

# FLUENCY

described by Kathy Collins

## Demonstrate accuracy and fluency when reading

Fluency is viewed, often, as simply the ability to read smoothly and expressively at an acceptable reading rate. In other words, fluency is characterized as reading that sounds like talking—not too fast, not too slow, and highly expressive. While these are certainly aspects of fluency, being a fluent reader involves so much more. Fluency is a vital skill to develop right from the start, before and while children are learning to decode the words. It's critical that fluency instruction and support continue throughout the elementary school years (and beyond) as students' reading voices go from being oral and out loud to *in their heads*. Fluency is linked to readers' overall proficiency (Valencia & Buly, 2004), and it's regarded as "a critical bridge between decoding and comprehension" (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Fluent readers are also more motivated to read (Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2012).

The Indiana Academic Standards for Reading RF.5, the fluency standard, is interesting in that it's expressed the same way from Grade 1 to Grade 5. For kindergarten there is a slight difference in wording. The challenge for teachers is to differentiate the standard so children accumulate fluency skills across the years while also accommodating the increasing complexity of their books. It's important for teachers to do two things: teach all children the range of skills and strategies that comprise fluent reading, no matter their reading levels, while also matching fluency instruction to the increasing sophistication and complexity of texts children read as they advance through the grades.

Fluency instruction and strategy support can and does draw from the following categories:

- Reading with chunking (vs. word-by-word reading, also known as word-calling)
- Reading with automaticity (using sight words, spelling patterns, and phonics to quickly decode words)
- Reading with appropriate reading rate (not too fast, not too slow, oral language cadence, decoding automaticity, increasing WCPM – words correct per minute)
- Reading with phrasing (able to fluently read sentences of different lengths and syntax demands)
- Reading that accounts for punctuation and text features (bold words, all-caps, underlines, mid-sentence and sentence-ending punctuation)
- Reading with expression (reading dialogue that sounds like the characters with regard to volume, tone, inflection; reading that matches the feeling and action of the text)
- Reading with prosody (expressive reading that is an accumulation of all of the above, reflects the meaning of the text and that demonstrates reading comprehension)
- Reading with a fix-it disposition (rereading to make reading sound smooth, rereading to reflect accurate meaning, rereading to self-correct, noticing when fluency wanes and going back to fix it, etc.)

To support fluency across the grades, it helps to implement (1) daily **read aloud** time in which the teacher models fluent reading using the categories listed above; (2) consistent **shared reading** sessions in which children chorally read and reread texts of grade level or higher complexity across a week; (3) **readers' theater** and similar kinds of experiences in which children are using fluency skills in authentic, performative contexts; (4) **reading lessons** featuring explicit, focused, and assessment-based fluency strategies for the whole class, for small groups, and for individual readers; (5) regular **rereading opportunities**; (6) **authentic experiences** for students, such as recording **audiobooks**, recording themselves reading their favorite parts of books, reading aloud to younger children; and so on.

When differentiating RF.5 in order to support children in meeting the standard across Grades K - 5, teachers will want to make sure that they have frequent opportunities to listen to children read aloud from their independent-level texts and that they consider the fluency demands embodied in the texts their children are reading. Teachers will not want to singularly prioritize reading rate at the expense of other fluency considerations as speed-oriented reading can work in opposition to meaningful reading (DiSalle & Rasinski, 2017).

## KINDERGARTEN

**Orally read emergent-reader texts, maintaining an appropriate pace and using self-correcting strategies while reading. (K.RF.5)**

### Unpacking the Standard

In kindergarten children begin reading emergent reader texts when they are starting to acquire decoding skills, and emergent-reader texts are characterized by very simple sentences or phrases in decodable texts (texts that use controlled vocabulary or select letter-sound relationships: *The flat cat sat on the mat./The flat cat saw a fat rat./The cat and the rat had a chat.*) or patterned texts (predictable texts that use a sentence pattern and repeated (sight) words across pages: *I like dogs./I like cats./I like birds.*) When children begin reading these emergent texts, the standard centers fluency instruction on reading rate (word level automaticity and phrasing) and self-correction, which means going back or pausing to fix words or phrases that were tricky or misread. Across the year, fluency instruction in kindergarten might include: active modeling of fluent reading through read-aloud and shared reading; routines and activities that support phonemic awareness; phonics instruction; opportunities to reread texts; explicit instruction in fluency skills as well as fix-it strategies to monitor for fluency.

