From *The Fluent Reader*, Timothy V. Rasinski, 2003, Scholastic.

Repeated Reading

Implementing a Powerful Tool for Practicing Reading

So far, we've explored two ways to help students become proficient, expressive, and meaningful readers: by modeling that kind of reading through read aloud and by providing students with support as they read. We can also help students by giving them opportunities to practice oral reading.

Applying basic skills automatically is usually achieved through practice. Basketball players practice jump and foul shots daily, so that the movements necessary for making those shots become second nature. Musicians practice new songs so that, when they're on the stage, they can focus on the subtle aspects of performance such as tone and phrasing, rather than the score. Perhaps your mother can bake a cake from

scratch or cook a turkey without once consulting a cookbook. She probably achieved that level of proficiency in her culinary skills by observing someone else skilled at baking and cooking, working with that person during the initial stages of her learning, and having plenty of opportunities to put those skills to good use.

In reading, decoding is a basic skill, one that is absolutely essential to success. Not only must students be able to decode words and phrases with a high degree of accuracy, they must also be able to decode them automatically, with minimal attention or effort. Practice through repeated reading helps them get there.

The Benefits of Repeated Reading

When we become fluent at a task, we can devote our attention to other related tasks. For basketball, related tasks might include watching the clock and being mindful of opposing players. For cooking, related tasks might include the preparation of many dishes simultaneously. And in reading, the most significant related task is comprehension. Through practice, the reader's decoding can become so fluent that she pays maximum attention to creating meaning from the words she encounters.

The theory of automaticity supports this idea (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). In one test of the theory, Samuels (1979) asked students experiencing severe learning difficulties to read orally a short passage several times. With each practice reading of the passage, the students read with greater accuracy, speed, and comprehension. This, of course, is expected; you get better at what you practice. Samuels observed another effect, however. As students mastered certain passages, they were given other passages of equal or greater difficulty. Samuels found that students' first readings of the new passage were actually better than their initial readings of the previous passage. Moreover, it took fewer practices to achieve a set goal.

Practice therefore not only led to improvements in reading of the familiar passage, but also of passages the students had not previously seen. As students became more fluent in their reading of one passage, their improved reading at both the word and sentence level transferred to new passages. Samuels described this effect as the theory of automaticity.

A series of follow-up studies have confirmed the efficacy of repeated readings as a powerful instructional tool. Indeed, in her review of research on repeated reading, Sarah Dowhower (1989) identifies several key proven benefits of the method. For example, repeated reading:

- helps good and poor readers recall facts from their reading. It also aids good readers in focusing on and remembering higher-level, important information. Studies have found that improvements in comprehension extend to unpracticed passages for primary through middle-grade students (Dowhower, 1987; Morgan & Lyon, 1979). In the Morgan and Lyon study, for example, struggling readers in junior high made gains of over eleven months on a standardized comprehension test in slightly over six months of repeated reading instruction. Considering that struggling readers, by definition, make less than a month's gain for a month's worth of instruction, these gains are impressive. Improvements in comprehension are particularly strong when students are encouraged to reread for meaning, not speed (O'Shea, Sindelar, & O'Shea, 1985).
- is an excellent study strategy, equal to or better than other more complex and cumbersome strategies such as note taking, outlining, summarizing, or recalling information.
- helps students remember important information—such as main ideas and important vocabulary—in technical and unfamiliar material and results in improved problem solving (Bromage & Mayer, 1986; Mayer, 1983).
- results in improved story comprehension and leads to more sophisticated questioning and insights when a text is presented as a "repeated read aloud" (a combination of read aloud and repeated readings) (Martinez & Roser, 1985).
- promotes faster reading with greater word recognition accuracy (Carver & Hoffman, 1981; Chomsky, 1976; Dahl, 1974; Dowhower, 1987; Herman, 1985; Neill, 1980; Rashotte & Torgesen, 1985; Samuels, 1979). Although comprehension is central to successful reading, quick and accurate processing of text is also important, too (Rasinski, 2001). A student who

reads a text passage at a rate of 140 words per minute and with excellent comprehension is clearly superior to one who reads the same text with the same level of understanding, but at a rate of 60 words per minute. If we accept the notion that the more one reads, the better reader one becomes (Postlethwaite & Ross, 1992), then faster and more efficient processing of text results in more reading over time. Rather than focusing on speed and accuracy as distinct elements in reading, I prefer to combine the concepts under the notion of efficiency in text processing.

