

# Florida Center for Reading Research

Read Naturally

## What is Read Naturally?

*Read Naturally* is a fluency program designed to develop in readers the skills necessary for fluent and effortless reading: speed, accuracy and proper expression. Motivated by research indicating that comprehension and fluency are highly correlated, the developer of this program aimed to give students a tool to accomplish the task of becoming fluent readers. Three strategies that figure prominently in the *Read Naturally* program are reading along with a fluent model, individual repeated readings of the same passage at the student's reading level, and progress monitoring. *Read Naturally* may be used flexibly as a supplement to provide extra practice for young readers, for students learning the English language, and as an intervention for struggling readers. Students of any age may use this program, from beginning readers able to read approximately 50 words, to adult readers experiencing difficulty with fluency. *Read Naturally* lends itself to use in a variety of settings including the general classroom, resource room, media center, computer lab, a multi-level classroom, or an Extended Day Program. Although the program may be supervised by a teacher, an instructional assistant, or a parent volunteer, ultimately the teacher must oversee its use to ensure proper implementation and to become familiar with students' progress. *Read Naturally* is intended to be implemented for a minimum of 3, 30-minute sessions each week. The program exists in an audiotaped version, *Read Naturally ME*, and in a software version, *Read Naturally SE*. The Teacher's Manual is clear and comprehensive and provides detailed descriptions for each step of the program with helpful suggestions for various adaptations. The teacher management system included in the software version provides student and class management of story options, placement level and student progress.

Implementation of *Read Naturally* begins by assessing a student's oral reading fluency levels using curriculum-based measurement procedures. Determination of fluency levels is based on data from a compilation of studies by Hasbrouck and Tindal (1991). The stories from *Read Naturally* have been leveled according to the following readability formulas: the Fry and Spache readability formulas for levels .8-2.7; the Harris-Jacobson readability formula for levels 3.0-5.0; and the Dale Chall readability formula for levels 5.6-8.0. Within each level, there are 24 non-fiction, high interest stories. The lower level stories within the program contain high percentages of Fry's 1000 most frequently used words in the English language; and, as the levels increase, that percentage drops. Once a student has been placed in a level, a reasonable goal is set and the instructional program begins. The goal refers to the number of words a student must read accurately in one minute in order to pass a story. *Read Naturally* provides a placement program in which students can be tested at multiple levels to determine the level and goal that is most appropriate for each student.

**READ** naturally

The first part of the instructional process involves the student choosing a story from his/her target level and making a prediction. Based on the title and the picture, the student writes what s/he already knows about the topic. Next, the student times him/herself for a one-minute unpracticed reading of the story. During this "cold timing" the student marks difficult words, records the words correct per minute (wcpm), and graphs them.

During the second part of the process, an expressive model reads the chosen story, which allows the student to hear proper pronunciation, expression, and phrasing. The student reads along with the narrator in a quiet voice while simultaneously tracking the print. Reading with the model occurs 3 times consecutively, with each reading slightly faster than the previous. Reading the story independently without audio support is the third part of the *Read Naturally* process. The student sets the timer for one minute for each reading and practices reading the story several times until the predetermined goal (wcpm) is reached. Stories are short enough for struggling readers to be willing to read them, but long enough to not be easy to commit to memory.

The final part of the process occurs when the student's goal (wcpm) is achieved. At this point, the student answers questions that pertain to the story. In levels 2.0-5.0, five types of question in multiple-choice format include main idea, literal information, story vocabulary, inferential and open-ended information or ideas. Levels 5.6 and above contain nine questions after each story. After answering the questions, the student writes or types a retell of the story. Finally, the student reads the story to the teacher for one minute. The teacher checks the student's wcpm, expression, and error patterns as well as the questions and retell steps the student has completed. When the student passes this reading of the story, a graph is completed with the wcpm enabling the student to see progress made from the "cold timing" step to the final reading.

The *Read Naturally* sequenced series has thirteen levels from 1.0 to 8.0. The phonics series has five levels (.8 short vowels, 1.3 long vowels, 1.8 blends and digraphs, 2.6 short vowels, and 2.7 long vowels). The extra step in the phonics series is that students must read a word list of featured sound words down and across in one minute after they pass the story. For beginning readers whose fluency rates are impeded by weak phonics skills, the *Read Naturally* program offers extra practice in phonemic awareness and phonics as well as fluency uniquely in the Group and Tutoring Edition (GATE) for levels .8 and 1.3. These two levels focus on short vowels and long vowels respectively, with teacher-directed instruction occurring in small groups of 1-6 students. The Read Naturally Fluency Company offers a Multicultural Series (levels 3.0-4.0) on African American and Mexican American History and a Spanish Series (levels 1.0, 1.5, 2.0, 2.5). Reading Fluency Benchmark Assessor is an assessment tool that is available from the company and can be used to assess the reading progress of students throughout the school year.

