



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

SPOT: Rate Man! *Developing Reading Fluency* (rate)



Problems When Reading Is Too Fast

Automaticity is the ability to read text quickly, accurately, and effortlessly. It is an important dimension of fluency. It is not, however, the end goal of reading. Some readers mistakenly think that fluent reading is a race to read the most words in the shortest amount of time. They often read so fast, they blow through periods and other markers that indicate pauses. Researchers have determined that this practice develops readers who are less aware of the meaning of text. Readers who read too fast find their comprehension suffers because their only focus is on increasing their reading. Like “2 Fast” they read so fast that neither they, nor anyone else is able understand what they are reading.

Problems When Reading Is Too Slow

Likewise, reading too slowly is also a concern. Reading progress is determined to a large degree by the amount of reading one does. Slow readers, by definition, read fewer words in a given amount of time, than readers who read at more normal rates. Slow readers end up investing considerably more time and energy in their reading just to keep up with their classmates in the amount of reading done. Few do. Most are less likely to read as much in class or at home.

Another problem facing slow readers is that they often read so slowly, they lose the meaning of the text before they finish. As many as 15% of all fourth graders read so slowly (less than 74 words per minute) that it is difficult for them to keep track of ideas as they are developing within the sentence and across the page. Slow, disfluent reading is linked with poor comprehension.

Finally, slow readers are often frustrated readers. Researchers have determined that typical fifth graders referred for Title 1 support read at half the rate (about 58 words per minute) of their classmates. Assignments take twice as long. Presented with a 12-page assignment from a social studies textbook, your classmates are finished and you have six pages left to read. What do you do? Pretend to have completed the assignment even though you haven't read or comprehended it? Or continue reading knowing that everyone around is aware of your slow reading rate? Even if you could take it home to read, the 60-minute assignment would become two hours for you.

Most likely you will become one out of eight young readers who never, or hardly ever, read for fun. And chances are, if you don't read, your progress will continue to fall further behind your peers. Eventually, the gap will be so wide you may consider giving up.



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Reading at a Conversational Pace

Some researchers feel there is no “right” rate. Variability occurs for many reasons, including interest, familiarity with a passage or subject, text structure, or the purpose of the reader. A general target rate is sometimes useful, however, to know whether a reader is reading at a typical rate when compared with his/her peers. Remember, this is not about speed reading, just reading that moves along like language. The following guidelines may be helpful.

Typical End-of-the-year Rates	Grade level	Words correct per minute (wcpm)
	1 st	60
	2 nd	90
	3 rd	120
	4 th and beyond	10 wcpm increases for each year

Have the reader read for one minute, then simply count the number of words read accurately (all the words read in a minute minus the errors). Keep track over several weeks to see if the reader's rate is improving.

Suggested Activities to Improve Reading Rate

It is important that the reader is nurtured by engaging in research-based activities to improve reading fluency. Modeled oral reading by a fluent partner or repeated readings, such as practicing poetry or reader's theatre scripts for later practice, are especially powerful activities.

Repeated Reading. If reading rate is a concern, a program of repeated reading is ideal. Rereading the text is like practicing a musical instrument or practicing a football play. The rereading helps improve reading fluency. The reader reads a passage orally. An adult or older, more competent reader keeps track of the rate and errors, which are recorded on a graph to show growth after each reading. Researchers suggest the passage be reread orally no more than three to five times. The greatest growth in fluency typically occurs between the third and fifth rereadings.

Modeled Oral Reading. Oral modeled reading involves live or taped fluent reading by a competent reader. A short section of an on-level text is selected. Before modeling fluent oral reading, practice reading with appropriate rate and accuracy. Read the passage aloud to the learner. Afterwards, discuss important ideas to remember that may influence pacing (tricky words, phrases, expression, etc). The modeling and discussion help readers think about how to anticipate meaning in order to read text fluently.

References:

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