be employed.

Echo reading is one form of assisted or supported practice (Rasinski, 2003). In echo reading the teacher reads a single sentence or phrase at a time; the student responds by orally repeating or echoing each sentence or phrase. The teacher must try to ensure that the student is visually examining each sentence or phrase as it is read and echoed.

Choral reading might be the next step in the assisted reading process. Here the teacher and student read the passage together, orally. Paired reading (Topping,



Teacher's Role

In all instruction, however, the most important factor is not the method; it is the teacher. The teacher does the strategic planning and makes on-the-spot decisions that can spell the success or failure for instruction.

1987a, 1987b, 1989, 1995) takes the notion of choral reading with two readers to a more sophisticated level. In paired reading, the teacher and student sit side by side and orally and simultaneously read the target text together. The teacher or student points to the text as it is read to keep the student's visual attention on the text. The teacher adjusts his or her volume and rate of reading to the requirements of the student. The teacher may initially take a slight lead in the reading, but, with each successive reading during this practice stage, the teacher gives more responsibility to the student by reading at a lower volume and situating his or her voice so that it begins to slightly lag or shadow the student's own reading. The student can also signal the teacher to remove himself or herself from the oral reading with a gentle elbow in the side of the teacher. The teacher, however, is ready to

return to the oral assisted reading whenever the student encounters difficulty while reading. The teacher may wish to engage the student in a brief discussion of the student's reading at the end of one or more paired readings.

The teacher may wish to give the student a bit more independence at this stage of the instructional cycle. This could be done by having the student read the assigned text while listening to a prerecorded version of the passage on audio tape or compact disc. The recorded reading provides the assist or support to the reader as the target passage is read. Research into this form of listening-while-reading has shown very promising and substantive results (Carbo, 1978a, 1978b, 1981; Smith & Elley, 1997).

The assisted reading portion of the guided fluency instruction might conclude with a return to echo reading. However, in



this version the roles are reversed from that described earlier—the student does the initial reading of each sentence or phrase and the teacher does the response. Again, this demonstrates a gradual but continual shift of responsibility for the reading task from the teacher to the student.

Guided Fluency Instruction — Independent Practice

In the final stage of guided fluency instruction responsibility shifts almost entirely to the student. The student is asked to orally practice the same text a certain number of times or until he or she reads with appropriate and meaningful expression and achieves some predetermined fluency target. The student receives no assistance at this point unless it is requested.

Oral reading practice on a target text, or repeated readings (Samuels, 1979; Dohower, 1987, 1989, 1994), is one of the most powerful fluency development tools at our disposal. Note that even before reaching this stage of the guided fluency instruction

cycle, the student has been repeatedly reading the target text or closely observing the text being read.

When the student feels ready, his or her reading of the text is assessed. Once mastery on the text is achieved the student moves on to another, perhaps more challenging, passage and the instructional cycle is repeated.

This guided fluency instruction approach should take place over several days. Although the time allotted for fluency instruction may vary from grade to grade and student to student, I recommend that no more than 20–30 minutes per day be given over to direct fluency instruction of this sort. If reading fluency is an important issue for students, it is important to make fluency instruction a regular, daily part of reading. Progress is maximized when fluency instruction can become a regular routine in the overall reading curriculum and that the challenge of the targeted passages for reading can be gradually increased over time.



A Model, Not a Prescription

The model presented provides a general framework for formulating instruction in fluency for students whose reading needs include reading fluency. (Interestingly, research sponsored by the United States Department of Education [Pinnell, et al., 1995] suggests that a fairly large percentage of intermediate grade students, upwards of 50%, may have not acquired sufficient fluency skills to maximize their comprehension of the texts they read.)

In all instruction, however, the most important factor is not the method; it is the teacher. The teacher does the strategic planning and makes on-the-spot decisions that can spell the success or failure for instruction. Thus, while the general model of fluency instruction provided in this article is sound, the actual implementation of the model may vary greatly due to the knowledge, comfort, and instructional style of the teacher, as well as to the specific needs and characteristics of the learner and the learning situation. I heartily endorse and encourage

adaptations and informed variations of this instructional model. The best instruction is planned and executed by informed teachers who, themselves, have achieved their own level of independence in their guided development as teachers.

Just as a good book is simply a framework for a narrative in which the readers add their own interpretations and images from their individual schemas, this instructional model is nothing more than a general framework for informed instruction in which teachers add their own informed interpretations, improvisations, and elaborations. Reading fluency is an indispensable key to success in reading. Excellence in teaching is an indispensable key to success in fluency instruction.



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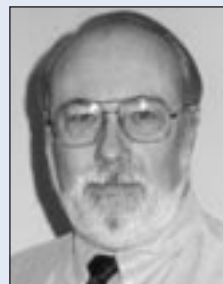
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Fluency Formula



About the Author

Timothy Rasinski is a professor of education in the Department of Teaching, Leadership, and Curriculum Studies at Kent State University. He teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in literacy education. His major interests include working with children who find reading difficult, phonics and reading fluency instruction, and teacher development in literacy education. He has published over 100 articles and 10 books on various aspects of reading education. A past editor of *The Reading Teacher*, the most widely read journal in reading education in the world, Tim is currently an editor for the *Journal of Literacy Research*. He has served as president of the College Reading Association and he currently serves on the Board of Directors of the International Reading Association. Tim received his Ph.D. from The Ohio State University.

