



Shotton Hall  
Research School



**5 MINUTES ON...**

**READING  
(FLUENCY FOCUS)**



## How do we define reading fluency?

Fluency is the **bridge** between **word recognition** and **comprehension**. This is because, Fluency connects to **accuracy and automaticity** in **decoding**. Furthermore, it connects to **comprehension** through **prosody** or **expressive interpretation**. Fluent reading **supports comprehension** because pupils' cognitive resources are **freed** from focusing on word recognition and can be **redirected towards** comprehending the text.

### Fluency is comprised of 3 parts:

**Accuracy** (words read accurately and with correct pronunciation, usually with a high success rate):

- > Pupils use context to support them in accurately reading homographs ('there is no time like the present to present a friend with a present').

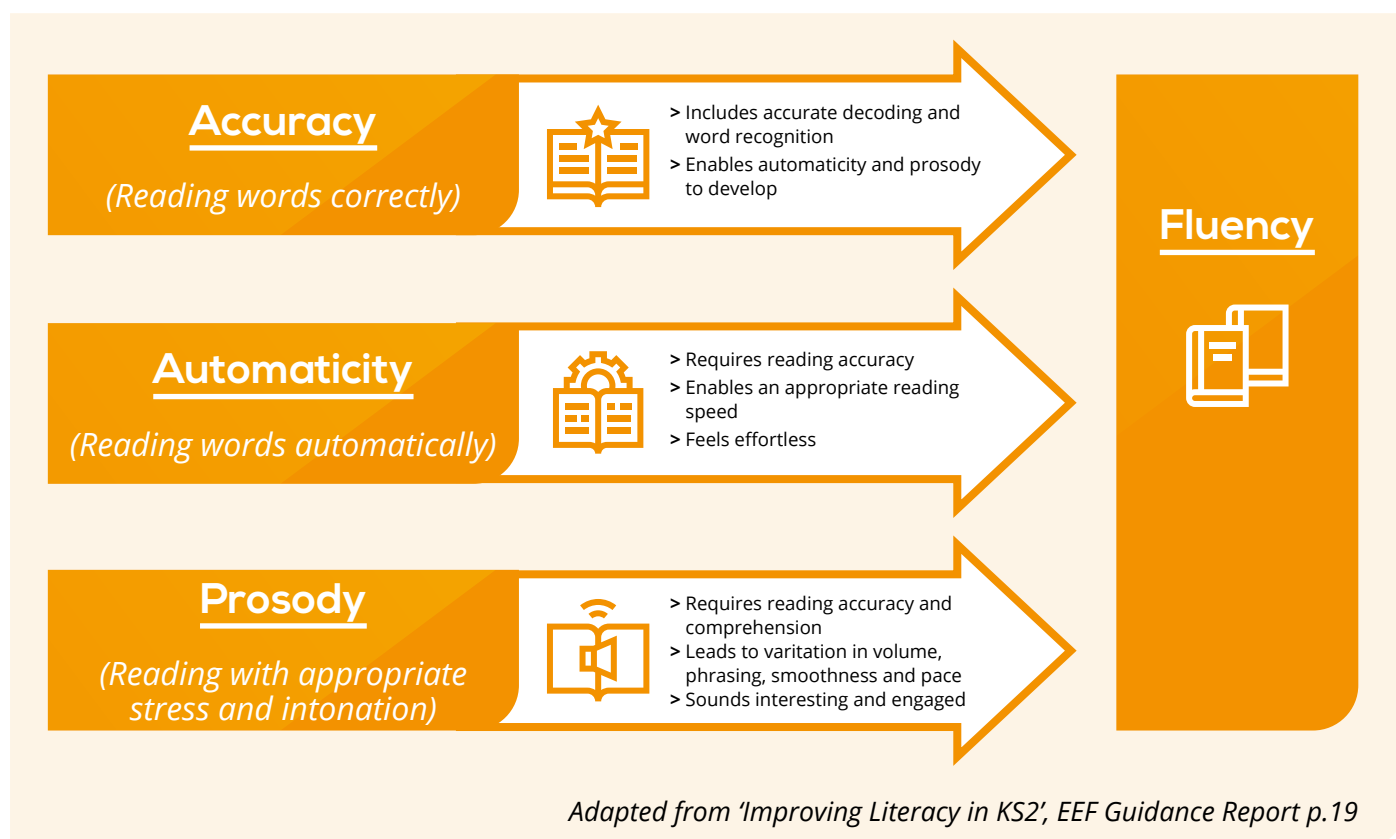
**Automaticity** (rapid word recognition without conscious decoding):

- > Pupils are able to recognise words quickly, accurately and without effort: whole word recognition.

