



Building and Assessing Reading Fluency: Academy of READING with Oral Reading Fluency

Marcie Penner-Wilger
Cognitive Scientist
AutoSkill International Inc.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to:
Marcie Penner-Wilger at AutoSkill International Inc.,
Suite 600B, 555 Leggett Drive, Ottawa, ON, Canada, K2K 2X3.
E-mail: Marcie.Penner-Wilger@AutoSkill.com

Reading Fluency

Reading fluency is the ability to decode and comprehend text at the same time (NICHD, 2000; Samuels, 2006). Reading fluency is comprised of three foundation skills, or fluency indicators:

- *Accuracy* of decoding, the ability to correctly generate a phonological representation of each word, either because it is part of the reader's sight-word vocabulary or by use of a more effortful decoding strategy such as sounding out the word,
- *Automaticity* of word recognition, the ability to quickly recognize words, with little cognitive effort or attention, and
- *Prosody* of oral text reading, the ability to read with proper phrasing and expression.

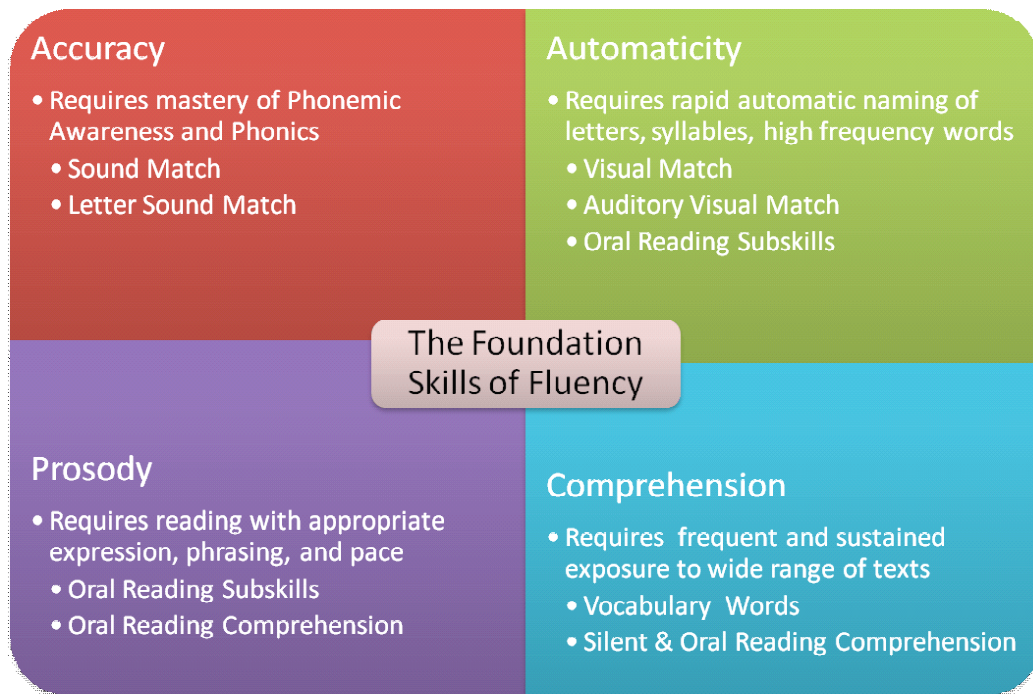
No Child Left Behind, Reading First, and the National Reading Panel have all identified fluency as a critical component of an effective reading program, based on scientific research (NCLB, 2001, NICHD, 2000). Fluency is a strong predictor of reading outcomes including measures of reading proficiency, reading comprehension, NAEP reading scores, and performance on state tests (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Maxwell, 1998; McGlinchey & Hixon, 2004; Pinnell et al., 1995; Silbergitt et al., 2006).

► The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and the National Research Council (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) strongly recommend that teachers build students' fluency skills and assess fluency regularly.

Building the Foundation Skills of Reading Fluency

Fluent readers are able to simultaneously decode and comprehend text. In beginning and struggling readers, the task of decoding uses most if not all attentional resources, making comprehension difficult. Through extensive practice, readers become automatic decoders, able to quickly recognize a large lexicon of words. When decoding is automatic, attentional resources are available for comprehension. Thus, the foundation skills build upon one another. Accurate decoding is a requirement for building automaticity, automaticity is a requirement for building prosody – as the automatic decoding of words frees up attentional resources required for prosody - and prosody in turn aids comprehension.