- helps strugglers break out of word-by-word reading to read with more meaningful phrasing (Dowhower, 1987).

Implementing Repeated Reading Through Direct Instruction

There are a variety of ways to implement repeated reading in the classroom. In the remainder of this chapter, I show how repeated reading can be used in direct and intensive ways to help, in particular, students struggling with reading in general and reading fluency in particular. In the next chapter, I offer authentic ways to use repeated readings with all students.

Thomas and Erin had just completed third grade and were enrolled in our university's reading clinic. Both children had been experiencing significant reading difficulties. They read in a slow, monotone, and labored manner. They read with little enthusiasm. Moreover, they could recall little of what they had read.

Claudia, a reading clinic teacher, used repeated readings to help Thomas and Erin improve their fluency and comprehension. Claudia introduced an age-appropriate poem daily to the children, reading it aloud and talking about it with them. Then, she, Thomas, and Erin read the poem chorally several times through, with the children pointing to the text as they read. After a few choral readings, Thomas and Erin recorded their own reading on a tape recorder. The children took the print and recorded versions of the poem home to practice and improve on their recorded performance. When

the children returned the next day, they were invited to read the poem to Claudia, me, and a few other adults. The improvement in the students' reading was amazing. They read with accuracy and expression, and their overall reading had improved significantly. In just five weeks, both students made over a year's gain in fluency and overall reading achievement. In some cases, especially for those students experiencing severe difficulty in reading, a direct approach is often best.

Guidelines for Repeated Reading

Below are guidelines for implementing repeated reading for students who you think would benefit from it the most.

PREPARATION

1. Set aside 15 to 30 minutes per day for repeated reading instruction.
2. Choose reading passages between 50 and 500 words. These passages may come from a variety of sources—basal readers, textbooks, trade books, poetry anthologies, newspapers, or student writing.
3. Determine the difficulty level of the passages by following the guidelines in Figure 4.1. But remember that these measurements are only estimates. See how the passage "fits" the individual reader. If it's on the difficult side, provide oral reading support in the initial repeated readings. If it's on the easy side, don't worry about providing the extra support. Expect the student to achieve the criterion level rather quickly. Think about developing and organizing a collection of passages at a variety of levels to use as your students' skills improve. This a good project for a summer vacation!

PROCEDURE

1. Sit next to the child in a comfortable, quiet location.
2. Choose a passage and make sure it is at or near the student's instructional reading level, which means that, upon a first oral reading of a passage, he exhibits 85 to 95 percent word recognition accuracy. If a student reads a passage closer to

the 85 percent accuracy level or reads with excessive slowness (less than 50 words per minute), you may need to offer oral supported reading, such as reading along with the student, in the initial repeated readings. (For more information on supported reading, see Chapter 3.) Or you may wish to choose an easier passage.

3. Have the student orally practice an appropriate passage until he has achieved the criterion reading rate on the passage, using the guidelines in Figure 4.2 to determine individual students' rates. These are typical criterion levels for grades one and up. But feel free to adapt levels for your own students and instructional goals and needs.

Grade Level	Target Number of Correct Words Per Minute
second half of first grade	60
second grade	90
third grade	100
fourth grade	110
fifth grade	120
sixth grade and higher	140

4. Once students have achieved the target criterion level, assign a new passage that is as difficult as or slightly more difficult than the passage they just practiced.
5. Keep a log of the passages students are working on daily and the dates on which they master them. (See Figures 4.3 and 4.4.)
6. Track student progress by administering an oral reading probe weekly, biweekly, or monthly on passages the students have not previously read. (See Figure 4.3 and Chapter 8 for details.)

