

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Fluency First!

### What is Fluency First!?

*Fluency First!* is a reading fluency development program that is designed to supplement a school's core reading program. The goal of *Fluency First!* is to build fluent and confident readers in grades K-3 through the use of repeated readings of brief, engaging texts. The program stems from the research of Drs. Timothy Rasinski and Nancy Padak and is based on a model called The Fluency Development Lesson (Rasinski, Padak, Linek & Sturtevant, 1994). Daily lessons of 10-15 minutes with whole-class or small group instruction are designed to target the essential elements of fluency: speed, accuracy, and prosody. This is accomplished through a variety of strategies including modeling, choral reading, repeated readings, and audio-assisted reading.

Lessons from *Fluency First!* occur over 5 days. One Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) consists of 2 days of instruction using one text, followed by 2 more days of instruction with a new text. On Day 5, a special performance time is set aside for students to read aloud one of the two text selections and/or any other texts that have been practiced for that week.

A *Fluency First!* 2-day lesson routine for one selection unfolds in the following manner. On Day 1, the teacher introduces the new reading by building background knowledge, questioning the students about the topic of the selection, and by eliciting responses that reflect students' moods and feelings about the selection's topic. Next, the teacher orally reads the selection two or three times, modeling appropriate rate and expression. Then the teacher leads the class in several choral readings of the selection. This is followed by practice in which students will read alone, in pairs, or in small groups. For students progressing well with this selection, a second related selection is provided for each FDL.

The primary focus on Day 2 of the FDL is coaching and rehearsing. This is a time for more student practice with encouraging support from the teacher. Students work in small groups of 4-5, reading individually, in pairs, or for the entire group. At this time, the teacher circulates among the groups offering feedback. Students may also listen and read with the audio CD in a listening center.

*Fluency First!* suggests that student progress be evaluated six times per year by reading orally with an assessment selection. Six graded selections for each grade level are included for this purpose as well as information for determining oral reading fluency, comprehension, and word recognition. Informal assessment is recommended on a monthly basis as part of daily observation. Checklists are provided with indicators that are based on teacher judgment. A self-assessment form is available for students.



Materials for *Fluency First!* are clear and easy to use. Each grade level includes a detailed teacher's guide with assessments, student books, an audio CD with two different readings of each passage, and transparencies of each passage for group instruction. Predictable texts in *Fluency First!* were chosen for their expressive qualities and consist primarily of rhyming poems, song lyrics, and other narrative passages.

## How is Fluency First! aligned with Reading First?

The important relationship between fluency and reading comprehension has been well established in the research (Report of the National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Students who are able to read smoothly, effortlessly and with proper expression are more likely to understand what they are reading. Repeated oral readings have been found to be an effective means of increasing students' ability to read with fluency and serve as the foundation of the *Fluency First!* program.

*Fluency First!* employs several repeated reading strategies for improving the reading fluency of students. The teacher reads text orally, modeling all dimensions of fluency. Additionally, the teacher leads discussions and questions students between readings about their thoughts on speed, accuracy, intonation, expressiveness, volume, and particular words from the selection. To stimulate students' thoughts and reactions during these readings, the teacher might experiment by changing voice, pace, diction, and mood. This is done frequently while trying to draw students' awareness to the various aspects of fluency. Choral reading, echo reading, paired reading, and listening and reading with an audio CD are other types of repeated reading strategies employed in this program.

There are brief, skill building activities on days 2 and 4 of a FDL that may focus on phonological or phonemic awareness, decoding, vocabulary and comprehension. A skills worksheet accompanies each FDL and students may be asked to complete this at another time or at home. These components are not goals of the program and it is suggested to only spend 5 minutes with these activities. Since some of the skill based activities do not focus on aspects of the specific text reading, it would be important for teachers to carefully choose activities that align with that day's specific fluency lesson in order to maximize instructional time.

The *Fluency First!* program uses the same selection for all students within each grade. Since students aren't assessed for placement in texts at their instructional reading level, teachers would need to be conscious of possible frustration experienced by struggling readers due to their inability to access some words caused by insufficient decoding skills. In this instance, teachers must be particularly careful to provide the level of support and modeling recommended by the Fluency First! program, and be ready to offer students extra opportunities for word work linked with the more challenging readings.

Professional development comes free of charge with the *Fluency First!* program, and the training time is negotiable, depending on the size of an order. The company offers full day, half day and after school trainings. Wright Group, the publishers of *Fluency First!* also offer follow-up visits to schools which can be classroom visitations or more formal follow-up trainings similar to the initial training.