- > Pupils' cognitive resources can attend almost entirely to reading comprehension.

**Prosody** (appropriate use of phrasing and expression):

- > Pupils demonstrate appropriate intonation, rhythm and emphasis of words and sentences when reading out loud.
- > A pupils' prosody can demonstrate their understanding and the extent they have read for meaning. Prosody is a signal that the text has been comprehended.



## What can we learn from the evidence about reading fluency?

- > Fluent readers **read whole words**. Research tells us that this is how **most adults** read.
- > Words have three forms: their **sounds** (phonemes), their **orthography** (spelling) and their **meaning**.
- > When we have seen and read a word many times, it is stored in **long term memory as a unique letter string** that can be read instantly. This process is referred to as '**orthographic mapping**' (Ehri, 2015).
- > **Orthographic mapping** is the **process** that successful readers use to become fluent. Readers use the oral language processing part of their brain to connect the sounds/phonemes of words they already know to the letters/graphemes in a word. Then, they **permanently store** the connected sounds and letters of words - along with their meaning - as instantly recognisable words.
- > After approximately **one to four exposures to a written word**, the word becomes **unitised** or instantly familiar (Kilpatrick, 2015).

## Misconceptions about reading fluency:

### > 'Fluent reading is fast reading':

speed is a consequence of automaticity, not the cause. Pupils need to increase their reading miles to increase automaticity. Getting pupils to read fast does not improve their fluency: it makes them quick readers, but doesn't mean that they are reading for meaning. We should avoid stopwatch reading.

### > 'Exposure to many texts develops fluency':

reading a text once – or 'wide reading' - is rarely enough to support fluency. Repeated readings, or 'deep reading', allows pupils to rehearse and hone their reading. Ultimately, this increases fluency and boosts comprehension. These benefits improve the reading of new texts pupils meet in future.

## What does effective fluency instruction look like? How do we do it really well?

Fluency must be **explicitly taught and deliberately practised**. This can be done through the following strategies:

Fluency Strategies	
<b>Teacher-led, modelled fluent reading</b>	Pupils hear how a text sounds when read fluently and can identify what aspects of fluency were used. Prosody (like language) is usually acquired naturally as children grow and listen to prosody modelled around them. Much infant-directed language is rich in prosody. Hearing an adult read aloud with expression or appropriate prosody demonstrates to pupils how to give meaning to what is read through varied pitch (frequency), intensity (specific emphasis on a syllable), and duration (length of the word and pauses between words).
<b>Choral reading</b>	This involves simultaneous reading of a passage and can be done individually, in groups or as a whole class. In choral reading sessions, it is important to monitor pupils' reading to ensure that all are participating. One way of doing this is to invite different groups of pupils, mid-flow, to read aloud; for example, girls, boys, people with blue eyes, people on a specific table etc.
<b>Repeated choral reading</b>	The teacher might lower their voice with each repeated reading, thus phasing themselves out and gradually releasing responsibility to the students.
<b>Echo reading</b>	The teacher reads a short section of the text aloud while pupils silently follow in their own copies of the text. This section could be a sentence, paragraph or a short passage. Pupils echo the section back. Sections need to be long enough so that students are required to rely on reading their text and not just remembering what the teacher said. The teacher then releases responsibility to pairs of pupils, who engage in partner reading. Partner A (the stronger reader in the pair) reads the same piece of text; Partner B tracks the text and monitors their partner. The pairs then swap: Partner B reads and Partner A tracks and monitors.
<b>Deep reading</b>	This occurs when a pupil is asked individually to read a single text repeatedly until a level of fluency is achieved. This may be silently or out loud. Several reviews of research on fluency have shown that word recognition accuracy, automaticity, comprehension, and attitude toward reading have been shown to improve with repeated readings.
<b>Performance reading</b>	Texts that feature monologues, dialogues, speeches, songs, are suited to performance reading. Pupils can discuss the text and make decisions about how to use their voices, facial expressions or gestures. Text marking can be used to show how different aspects of the reading sounds e.g., underlining a phrase/word/part of the word that will be stressed when read out loud. This is a crucial strategy because it is a way to make repeated reading purposeful and engaging.