Figure 4.1

HOW TO DETERMINE THE DIFFICULTY LEVEL OF A PASSAGE

Difficulty levels are generally expressed in readability levels. A readability level is a number that indicates the passage's approximate grade-level equivalent—the grade at which most students should be able to read the passage with the teacher's help. Readability levels are usually determined using a formula that measures sentence difficulty and word difficulty. These formulas give at best rough estimates, since they leave out the most important factor in determining reading difficulty: the individual reader. Nevertheless, they do provide an indication of difficulty. Here are two simple methods for determining difficulty levels:

Computer Method

This method requires a word processing program. Simply type the target passage into the computer. Then, on the Tools menu, look for and click on "readability," which is usually within the spelling and grammar checker (often under "Preferences"). The program will automatically determine the passage's readability in grade-level equivalents.

Adapted Fry Method

This method is an adaptation of the Fry Readability Graph (Fry, 1968, 1977). To begin, determine the average number of syllables per sentence in the target passage. Do this by counting the number of syllables in the words in the first ten sentences. (Hint: Since each word has at least one syllable, begin by counting the total number of words, then add any additional syllables in the multi-syllabic words.) To arrive at the average number of syllables per sentence, divide the total number of syllables in the sentences by ten (i.e., move the decimal point one place to the left). Finally, compare your figure against the chart on page 82. This will give you the

(Figure 4.1, continued)

approximate grade-level equivalent for the passage.

Grade Level	Syllables Per Sentence
1	less than 8.4
2	8.5 – 11.8
3	11.9 – 14.5
4	14.6 – 16.3
5	16.4 – 18.1
6	18.2 – 21.9
7	22.0 – 26.7
8	26.8 – 29.4
9	29.5 – 33.6
10	33.7 – 37.4
11	37.5 – 37.8
12	37.9 – 39.3

Adapted from Edward Fry's Readability Graph (1968; 1977).

Figure 4.2

HOW TO DETERMINE A STUDENT'S READING RATE

There are two easy ways to determine a student's reading rate. For both methods, you will need a watch with a second hand. Tip: Limit measures of rate to the number of words the student reads correctly (including words he or she self-corrects after an initial error).

ONE-MINUTE READING PROBE

Choose a target passage that is at the student's grade level and make a photocopy of the passage for yourself. Have the student read the passage aloud to you for one minute. If the student makes an error and does not self-correct it, draw a line through the word. If the

(Figure 4.2, continued)

student comes to a word that he is unable to decode or does not try to decode, simply give him the word after a count of three and draw a line through it. (For formal names or unusual words, give credit if the student decodes them in a way that seems appropriate for his or her level of reading.) At the end of 60 seconds, have the student stop reading (or mark the 60-second point if you want to student to read the entire passage). Count the number of words read correctly to determine the student's words-per-minute reading rate. (For more detailed guidelines on administering a one-minute reading probe, see Chapter 8.)

Entire Text Method

Although this method takes longer, it makes for a more authentic reading experience because students read a piece of at least several paragraphs, from start to finish, as we do in the real world. To determine a student's reading rate using this method, figure out the number of seconds it takes him or her to read the entire passage. Count up the number of words read correctly or self-corrected after an initial error. Insert those numbers into the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{\# words read correctly}}{\text{\# of seconds to read}} \times 60 = \text{reading rate in words correct per minute}$$

Example: The passage is made up of 245 words. The student reads the passage in 134 seconds and makes 3 errors, meaning he read 242 words correctly.

$$\frac{242}{134} \times 60 = 108 \text{ words correct per minute (wcpm)}$$

Figure 4.3

Repeated Reading Log

Name: Kristi

Passage	Passage Reading Level	Probe 1		Probe 2		Probe 3		Probe 4		Comments
		Date	WCPM	Date	WCPM	Date	WCPM	Date	WCPM	
5th grade IRI Form A	5.0	9/16	80	9/17	102	9/19	105	9/20	110	Practiced several times on Mon & Tues
5th grade IRI Form B	5.0	9/23	87	9/24	100	9/25	104	9/27	120	Paired reading—read 3 times 9/26
5th grade IRI Form C	5.0	9/30	90	10/1	102	10/3	110	10/4	118	
Basal Reader page 88	5.2	10/8	86	10/9	94	10/10	112	10/11	122	Practiced at home 2x every night

