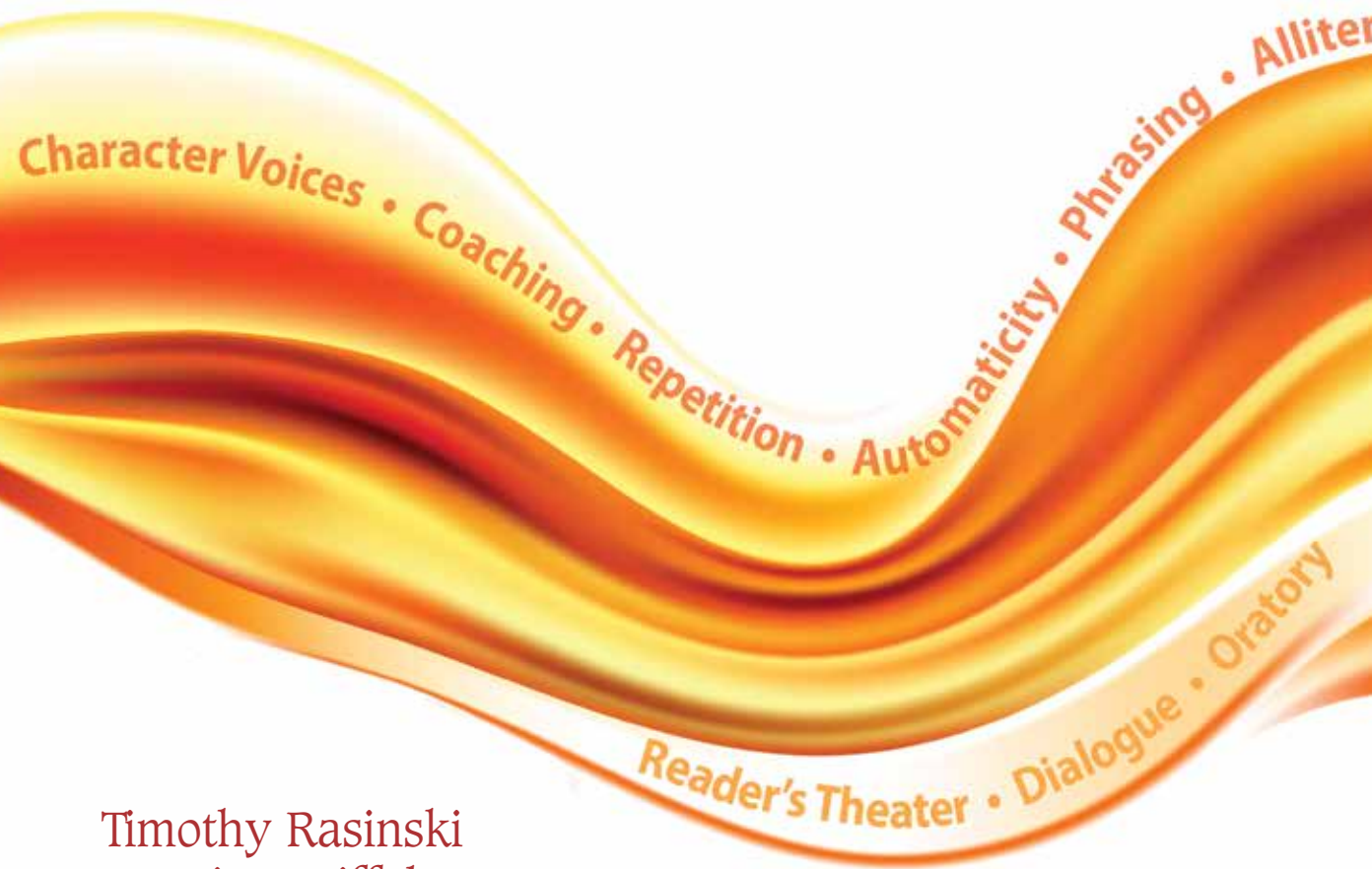




Fluency

Through

Practice & Performance



Timothy Rasinski
Lorraine Griffith

Foreword by Lori Oczkus

Fluency

Through

Practice & Performance

Character Voices • Coaching • Repetition • Automaticity • Phrasing • Alliteration • Reader's Theater • Dialogue • Oratory

Authors

Timothy Rasinski, Ph.D., and Lorraine Griffith, M.A.Ed.

