Supporting the Development of Reading Fluency

In response to requests from teachers and schools, UFLI developed a set of fluency checks to provide an overall picture of each student's reading development at the end of each *UFLI Foundations* unit. The following is a guide for using data from these assessments to support your students' fluency growth.

Fluency is a key indicator of reading proficiency and the goal of foundational reading skills instruction (Rupley et al., 2020). Fluency can be defined as accuracy, automaticity at both the word and text levels, and prosody (Hudson et al., 2005). Accuracy and automaticity are the most important elements of fluency in the primary grades and should be the focus of fluency instruction until mastered (Schwanenflugel et al., 2006).

Prerequisite support. When students struggle with fluency, it is important to identify the root cause of that struggle. If students have not yet achieved word-level accuracy and automaticity, they first need support with these skills. Development of these skills will support fluency (Metsala & David, 2022). Teachers can use the *UFLI Foundations* Progress Monitoring Spelling Assessments to track student progress with these skills. These assessments are on pp. 354-366 in the *UFLI Foundations* manual. Additional guidance for differentiation is available on pp. 33-35 in the manual and in the [Progress Monitoring and Differentiation webinar](#).

Teacher-led support. Teachers can support fluency development in a variety of ways. Steps 1-7 of each *UFLI Foundations* lesson provide instruction in the skills that contribute to accurate and automatic word reading. In Step 8, the focus shifts to connected text. Students read sentences and a decodable book or passage for the purpose of building fluency and comprehension. This lesson component emphasizes the development of both word-level and text-level automaticity. The [UFLI Decodable Text Guide](#) provides links to many resources for decodable text.

Step 8 also provides an opportunity for the teacher to model prosodic reading and for students to practice reading prosodically. For example, teachers can model prosodic reading during echo reading, having students repeat portions of the text while focusing on intonation and phrasing. Some students may also benefit from supplemental opportunities for this type of fluency practice during small group instruction.

In addition to the skills developed during the *UFLI Foundations* lesson, it is also important for all students to hear examples of fluent reading with authentic text. The language comprehension portion of reading instruction is an ideal opportunity to incorporate this practice through read alouds with a wide variety of high-quality trade books.

Peer support. During independent work time, students can practice fluency with peers. Teachers can pair students up to read passages together. Student pairs can take turns reading and listening. Teachers can pair a more proficient reader with a less proficient reader so that the more proficient reader can provide a model and offer support and feedback. However, avoid pairing children who are too far apart in their reading fluency. A wide gap in proficiency can lead to frustration for both partners. Instead, pair up students who have slight differences in text-level automaticity.

Partner reading is a great opportunity for students to engage in repeated reading. Repeated reading is the practice of reading the same text multiple times. This practice supports students' decoding accuracy and automaticity and allows them to refine their prosody. Three to four repetitions per text would be sufficient practice.
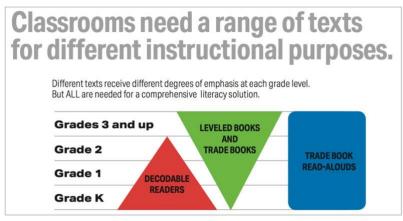
Reader's Theater is another opportunity for repeated reading practice that some students may find more engaging. In Reader's Theater, students read scripts together and act them out. The goal is not for students to memorize their scripts, but instead practice reading their parts with prosody to support their fluency.

Independent practice. After chorally reading the decodable passage during Step 8 of the *UFLI Foundations* lesson, students can practice reading and illustrating the passage independently. Student illustrations can serve as a quick, informal comprehension check. If students are able to depict what happened in the story through their illustration, teachers can assume they understood the content.

Students should also have ample opportunities to read a wide variety of engaging text matched to their interests and background knowledge (Kuhn, 2020). The breadth of text students can read independently will expand as decoding proficiency develops.

Classrooms need a range of texts for different instructional purposes.

Different texts receive different degrees of emphasis at each grade level. But ALL are needed for a comprehensive literacy solution.

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When students are in the earliest stages of reading development and know very few grapheme-phoneme correspondences, it is helpful to have ample opportunities to independently read highly controlled text. This means the text only includes concepts that students have already learned. This allows students to build an initial understanding of the alphabetic code, or the systematic relationship between

graphemes and phonemes. Decodable passages are an example of highly controlled text.

However, students should never be limited to only decodable text. It is also important that students learn the probability that a particular grapheme will correspond with a particular phoneme (Arciuli, 2018). Exposure to less-controlled text promotes the statistical learning needed for reading proficiency. So, as students' decoding skills advance, they will benefit from increased access to a wide variety of authentic, high-interest text beyond decodable passages.

Students should have choice in what they read and have access to books that interest them so that reading is an appealing activity to engage in. It is important to build students' interest in reading because the more students read, the stronger their reading skills become.

References

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