A large-scale study showed that just under half of students are not fluent readers (Pinnell et al., 1995). Students struggling with fluency, however, are not a homogenous group. Given the three foundation skills required for reading fluency, accuracy, automaticity, and prosody, students can fail to achieve fluency for multiple reasons. Successful interventions identify and target deficits in the foundation skills of fluency for each individual student.



Accuracy

Students need to build a large sight-word vocabulary of high-frequency words and strategies that allow them to read unfamiliar words. However, students can fail to develop accuracy due to decoding problems. Students with dyslexia are especially at risk of failure at the accuracy stage. These struggling readers need interventions that **build decoding skills, including phonemic awareness and phonics instruction**, allowing them to unitize their representations of letters and words (Ehri, 1995, 1998; Palumbo & Willcutt, 2006).

- **Phonemic awareness** is the ability to hear, identify and manipulate the individual sounds – phonemes – in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of spoken language work together to make words.
- **Phonics** is the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes – the sounds of spoken language – and graphemes – the letters and spellings that represent those sounds in written language. Readers use these relationships to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically and to decode unfamiliar words.

▶ The **Academy of READING with Oral Reading Fluency** builds phonemic awareness and mastery of phonics through *Sound Match* training and *Letter-Sound Match* training.

▶ **Phonemic Awareness:** Academy of READING includes a comprehensive Phonemic Awareness Training component that follows a task analysis approach in which the awareness of phonemes is trained in small, individual units. Each unit is considered an essential part of a complete awareness of phonemes. The units are presented in an order that is in line with the natural developmental sequence of the learner. In *Sound-Match* training, students begin with matching words that rhyme, moving on to matching words with the same beginning, then ending, then

middle sounds. Students progress to matching words with sounds in the beginning, ending and middle position. Then, exercises requiring the blending of three and four phonemes are followed by exercises requiring the segmentation of words with three and four phonemes.

▶ **Phonics:** The development of sound-symbol association knowledge, or phonics, is a major component of the Academy of READING. The program offers a structured opportunity to develop sound-symbol knowledge through the exercises found in *Letter-Sound Match* training. Students work through a series of activities in which they hear the word pronounced by the computer and must match it to one of three text options. Students work with letters, letter combinations and words. Additional activities include blending and word building. Students who work through these exercises not only reinforce their phonological awareness but also develop their grapho-phonemic knowledge.

Automaticity

Students need to be able to **identify letters, syllables, and high-frequency words rapidly and accurately**. Students can fail to develop automaticity even once accuracy has been achieved. These struggling readers need practice identifying letters, syllables and high-frequency words to the point where decoding becomes fast and effortless – freeing up cognitive resources for other tasks, such as text comprehension.

▶ The **Academy of READING with Oral Reading Fluency** builds rapid automatic identification of letters, syllables, and high frequency words through *Visual Match*, *Auditory-Visual Match*, and *Read Aloud Subskills* training.

▶ **Academy of READING with Oral Reading Fluency** incorporates and applies the theory of automaticity alongside a task-analytic methodology. A unique training procedure, it includes *Read Aloud Subskills*, *Auditory-Visual* matching-to-sample, and *Visual* matching-to-sample, and is designed to improve rapid automatic responding through practice. Within each of its activities, *Read Aloud Subskills* breaks down the complex task of learning to decode into a developmental sequence. Learners focus on individual letters as well as common and orthographically accurate vowel-consonant combinations that form words and pseudo-words, and on high-frequency words of varying complexities. In order to achieve automaticity of letter and word recognition, learners must demonstrate an ability to respond at a high level of accuracy and at a consistent rate of speed. As students progress through this hierarchy of skills, automaticity is achieved.