### How is Read Naturally aligned with Reading First?

The five critical components of reading instruction cited by the National Reading Panel, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension, may be found in varying degrees within the *Read Naturally* program. Its overarching purpose however, is to provide students with a tool to develop reading fluency.

Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction that is explicit and systematic is provided in GATE levels .8 and 1.3 where a specific vowel is the focus of each lesson. Students receive extra practice in letter sound recognition, blending and segmenting through phonemic awareness activities and decoding of words. The featured vowel and words chosen for the activities in each lesson are taken from the story that the students will read. Before reading the story, key words from the story are sounded out and blended with the intention of facilitating a more accurate reading. The repeated readings of each story provide the student with multiple opportunities to practice that lesson's specific vowel. A word list follows the story that consists of three columns of words with

each column featuring a particular word family and the lesson's target vowel. Students listen to the teacher read the words, then they sound out and blend the words. The students practice reading the words and finally they are timed for one minute while they quietly read as many words as possible. All activities within these lessons are constructed such that fluency of response is the goal.

The repeated reading strategies used by *Read Naturally* have been validated through research as being effective for increasing a student's reading speed and accuracy. Oral repeated readings of the same text appear in two formats: listening to a fluent audiotaped reading of the story while reading along in a quiet voice, and independent repeated readings. To ensure that students are reading books at their appropriate level, the author of *Read Naturally* chose to incorporate fluency levels based on research studies of Hasbrouck and Tindal (1991).

Vocabulary instruction is woven implicitly into the comprehension aspect of *Read Naturally*. During story prediction, students look at key words from the story and the title, and then write what they think the story will be about. Based on their prior knowledge, and what is read in the story, understanding may be confirmed or developed. Questions following the story based on the main idea, vocabulary words, and literal understanding will further indicate whether the student has grasped the meaning of the story. For story retell, the student writes main points of what has just been read, again indicating understanding. A student is not allowed to continue until the questions are correctly answered and the teacher has listened to the reading, and checked the questions and the retell. The teacher student interaction at this point is important for scaffolding understanding by providing guidance and feedback.

The *Read Naturally* program is easily adapted for struggling readers across many grades. The teacher's manual and the company's website offer helpful suggestions for extending, modifying and adjusting use of the program for individual students. Professional development is not included with the purchase of the *Read Naturally* program; however, free information and advice as well as technical assistance are available and encouraged by calling the company. For a fee, full day training seminars are offered throughout the country as well as a full training via videotape.

### Research Support for Read Naturally

The *Read Naturally* program emerged in 1989 as the result of a Master's Degree study that focused on a review of research on strategies to improve students' reading skills. The program's author used the scientifically-based strategies of teacher modeling, repeated reading, and progress monitoring with her own students in the Special Education and Chapter 1 programs of an elementary school in an urban setting in Minnesota. The *Read Naturally* program for teachers appeared in 1991.

During the 1989-1990 school year, 7 third grade students and 18 Chapter 1 students in an inclusion setting received instruction with the *Read Naturally* program in addition to reading instruction with the classroom basal program. After 7 weeks with *Read Naturally*, the Special Education students showed an average gain of 2.35 correct words per minute per week. The Chapter 1 students gained an average of 2.15 wcpm per week after 13 weeks. Their instruction, in addition to the classroom basal program, consisted of phonics instruction, reciprocal teaching and *Read Naturally*. It is important to note that while the rapid gain by the students in Special Education is encouraging, more information is needed before one can positively conclude that the improvement was due uniquely to the *Read Naturally* program.

In the same Minnesota school, data was collected over a six year period on low performing 2<sup>nd</sup> (n=122) and 3<sup>rd</sup> (n=92) graders receiving instruction using the *Read Naturally* program (Hasbrouck, Ihnot, & Rogers, 1999). Average Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) scores in the fall of each year were 17.9 wcpm, for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 42 wcpm, for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, which fell below the 25th percentile of ORF norms (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 1991). Spring ORF scores had increased to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile with ORF scores of 71.6 wcpm, for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and 93 wcpm, for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Again, these results are encouraging. Without appropriate control groups however, the results do not indicate conclusively that the gain in wcpm was due only to the *Read Naturally* program or to other factors in their educational experience.

A study in Michigan evaluated the effects of the *Read Naturally* program with Special Education students in grades 3-8. Comparisons of grade-level reading performance of words correct per minute indicated that students receiving instruction with *Read Naturally* made greater gains in fluency than the students who did not receive the same instruction. Additionally, student comprehension was evaluated using reading mazes. The results indicated that special education students using *Read Naturally* made greater gains than general education students who did not receive instruction with *Read Naturally*. Although these gains are encouraging, students were not equivalent at pretesting, and without an experimental design including random assignment, it is not possible to unambiguously attribute the gains to experience with the *Read Naturally* program.