## How can we assess reading fluency?

Fluency can be assessed by listening to pupils read from an appropriate text. A fluency rubric, such as the one below (adapted from Zutell and Rasinski, 1991), can be used to inform accurate diagnosis and identify areas where pupils may need further support.

	Expression and volume	Phrasing	Smoothness	Pace
4	Reads with <i>good expression and enthusiasm throughout the text</i> . Varies expression and volume to match his or her interpretation of the passage.	Generally reads with <i>good phrasing</i> , mostly in clause and sentence units, with adequate attention to expression.	Generally <i>reads smoothly</i> with some breaks, but resolves word and structure difficulties quickly, usually through self-correction.	Consistently reads at <i>conversational pace</i> ; appropriate rate throughout reading.
3	Make text sound like <i>natural language</i> throughout the better part of the passage. Occasionally slips into expressionless reading. Voice volume is generally appropriate throughout the text.	Reads with a <i>mixture of run-ons</i> , mid sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness, reasonable stress and intonation.	Occasionally <i>breaks smooth rhythm</i> because of difficulties with specific words and/or structures.	Read with an <i>uneven mixture of fast and slow pace</i> .
2	Begins to <i>use voice to make text sound like natural language</i> in some areas of the text but not in others. Focus remains largely on pronouncing the word. Still reads in a quiet voice.	Frequently reads in two- and three-word phrases, giving the impression of <i>choppy reading</i> ; improper stress and intonation fail to mark ends of sentences and clauses.	Experiences <i>several 'rough spots'</i> in text where extended pauses or hesitations are more frequent and disruptive.	Read <i>moderately slowly</i> .
1	Reads <i>words as if simply to get them out</i> . Little sense of trying to make text sound like natural language.	Reads in a <i>monotone</i> with little sense of boundaries; frequently reads <i>word-by-word</i> .	Makes frequent <i>extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound outs, repetitions</i> , and/or multiple attempts.	Reads <i>slowly and laboriously</i> .

*'Improving Literacy in KS2', EEF Guidance Report, p.21*

## Questions we should ask ourselves about reading fluency?

- > Have I used an effective diagnostic tool, such as Rasinski's '*Fluency Rubric*', to assess pupils' fluency capabilities? Do I know what components of fluency they need to develop so I can target my support effectively?
- > Do I carefully select the texts I use to teach reading fluency to support previous or future learning in the curriculum?
- > Do I have clear teaching routines in place for reading fluency? Do I teach reading fluency explicitly?
- > Do I expose my pupils to texts multiple times so words can be unitised? Do I give multiple opportunities for deliberate practice and 'deep reading'?
- > Before I teach a text for fluency, do I frame it, considering how to activate prior knowledge and make explicit connections between prior knowledge and future knowledge?
- > Do I remove barriers to the text by explaining difficult concepts and pre-teaching essential vocabulary?
- > Do I utilise strategies such as text marking so pupils know how the different components of a text's reading sounds?

### Useful wider reading:

- > '*Improving Literacy in KS1*', EEF Guidance Report
- > '*Improving Literacy in KS2*', EEF Guidance Report
- > '*A field guide to reading fluency: a reader's digest of our work to date*' HFL Education
- > <https://keystoliteracy.com/blog/the-role-of-orthographic-mapping-in-learning-to-read/>
- > '*The Megabook of Fluency*', Tim Rasinski, Melissa Cheesman Smith