Prosody

Students need to be able to **read with appropriate expressions, phrasing, and pace**. Students who have achieved automaticity may still struggle with prosody. Prosody is dependent on oral language skills that may be underdeveloped in some readers, especially English Language Learners (ELLs) who take 6-8 years to achieve the oral-skill level of their peers (Collier, 1987). Interventions that include the modeling of fluent reading

along with oral practice and feedback are helpful for these students (Palumbo & Willcutt, 2006; Rasinski, 2004).

▶ The **Academy of READING** with **Oral Reading Fluency** builds oral reading skills with appropriate expression, phrasing, and pace through *Read Aloud Subskills* training and *Read Aloud Stories*.

▶ In *Read Aloud Subskills* practice, students hear modeled letters, syllables, words, phrases, sentences, and passages. Decoding strategies are strategically developed. The content builds incrementally, forming building blocks to comprehension passages. At each level, students rehearse, record, and self-evaluate their oral recordings against the modeled text. In *Read Aloud Stories*, students rehearse, record, and self-evaluate their oral recordings of leveled passages.

Comprehension

Reading fluency is the ability to decode and comprehend text at the same time – the ability to make sense of what is being read. Comprehension is the ultimate reading goal. ELLs often struggle to build fluency due to lagging vocabularies. Interventions that increase word exposure as well as build word comprehension are helpful for ELL students and other students that have yet to build automaticity (Palumbo & Willcutt, 2006).

In addition to building the foundation skills of fluency, students need to have **frequent and sustained exposure to a wide range of texts**. Frequent and sustained exposure to texts, or repeated reading, improves students reading fluency and reading comprehension (NICHD, 2000). Decoding has a reciprocal relation with comprehension; when reading in an area of expertise, comprehension can aid decoding. Thus, exposure to a wide range of texts is important to expanding a student’s sight-word vocabulary and ability to use context to aid word identification.

▶ The **Academy of READING** with **Oral Reading Fluency** provides frequent and sustained exposure to a wide range of texts through *Vocabulary Words* and both *Silent Reading Comprehension* and *Read Aloud Stories*.

▶ The **Academy of READING** includes *silent and read aloud* paragraphs to help students practice comprehension abilities and learn new vocabulary. Comprehension exercises help students develop expected learning outcomes and strategies for better comprehension, including, for example, the development of a reading vocabulary, and the ability to identify the main idea and author’s purpose, literary devices, understand relationships, causes and effects, make inferences, note specific facts and details, and retain information.

▶ The paragraph content for the **Academy of READING** covers a variety of high-interest areas and genres. Key words in the text are highlighted and clickable

to reveal definitions, usage in a sentence and graphical representations to ensure understanding.

- ▶ In *Read Aloud Stories*, after students rehearse, record, and self-evaluate their oral recordings of leveled passages, they answer questions to assess comprehension.

Assessing Reading Fluency

Both the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and the National Research Council (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) recommend that teachers assess fluency regularly (NICHD, 2000). Fluency assessments need to cover the three foundation skills or indicators to provide a valid measure of fluency: accuracy of decoding, automaticity/rate of word recognition, and prosody of oral text reading.

- ▶ The **Academy of READING with Oral Reading Fluency** provides a *fluency benchmark assessment* to track students' progress. All three foundation skills are assessed in a manner that is quick and easy to both administer and interpret. The fluency benchmark consists of timed cold readings of leveled passages. This reading is recorded and stored for evaluation. Assessments can be compared against target norms, by grade and time of testing.

- ▶ *Accuracy* is assessed as the number of student errors.
- ▶ *Automaticity* or rate is assessed as the words correct per minute (WCPM).
- ▶ *Prosody* is assessed based on a four-point rubric. Teachers can use the NAEP four-point rubric or another rubric of their own choosing.

Conclusion

- ▶ The **Academy of READING with Oral Reading Fluency** provides research-based, systematic instruction to build the foundation skills of reading fluency -- meeting the instructional recommendations of the National Reading Panel and National Research Council.

- ▶ The **Academy of READING with Oral Reading Fluency** provides adaptive, individualized intervention for the unique needs of at-risk, ELL, and special education students.

- ▶ The **Academy of READING with Oral Reading Fluency** provides an Oral Fluency Benchmark Assessment and progress monitoring to track reading fluency development--meeting the assessment recommendations of the National Reading Panel and National Research Council.

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