### Considerations for Lessons and Assessment

To support fluency in kindergarten, teachers will want to provide phonemic awareness and phonics instruction to help children rapid-read the words in their texts and to help build a larger sight word vocabulary. Children may need support for finding their *not too slow and not too fast* reading rate (see scale in resource section). With regard to assessment, teachers will want to frequently monitor children's fluency by asking them to read aloud during one-to-one conferences to assess rate, expression, automaticity, and fix-it behaviors. Assessments should include rubrics, checklists, and oral reading rate measures.

## GRADE 1

**Orally read grade-level appropriate or higher texts smoothly and accurately, with expression that connotes comprehension at the independent reading level (1.RF.5)**

### Unpacking the Standard

In first grade many children are continuing to develop phonemic awareness, adding words to their sight word bank and learning to decode words, and the expectation is that they will read decodable and

patterned texts with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Across the year, fluency instruction might include: routines and activities that support phonemic awareness; phonics instruction; opportunities to reread texts; explicit instruction in fluency skills as well as fix-it strategies to monitor for fluency.

### Considerations for Lessons and Assessment

To support first-grade children's fluency, teachers will want to provide word-solving strategies and phonics instruction so that children's word-level automaticity and orthographic mapping continues to develop. Teachers will want to support children in acknowledging punctuation as they read. Children may need support for finding their *not too slow and not too fast* reading rate (see scale in resource section). With regard to assessment, teachers will want to frequently monitor children's fluency by asking them to read aloud during one-to-one conferences to assess rate, expression, automaticity, and fix-it behaviors. Assessments should include rubrics, checklists, and oral reading rate measures.

## GRADE 2

### Orally read grade-level appropriate or higher texts smoothly and accurately, with expression that connotes comprehension at the independent reading level (2.RF.5)

#### Unpacking the Standard

In second grade many children begin to encounter books with longer dialogue passages featuring more characters. Their books may have settings with different time frames and take place in unfamiliar places. Second graders also encounter multi-syllabic words that they may not have ever seen or written before, so fresh demands are made to learn decoding skills to read with automaticity. Across the year, fluency instruction might include: reading with automaticity; reading with expression; fix-it strategies to monitor for fluency; and reminders about the importance of making sure the voice in one's head is as fluent as the voice one has when reading out loud.

### Considerations for Lessons and Assessment

To support second-grade children's fluency, teachers will want to continue to provide word-solving strategy instruction (RF.3 and RF.4 standards) so that children's automaticity continues to develop. Teachers will want to support children in acknowledging punctuation as they read and changing voices to match characters in terms of tone and expression. Children may need extra support for finding their *not too slow and not too fast* reading rate (see scale in resource section). With regard to assessment, teachers will want to frequently monitor children's fluency by asking them to read aloud paragraphs and parts of their books during one-to-one conferences to assess rate, expression, automaticity, and fix-it behaviors. Assessments should include rubrics, checklists, and oral reading rate measures.

## GRADE 3

### Orally read grade-level appropriate or higher texts smoothly and accurately, with expression that connotes comprehension at the independent reading level (3.RF.5)

#### Unpacking the Standard

In third grade students read books with everything they encounter in second grade and also multiple story lines, more character complexity and extended dialogue that moves the story along, and a growing variety of genre. Sentence length in these books is varied, and readers are likely to encounter sophisticated sentence structures with restrictive and non-restrictive appositives. Words per minute expectations increase as well so that children are continuing to develop automaticity while making meaning, all while increasing their reading volume.