A filled-out repeated reading log

Radio Reading

Radio reading (Greene, 1979; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998; Searfoss, 1975) is another form of repeated reading. It was developed as a more collaborative alternative to round robin reading, the archaic form of small-group instruction where the teacher chooses students to read aloud "on the spot" from an assigned text, without the benefit of practice. Round robin readings are often disfluent, inexpressive, uninspired, and filled with word recognition errors. Performances like these do little for the group's enjoyment of reading and even less for the reader's confidence in himself or herself. And since round robin reading is practiced regularly in many classrooms, the poor oral reading it engenders too often finds its way into other components of the literacy program, such as guided reading.

Repeated Reading Log

Name: _____

Passage	Passage Reading Level	Probe 1		Probe 2		Probe 3		Probe 4		Comments
		Date	WCPM	Date	WCPM	Date	WCPM	Date	WCPM	

In radio reading, as in round robin reading, groups of four to six students read aloud an assigned text. The difference is that the parts to be read are assigned the day before. (See Figure 4.5 for step-by-step guidelines for implementing radio reading.) I prefer to use passages from texts that the group has already read silently, because students are familiar with the meaning and outcome of the text and can plan their presentation accordingly. If you use an unfamiliar text, be sure to provide students with a detailed overview of it before carrying out radio reading.

When assigning parts, use good judgment based on what you know about your students as readers. Assign the longest or most challenging parts to students most able to handle them. You might also want to give a mini-lesson on the importance of reading with meaningful expression, just as radio and television announcers do. Emphasize that the only way to be able to read with good expression is through practice.

Once you've assigned each student a part, have him or her practice reading it aloud. Provide class time for individual practice and cooperative repeated reading, which is explained on page 91. Students can also practice their reading and develop their questions at home.

From there, ask each student to prepare two questions about his or her part—one literal (i.e., finding the answer requires the reader to look "right there" in the text) and one inferential (i.e., finding the answer requires the reader to "think and search" the text, using the information from the text, as well as his or her own background knowledge). For example:

Literal/"right there": What was the name of the main character in my reading?

Inferential/"think and search": Why did people dislike this character? What did he do, say, or stand for that made people hate him?

On the following day, have students gather into their groups and present their parts one by one, in the appropriate order according to the text. I sometimes ask students to come to the front of the group,

stand tall, and read to the group as if they were giving a formal presentation. On other occasions, I have students choose the place to read.

Ask students to read as expressively and meaningfully as possible, as if they were professional announcers. I find that a fake microphone on a stand or an old radio is a good prop for reminding students of that point. If a student miscalls a word, give her an opportunity to correct it. If she can't, you (and not the other students) should provide the right word and ask her to continue, thus minimizing the disruption. The student may also call on you for help with particular words or phrases. Again, supply the word or phrase and urge her to continue reading. As in paired reading, you may wish to make note of words that give students difficulty. Those words can be the focus of a quick mini-lesson after the radio reading session. The students who are not reading should either read along silently in the book or listen attentively with their books closed.

TEACHING TIP: RECORD RADIO READINGS

Tape record radio readings so that students can analyze them later. Save the very best recordings and play them as a model for future reading groups that are assigned the same text. Then, those groups can try to outperform the recorded performance!

After all students have presented their parts, have them ask their literal and inferential questions in a follow-up discussion. Encourage students to elaborate on questions and responses, and find quotes from the text that illustrate or justify their points. Questions you might ask students to help them elaborate include:

- That's an interesting question. How did you come up with it?
- Tell us more about this character. Does he remind you of anyone you know or have read about?

- Can you find a section from the passage that gives us clues to answer that question?
- What do you think was the most interesting quote from today's reading? Why do you think so?
- How does this story compare with the one we read last week?

After the discussion, ask students to summarize the reading, their oral presentations, and what they need to work on for their next radio reading session.