Foreword by

Lori Oczkus



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Fluency workshops, programs, and books are plentiful since fluency made the list of five pillars of essential research-based instruction as identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) and the Reading First legislation. Yet, many of our students still lack comprehension and expression, pay minimal attention to punctuation and phrasing, and are unfortunately learning what the authors of this book call “fake fluency.” *Fluency Through Practice & Performance* provides the critical next steps in cutting edge fluency instruction that will ensure reading success for our students. Tim Rasinski, a name synonymous with fluency, and Lorraine Griffith, an experienced classroom teacher, outline common sense fluency instruction that yields dramatic results. They describe what fluency is, dispel some misconceptions, and build a case for a rich practice and performance approach with dozens of convincing arguments for this super practical and student-centered method. Best of all, you just need this book to get started! Even if you’ve read everything you can about fluency, try these ideas and share them with a colleague. This resource is your desktop reference that will ensure fluency success!

Fluency is strongly linked to improved comprehension during silent reading (Daane, et al. 2005; Pinnell, et al. 1995; Rasinski, Rikli, and Johnston 2009). The authors’ multidimensional definition of fluency includes word decoding accuracy, automaticity, and prosodic or expressive reading. They propose instruction that is rich, natural, and for genuine purposes. Five minutes a day of reading practice that emphasizes speed (NASCAR reading, according to the authors) won’t do the trick! Students who solely practice speed do not make the same gains as those who receive instruction in the other aspects of fluency, such as phrasing and expression. Struggling readers in Lorraine’s classroom have made on average 2.9 years’ growth in reading achievement in one year. This well-rounded fluency program engages students in meaningful practice and performance to achieve results.

There are so many new, fresh, and exciting ideas about fluency in this text! Here are some that I can't wait to share in the many schools I work in across the country:

- THE secret weapon is coaching. Learn dozens of powerful ways to coach students in groups, individually, and by modeling.
- The gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson and Gallagher 1983) is creatively applied to fluency, including ways to conduct modeling through think-alouds, guided practice, and independent practice.
- This book offers rich and purposeful practice ideas such as cumulative choral readings, lucky listeners, and paired reading, while supporting English language learners and struggling readers.
- New reader's theater suggestions that require little preparation are included.
- The year-long flexible plan shows how to scaffold instruction using songs, reader's theater, and poetry through detailed weekly and daily lesson plans. We can grab this resource and teach!
- Many simple, quick teacher-directed assessment ideas that measure all aspects of fluency are included.

Fluency impacts our daily lives. I find it ironic that as even I write this foreword, my own home buzzes with activity centered around fluency—from my high school senior reading lines from *Hamlet* with a “sarcastic” tone, to my sophomore memorizing a poem, to my sixth-grader practicing a fund-raiser presentation. Notice how meaningful reading fluency practice and performance boosts comprehension—you will see it everywhere!

Please join me in thanking Tim Rasinski and Lorraine Griffith for such a wonderful, practical, and timely resource to improve the fluency of our students!

Lori Oczkus
Literacy Consultant and Author

Acknowledgements

To all teachers of reading who view reading as an art and a science and are willing to take the risk to teach reading fluency in an artful manner—through authentic practice and performance aimed at making meaning.



Think of someone you know who is a fluent speaker or reader. What does that person do that makes him or her fluent? We think that fluent speakers and readers use their voices to enhance the meaning of what is being said or read. Fluent speakers and readers raise and lower the volume and pitch of their voices, speed up and slow down, pause at appropriate places, and emphasize particular words and phrases for the purpose of making the listening experience more satisfying and understandable for the listener. Fluency is integrally associated with comprehension or meaning.

The concept of reading fluency has had a checkered past. In the 19th century, oral fluency in reading (elocution) was considered a primary goal of reading instruction. Readers were taught to read with good enunciation, expression, and volume. However, by the beginning of the 20th century, fluency had begun to wane. Reading scholars viewed comprehension as the goal for reading, and by the middle of the 20th century, fluency had largely disappeared from the reading curriculum.

Research in the 1980s to the present, however, has rediscovered the link between reading fluency and comprehension. Readers who read with greater oral fluency tend to be readers who have better comprehension when reading silently. And so, with the report of the National Reading Panel (2000) and legislation such as *Reading First*, reading fluency once again appeared on the reading radar.