## Research Support for Fluency First!

The Fluency Development Lesson (FDL) was developed in 1994 based on the research on repeated reading as a technique for increasing fluency. The goal of the FDL is to improve students' oral reading fluency through the use of oral repeated readings in multiple formats: modeling by the teacher, choral reading, reading with an audio-tape, and partner reading. In addition to repeated readings, teachers offer guidance and support about the reader's performance.

Four second grade classrooms at two different elementary schools in a large, urban ethnically diverse school district were the site of a study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the FDL in developing reading fluency. School A was in a working-class residential setting, and School B was in an inner-city neighborhood. Two classrooms from each school participated in the study: one classroom served as the experimental FDL treatment and the other class as the control treatment. Students in each school were randomly assigned to each classroom; for School A, there were 14 students in the experimental treatment and 16 students in the control treatment, while at School B, there were 14 students in the experimental treatment and 10 students in the control treatment.

The researchers and the teachers administered a modified form of the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 1988), for pre- and posttesting. Students read both orally and silently, and then answered comprehension questions about the passage. Instructional reading levels and oral reading rates were determined from these reading assessments. Oral reading rate was the dependent measure for reading fluency.

Reading instruction in both schools relied upon basal programs. Although students in School B were grouped according to reading ability across the entire second grade, for the purposes of this study, they received fluency instruction while still in their heterogeneously grouped homeroom.

Treatments in both conditions were delivered for 15 minutes daily, at the start of each day, from November to mid-May. Materials for the study consisted of a reading text for each student in both the experimental and control conditions. Texts were chosen to match the time of year and topics students were studying in their classes. They consisted of brief passages of 50-150 words from rhymes, poems, and narrative passages, which were chosen for their rhythm and predictability. Students in the experimental condition were given the FDL by their teachers while students in the control treatment were not given a structured fluency lesson but were instructed with the same texts during the course of normal reading activities. The FDL for this study contains the following steps: (1) Teacher introduces text and asks for predictions; (2) Teacher reads text orally modeling fluent reading; (3) Teacher leads class in discussion of text content. Teacher's reading is discussed in terms of rate, phrasing, expression, and intonation; (4) Teacher leads whole class in several choral readings of text; (5) Students read in pairs, with each person reading the text 3 times, while the other gives positive feedback. (6) In whole group, individuals, pairs, or small groups gave performances of the reading; (7) Texts are placed in a folder and students are encouraged to read on their own or read for their parents. Control group lessons included oral and silent reading, discussion rewriting and summarizing the text, artistic response to the text as well as discussion of interesting words from the text. Although control teachers were asked to minimize their use of repeated readings during the treatment phase, they reported the occasional use of repeated readings with their students.

Results after posttesting from a three-way analysis of covariance revealed a significant treatment by time interaction on Grade 2 oral reading rate ( $p = .048$ ), such that the treatment group grew at a significantly faster rate than did the control group. This study represents a good first step in building research support for the *Fluency First!* program.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

### Strengths of *Fluency First!*:

- Repeated reading is supported by a strong research base.
- Lessons are teacher directed.
- Teacher's manual is easy to use.
- Selections are brief, engaging, and their lyrical quality may be motivating to students.

### Weaknesses of *Fluency First!*:

None were noted.

## Which Florida districts have schools that implement Fluency First!?

Alachua	352-955-7880	Lake	352-253-6510
Broward	754-321-2600	Lee	239-337-8301
Collier	239-377-0212	Orange	407-317-3202
Dade	305-995-1430	Pasco	813-794-2651
Duval	904-390-2115	Pinellas	727-588-6011
Escambia	850-469-6130	Polk	863-534-0521
Gilchrist	352-463-3200	Sarasota	941-927-9000
Highlands	863-471-5564	Seminole	407-320-0006
Hillsborough	813-272-4050	Volusia	386-734-7190

## For More Information

<http://www.wrightgroup.com/index.php/programsummary?isbn=0076034259>

## References

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- Rasinski, T., Padak, N., Linek, W., & Sturtevant, E. (1994). Effects of fluency development on urban second-grade readers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 87, 158-165.
- Snow, C., Burns, S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

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**Important Note:** FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org)

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227 N. Bronough St., Suite 7250 • Tallahassee, FL 32301  
<http://www.fcrr.org> • 850-644-9352