### Considerations for Lessons and Assessment

In third-grade classrooms, teachers will want to model and teach children about fluency across genres (3.RL.2.2). For example, an adventure filled sci-fi graphic novel with sound effects is read differently than

a nonfiction text on penguins, which is read differently than a rhyming poem about a sad experience. Specific lessons might include determining tone and matching one's voice to it; going back to reread when fluency breaks down; the importance of fluency to help a reader keep track of meaning. With regard to assessments, teachers will want to invite children to regularly read aloud to them while also assessing words per minute at a couple of different points in the year, and using a fluency rubric and checklists to measure multidimensional aspects of fluency.

## GRADE 4

### Orally read grade-level appropriate or higher texts smoothly and accurately, with expression that connotes comprehension at the independent reading level (4.RF.5)

#### Unpacking the Standard

In fourth grade everything that has been previously taught with respect to fluency is taught again at a higher level, in coordination with the complexity of the texts fourth-grade children encounter as they read independently.

#### Considerations for Lessons and Assessments

Fourth-grade readers are expected to retell their complex texts (4.RL.2) and can be taught to apply fluency skills to retell in more engaging, expressive ways. Fourth-grade readers will read plays and poetry (4.RL.3.1), so teaching fluency implications (line breaks, white space, stage directions, memorization of lines, etc.) within these genres will be necessary. Teachers will want to assess fourth-graders' fluency across genres while accounting for the various aspects of fluency, from automaticity and reading rate to expression and prosody.

## GRADE 5

### Orally read grade-level appropriate or higher texts smoothly and accurately, with expression that connotes comprehension at the independent reading level (5.RF.5)

#### Unpacking the Standard

In fifth grade everything that has been previously taught with respect to fluency is taught again at a higher level, in coordination with the complexity of the texts fifth-grade children encounter as they read independently. Children's reading levels begin to consistently match the levels of texts that teachers may be reading aloud, so the read-aloud time is opportune for modeling how to be a conscientiously fluent reader. Comprehension demands increase as readers need to determine theme and make high-level inferences, and it's important they understand the role and importance of fluency in high level and deep comprehension of any text.

#### Considerations for Lessons and Assessments

As students read self-chosen independent texts, teachers will want to regularly listen as they read aloud passages and paragraphs and stanzas and scenes to ascertain what they demonstrate as fluent readers and what they need. Much of the fluency instruction in fifth grade will build upon all that has come before, while consistently being connected to meaning making. Teaching strategies for fixing fluency when it breaks down, rereading to *hear* the text, and monitoring the voice in one's head for fluency will be important skills. As always, teachers will want fluency assessments that assess all of the dimensions of fluency, from reading rate to prosody.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Burkins, J. & Yates, K. (2020) *Shifting the balance: Six ways to bring the science of reading into the balanced literacy classroom*. Stenhouse.
- Fountas, I. & Pinnell, G. (n.d.). *Fountas & Pinnell Recommended oral reading rates*.  
<https://www.usd450.net/files/OralReadingRates.pdf>
- Fountas, I. & Pinnell, G. (n.d.). *Six dimensions fluency rubric*. <http://www.dps.k12.oh.us/content/documents/Fluency-rubric.pdf>
- Hasbrouck, J. & Glaser, D.R. (2012). *Reading fluency: Understanding and teaching this complex skill*. Gibson Hasbrouck & Associates.
- International Literacy Association. (2018). *Reading fluently does not mean reading fast*.  
<https://literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/ila-reading-fluently-does-not-mean-reading-fast.pdf>
- National Assessment of Educational Progress Oral Reading Fluency Scale.  
<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs95/web/95762.asp>
- Pikulski, J. & Chard, D. (2005). Fluency: The bridge between decoding and reading comprehension. *The Reading Teacher* 58(6), 510-519.
- Rasinski, T. & DiSalle, K. (2017). Impact of short-term intense fluency instruction on students' reading achievement: A classroom-based, teacher-initiated research study. *Journal of Teacher Action Research*, 3(2).  
[http://timrasinski.com/presentations/impact\\_of\\_short\\_term\\_intense\\_fluency\\_instruction.pdf](http://timrasinski.com/presentations/impact_of_short_term_intense_fluency_instruction.pdf)
- Partnership for Inquiry Learning. (n.d.). <http://partnershipforinquirylearning.org>

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