Although fluency has once again become a major player in reading education, the way that fluency has come to be defined and taught in many classrooms has become a great concern to us. Reading fluency is most commonly measured by reading speed—faster reading has become associated with more fluent reading. And so, reading fluency instruction has evolved into

encouraging students to read faster and faster, often with little regard for meaning. We now see students practicing oral reading by trying to beat their previous day's reading rate. Reading fluency instruction has turned into something akin to a NASCAR race.

We are convinced that this is the wrong approach to fluency. Can you imagine an adult reader reading as fast as possible? Would you call such reading *fluent*? Fast maybe, but certainly not fluent, clearly not satisfying, and absolutely not meaningful. We fear that if this trend toward speed reading continues, we will have grown a generation of readers who may be able to read quickly, but who find very little satisfaction or meaning in reading.

It is against this backdrop that we have written this book. Reading fluency is only important to the extent that it connects to comprehension. Let's go back to that initial example of a fluent reader—someone who makes meaning with his or her voice while reading orally. Although such a reader could very likely read fast if he or she chose to do so, a truly fluent reader uses his or her voice to make or enhance meaning. This is most commonly found in performances for an audience—plays, poetry, speeches, jokes, teacher and parent read-alouds, etc. In many cases, the play, poem, speech, joke, or book had to be rehearsed or practiced repeatedly in order for the reader to develop his or her oral reading to the point where it could communicate the meaning of the passage adequately. That is essentially the approach to fluency and fluency instruction that we take in our own classroom and clinical experiences, and it is this approach that we wish to share with you in this book.

Fluency is embedded in the oral performance of a text. Readers demonstrate their fluency by the manner in which they are able to create meaning through their oral interpretation of the words of a passage. And, the meaningful oral performance is developed and perfected through practice. Hence, practice and performance are natural keys to teaching and developing

fluency in students. Additionally, meaningful practice followed by authentic performance is a naturally engaging and motivating activity that nearly every student can find satisfying and enjoyable. Moreover, through texts that are meant to be practiced and performed, teachers and students have alternative ways to learn about and appreciate language in its various forms and through various content areas such as social studies, science, art, or music.

We have learned about the power and potential of practice and performance through our own work with readers—from young to adult—and from readers who struggle to those who are advanced. In this book, we share with you our own journeys to fluency through practice and performance. We will examine with you why fluency is important for oral and silent reading proficiency. We share with you how we teach fluency through modeling fluent reading, guided practice in reading, coaching students to develop their fluency, and of course, showcasing students' fluency through performance. We will provide you with models of how to organize and manage your classroom for fluency instruction. We will also explore what texts and textual features lend themselves to practice and performance, as well as explore methods for assessing the various dimensions of fluency.

If you are looking to make an impact on your students' growth as readers, then you need to look at fluency. And, if you are interested in teaching reading fluency in authentic ways that have been proven effective and engaging for students, then you need to look at practice and performance. We think that this book will help you negotiate your way to developing fluency instruction that will lead to greater growth and greater enjoyment of reading.

Timothy and Lorraine



Chapter 1: Potential and Pitfalls in Fluency Instruction

Reading fluency, the ability to read the words on the printed page accurately and effortlessly—with appropriate and meaningful expression and phrasing—was largely a forgotten element of the reading curriculum during the second half of the 20th century. Reading scholars thought of fluency as nothing more than oral reading and, of course, everyone knows that most reading done today is silent reading. So why teach fluency if it is nothing more than good oral reading?

In fact, fluency is, in essence, a neglected goal of the reading program. Indeed, that is just what Dr. Richard Allington called fluency in his seminal article from *The Reading Teacher* (1983). But Allington also argued that even though fluency was being neglected, it should not be. He pointed to some early research that indicated that many struggling readers are not sufficiently fluent and that instruction in fluency not only tended to improve fluency, but it also improved other key aspects of reading, including reading comprehension.

It took nearly 20 years for fluency to appear back on the radar screen. Thanks to the review of research conducted by the National Reading Panel (2000), fluency was once again identified as a key element in effective reading instruction. In its review of the research, the Panel concluded that there was sufficient empirical evidence to indicate that instruction in fluency leads to improved reading in students, especially with readers who struggle in achieving their full literacy potential.

