



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

SPOT: The Expression Trio *Developing Reading Fluency* (*stress, pitch, and juncture*)



Fluency Is Multidimensional

Reading fluency is multidimensional. One dimension is accuracy in word decoding. Another dimension is automatic processing. The third dimension is what linguists (people who study language) call *prosodic reading*. Prosody includes pitch, stress, and juncture. Pitch is the rising and falling tone of the reader's voice. Stress is the emphasis placed on words or word parts by the reader's voice. Juncture is the vocal pauses or breaks that occur between or within words. If readers read quickly and accurately, but with no expression in their voices, if they place equal emphasis on every word, if they ignore most punctuation, blowing through periods and other markers that indicate pauses, if they read in a monotone voice, it is unlikely that they will fully understand the text. Developing prosody (expression) as a part of reading fluency plays an important role in developing reading comprehension.

Model Expressive Reading

When reading to children, it is important to use an expressive voice. Often, poetry and stories that contain a lot of dialog work well to use when modeling expressive reading. Here are some tips that you may find helpful:

Vary your pitch. Expressive readers make their voices go up and down. Go up at the beginning of a sentence and down at the end (up slightly if it ends with a question mark). Use a range of voices for the characters. Use a lower pitch for attributions (the "he says" and "she says") and other text by the narrator. Changes in pitch often help readers understand where different ideas begin and end.

Emphasize important words. Expressive readers call attention to key words in a sentence by raising the volume of their voice, changing tone, or stretching it out to make it last just a bit longer than normal. Be careful not to overdo this. Changes in stress convey meaning and help the reader attend to the important ideas.

Pause now and then. Expressive readers enjoy the rhythm of language. Take appropriate pauses (juncture). Longer breaks occur at the end of a sentence, shorter ones after commas and at logical points like phrase and clause boundaries. Juncture helps readers understand how small parts of sentences combine to create a complete thought.

Good Readers Practice Expression

Developing expression requires practice. The following are some proven methods for improving expressive reading:

Reader's Theatre. Reader's Theatre is a highly motivational reading strategy that combines oral reading, literature, and the performing arts. Reading aloud from a script, readers use their voices, facial expressions, and bodies to interpret the script. No makeup, sets, costumes, or props are needed. Researchers have found many benefits of Reader's Theatre including improved fluency, comprehension, attitude toward reading, and appreciation of literature.



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Plays, Puppet shows, etc. When readers practice their parts prior to performing a play or puppet show, they engage in the practice of repeated readings. Readers read short, meaningful passages over and over until expressive reading is achieved. Researchers have found that the method of repeated reading leads not only to the improvement in reading the selected passage, but also to improvement in decoding, reading rate, prosodic reading, and comprehension of passages that the reader has not previously seen.

Radio Reading. The purpose of this activity is to convey information to a group just as a radio announcer conveys information to a listening audience. Of course, the short intense announcing style of "Top 40" stations should not be the model here. As a variation of repeated reading, a reader first practices a selected passage until he/she is able to read it with meaningful expression. Then he/she reads orally to a group. After reading a certain portion of a passage, the reader should check for understanding from the audience. The group may summarize what has been read and questions may be asked. If necessary, certain parts of the passage may be reread in order to clarify an unclear message. This activity provides an authentic audience and purpose for expressive reading.

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