Another study in Georgia used the *Read Naturally* program with first grade students from one class. Six students used the *Read Naturally* software for forty-five minutes a day, four days a week for three weeks. Another six students served as the control and received normal classroom reading instruction. Students were matched according to their reading levels based on an Oral Reading Fluency test, a Comprehension Reading Test, and the Star test. According to Oral Reading Fluency scores, the Comprehension Reading Test and the STAR test, students receiving instruction with *Read Naturally* made greater gains than the control students. However, due to a lack of information about how students were assigned to the *Read Naturally* treatment and control groups, and also because no statistical tests were reported, it is not clear that the differences in performance between the groups were statistically reliable, or that they were due solely to the use of the *Read Naturally* program.

One additional study that included 156 students from four schools in Minnesota during the 2003-2004 school year compared the effects of students using the *Read Naturally* program to another group of students not using the program. Student selection for the study was based on parent and teacher nomination of students likely to experience difficulties on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). For this quasi-experimental study, students from grades 3-5 were matched within and across the schools based on test scores and demographic information. There are 3 separate sets of results for this study. Results for the Northwest Achievement Levels Test (NALT) indicated that students receiving instruction with *Read Naturally* (n=78) made significantly greater gains than the control group (n=78). A subset of these students (n=44) in grades 3 and 5 made significantly greater gains on the MCA than a comparable matched comparison group (n=44). Finally, scores from the Reading Fluency Monitor indicated student growth in reading. Students using *Read Naturally* were matched with students from the *Read Naturally* growth norm sample, which consists of 100 students in each grade level from Minnesota, Texas, California, Virginia, Michigan, Iowa, and Pennsylvania. Due to overall poor implementation in two of the schools, reading gains were not statistically significant. In two other schools, students

made statistically significant reading gains on the Reading Fluency Monitor. This study gives beginning levels of evidence that the *Read Naturally* program was effective in improving students' reading fluency, and it is noteworthy because of the success in matching the students receiving instruction with *Read Naturally* with students in the contrast group in terms of their pretest scores on reading.

In sum, the strategies within the *Read Naturally* program have been shown by scientific research to be effective for improving students' reading fluency. Although beginning levels of evidence for effectiveness of the specific instructional elements in *Read Naturally* are evident in the studies that have thus far been reported, additional well designed studies, using random assignment, with equivalent scores on pretests between the experimental and control groups, would strengthen the efficacy evidence for this program.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

### Strengths of *Read Naturally*:

- Teacher's manual is well organized providing clear objectives that link research evidence with practice. It also offers explicit, detailed information for proper implementation and effective use of the program.
- Students receive explanations of why they perform various aspects of the strategy: cold timing, reading along with a proficient model, individual repeated reading.
- Progress monitoring drives instructional practice, helps in making instructional decisions and alerts teachers to reading problems.
- Comprehension questions and written retell are part of every story, reminding students that their ultimate goal is to achieve understanding of the reading.
- Students are instructionally engaged in the act of reading and their time on-task is high.
- Activities are structured such that students work in a self-directed manner, freeing the teacher to work with other students. Teacher assistance is required in only one step of the process.
- Timed readings and graphing the wcpm can be very motivating for students.

### Weaknesses of *Read Naturally*:

- None were noted.

## Which Florida districts have schools that implement *Read Naturally*?

Alachua	352-955-7527	Marion	352-671-7702
Brevard	321-633-1000	Martin	772-219-1200
Broward	954-765-6271	Monroe	305-293-1400
Collier	954-765-6271	Orange	407-317-3202
Dade	305-995-1428	Osceola	407-870-4008
Duval	904-390-2115	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Flagler	386-437-7526	Pinellas	727-588-6011
Indian River	772-564-3150	Polk	863-534-0521
Lafayette	386-294-1351	St. Johns	904-819-7502
Lake	386-294-1351	Sarasota	941-927-9000

Lee                    239-337-8301    Seminole            407-320-0006  
Leon                850-487-7147  
Manatee            941-708-8770

### For More Information

[www.readnaturally.com](http://www.readnaturally.com)

### References

Hasbrouck, J. E., Ihnot, C., & Rogers, G. (1999). "Read Naturally": A strategy to increase oral reading fluency. *Reading Research and Instruction, 39*(1), 27-38.

Hasbrouck, J. E., & Tindal, G. (1991). Curriculum-based oral reading fluency norms for students in grades 2 through 5. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 24*(3), 41-44.



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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.

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