Fluency
Notes for Initial Instruction of All Students
(Include grade levels with specific notes when appropriate)

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Fluency, the ability to read a text quickly, accurately, and with proper expression, has been described as the "most neglected" reading skill, and with good reason. For much of the 20th century, researchers and practitioners alike assumed that fluency was the immediate result of word recognition proficiency, so efforts were directed towards the development of word recognition, whereas fluency itself was largely ignored. That neglect has started to give way during the past four decades as research and theory have reconceptualized this aspect of reading performance. Research has increasingly turned towards considerations of how instruction and reading experience contribute to fluency development.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress conducted a large study of the status of fluency achievement in American education (1995). That study examined the reading fluency of a nationally representative sample of 4th graders and found 44% of students to be disfluent even with grade-level stories that the students had read under supportive testing conditions. Moreover, that study found a close relationship between fluency and reading comprehension. Students who are low in fluency may have difficulty getting the meaning of what they read. The National Research Council report, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, states "Adequate progress in learning to read English (or any alphabetic language) beyond the initial level depends on sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different texts."

Over the past four decades, our understanding of what is involved in reading fluency has been altered and enlarged. Originally, fluency was closely tied to word recognition, but more recent conceptualizations of fluency have been extended beyond word recognition and may embrace comprehension processes as well. In its early conception, it was recognized that fluency requires high-speed word recognition that frees a reader's cognitive resources so that the meaning of a text can be the focus of attention. However, it is now clear that fluency may also include the ability to group words appropriately into meaningful grammatical units for interpretation. Fluency requires the rapid use of punctuation and the determination of where to place emphasis or where to pause to make sense of a text. Readers must carry out these aspects of interpretation rapidly—and usually without conscious attention.

Strategy for Teaching Fluency:

1. Read aloud to students even if they can read by themselves. They need to hear a more fluent reader read. You can share reading time with students by taking turns reading parts out loud or byy participating in choral readings.
2. Require students to read new stories and reread old stories every day.
3. Read harder texts with them and to them every day.
4. Instruct them about how texts are put together. Talk to them about titles, headings, pictures, etc., and what you can learn from these. Point out clues in reading like things that are repeated, things in bold or italics, etc. Explain the difference between fiction and non-fiction, figurative language (poetic language) and literal language ("plain" English). Encourage students to read a variety of materials: non-fiction, fiction, short stories, poems, articles, etc. so that they understand about different genres.

5. Help students to generate questions about what they have read. These questions should deal with the what, how, and why of the things they have read. They should know the purpose of the story or article, the main characters or whose point of view it is, the action, and how the author goes about putting everything together.
6. Assist students in using clues from what they have read to predict what might happen next in a story or to make an inference about something an author hints at by doesn't say in an article.
7. Discuss what children have read with them. Go beyond comprehension questions. Ask their feelings about what they read, what stood out to them and why, what they liked and didn't like and why.
8. Encourage students to write in response to their reading. This may be in the form of a journal.
9. Have children read aloud to you. Do not correct errors as they are reading. Repeated errors or errors that can affect comprehension should be corrected by bringing the child back to the mistake and asking him or her to read it again.
10. Read yourself and model good reading for students by sharing what you read with them or read what they are reading. Talk about the things you find important in what you read and why. Show them how you form opinions about reading and how you use clues in the text to help guide comprehension.
11. Increase children's vocabulary by playing word games like "Wheel of Fortune," "Scrabble," "Boggle," or "Mad Libs."

Fluency should be promoted through practice with a wide variety of well-written and engaging texts at the child's own comfortable reading level. Children who have started to read independently, typically 2nd graders and above, should be encouraged to sound out and confirm the identities of visually unfamiliar words they encounter in the course of reading meaningful texts, recognizing words primarily through attention to their letter-sound relationships.

Rayner (1998) summed up the differences in eye movements between good and poor readers:

1. Fast readers make shorter fixations, longer saccades (the jump of the eye from one fixation to another), and fewer regressions than slow readers.
2. Dyslexic readers are "plodders" or "explorers." Plodders make relatively short forward saccades, and more regressions, whereas explorers showed more frequent word skipping, longer forward saccades, and more regressions.

National Reading Panel:

Fluent readers can read text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. Fluency depends upon well developed word recognition skills, but such skills do not inevitably lead to fluency. There is a close relationship between fluency and comprehension. There is common agreement that fluency develops from reading practice. NRP studied the effectiveness of two major instructional approaches to fluency development: (1) repeated oral reading practice or guided repeated oral reading and (2) independent or recreational reading (however, not enough studies for a meaningful interpretation).

NRP Findings:

1. Repeated guided oral reading procedures had a consistent, positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension. Continued reading practice helps make the word recognition process increasingly automatic.

2. Repeated reading procedures have a clear impact on the reading ability of non-impaired readers through at least grade 4, as well as on students with various kinds of reading problems throughout high school.
3. Most of the studies involving encouraging independent reading failed to find a positive relationship between independent reading and either the amount of reading or reading achievement. It may be beneficial, but research has not yet demonstrated this in a clear and convincing manner.
4. The demonstrated effectiveness of guided oral reading compared to the lack of demonstrated effectiveness of strategies encouraging independent silent reading suggest the importance of explicit compared to more implicit instructional approaches for improving reading fluency.