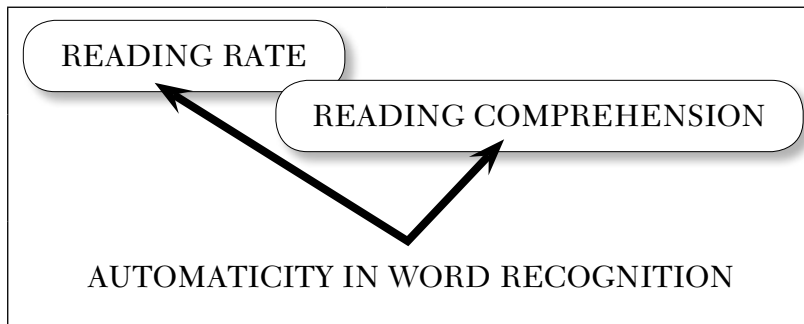
And so, when President George W. Bush initiated his *Reading First* plan for improving reading education in the United States, reading fluency was identified as a central and required part of any reading program that was to be part of *Reading First*.

Now, that may have been the end of the story and reading fluency would go on to play an illustrious role as a cornerstone in

successful literacy efforts. Unfortunately, somewhere along the way, fluency got a bit off track. Teachers and reading scholars began to see reading fluency as a bit of an albatross. Indeed, when the International Reading Association's "*What's hot*" survey for 2009 was published (Cassidy and Cassidy 2009), fluency was identified by a group of noted literacy scholars as a topic that was hot but should NOT be!

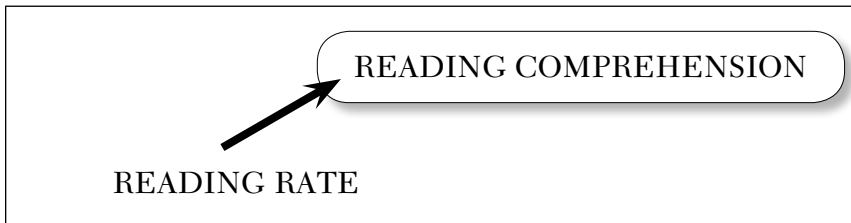
What happened to fluency to give it such a bad name? We think that the problem with fluency began with the way it was being defined. Some research found that reading rate, a measure of effortless and automatic word recognition—one aspect of fluency—was highly correlated with reading comprehension. Students who were automatic in their word recognition could focus on meaning rather than on the laborious decoding of the words in the passage. Hence, comprehension improved. Students who were automatic in word recognition tended also to be faster readers. Automaticity improved both rate and comprehension (see Figure 1.1 below).

Figure 1.1 Automaticity Improves Rate and Comprehension



Somehow, over time, this model of reading fluency got twisted around. Automaticity disappeared from the picture and reading rate was viewed as the direct link to reading comprehension. Essentially, the model of reading fluency evolved into improving reading rate which, it was believed, would lead to improved comprehension (see Figure 1.2 on the following page).

Figure 1.2 Reading Rate Alone Improves Comprehension



Fluency became associated with reading rate; or, as some of our teacher friends have noted, fluency and reading turned into a NASCAR race. Students (and teachers) were given specific reading rate goals by school district administrators. They were informed that these goals should be achieved by the end of a school year. Well-meaning teachers designed lessons that were aimed primarily at improving reading speed.

We see this now in the reading clinic at Kent State University: when students are asked to read a passage aloud in order to assess their reading, they often ask the examiner if they should read the passage “as fast as I can.”

Although we can see how this notion about fluency has evolved, it is simply wrong. We know of no compelling research that shows when students are taught to read faster they improve their reading comprehension or overall reading achievement. Indeed, we know of classrooms where teachers gave additional focus on reading rate; yet when those students took the state reading examination at the end of the year, they did worse than students in other classrooms in the same school where the fluency focus was not nearly so speed centered.

Still, this notion of reading fluency has found its way into our profession. Definitions of reading fluency more often than not include “reading quickly” or “reading words at a fast pace.” Of course, many teachers and scholars know that reading fast is not fluency, and so there has been a backlash against fluency. Now we see that even though fluency may be a hot topic, if it is defined primarily as reading fast, then it shouldn’t be