Figure 4.5

RADIO READING: A QUICK GUIDE

THE DAY BEFORE RADIO READING

1. Choose a passage from your regular guided reading program, basal reader, or a trade book that is long enough to be read by four to six students. Choose a selection that has already been read silently, or, if the selection has not been read previously, give students a detailed overview to the selection.
2. Provide students with a mini-lesson on the importance of reading aloud with expression and meaning, using radio and television announcers as examples of people who do it well.
3. Assign parts of the passage to students. Give the most challenging parts to students who are best able to handle them. Assignments do not need to be equal in length.
4. Have students practice reading their parts orally, alone or with others, in school and at home.
5. Ask each student to develop two questions about his or her part: a literal, fact-based question, and an inferential question

(Figure 4.5, continued)

that requires students to use information from the text and their background knowledge to arrive at an answer.

THE DAY OF RADIO READING

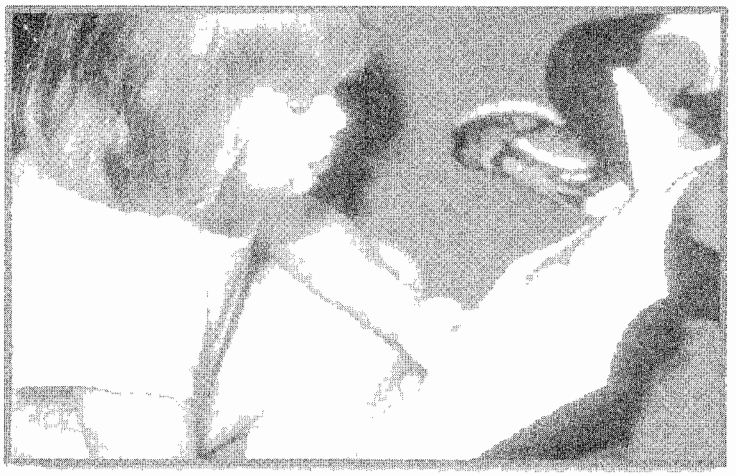
1. Remind students about the need to read with expression and meaning.
2. Provide props such as a microphone or radio to lend authenticity to the experience.
3. Have students read their assigned parts orally in the proper order.
4. If students encounter problems in their reading, provide help or allow them to call on you for help. Deal with the difficulty quickly to minimize disruption.
5. After all the readings are complete, have students discuss the entire passage, using the questions they prepared the day before.
6. At the end of the discussion, have students summarize the story, critique their reading, and make suggestions for the next radio reading.

Say It Like the Character

Oral reading fluency means more than reading accurately and quickly. It also involves reading with expression as a way to get at the text's meaning. In Say It Like the Character (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998), students get "inside" characters from books by reading monologues and dialogues orally. Listeners must make inferences about the characters through the way they read the passage. For this to happen, readers need to do two things: practice reading the assigned text, and think about the feelings and disposition of the character.

To try Say It Like the Character, find passages that contain monologues or dialogues. They can be as short as a sentence or as long as a full page. Look in books that students are reading on their own or that you are

reading to them. Make copies of the passages. If the story from which the passage comes is unfamiliar, give students some background so that they understand the events and emotions leading up to the passage. Have the students practice reading the passage silently as well as orally. Then read aloud a portion of it in several tones of voice (e.g., angry, delighted, confused, surprised) and talk about the feelings that can be inferred.



Students practice passages to improve their ability to read them with expression and meaning.

Once students get the idea, have them try Say It Like the Character on their own with a new passage. You can assign them a feeling to embed in their reading or let them choose their own. Have them practice the reading and then perform it, one at a time, in small groups. The students listening must guess the emotion that the reader is feeling. Following the reading, have students discuss what the reader did to convey the intended emotion (increased or decreased volume or pitch, changed rate, dramatic pause, emphasis on a particular word) as well as the markers in the text itself (italics, bold print, illustrations) that gave clues to what the character was feeling.

Poetry works well for Say It Like the Character, too. I often give two or more students the same poem to read aloud, along with an emotional context from which to develop their reading, such as "you just won the lottery" or "you just found out that your best friend is moving away." Students practice their reading at home and, the next day, present it. This becomes

a dramatic example of how meaning is carried not only by words, but is also conveyed by the way that the words are presented by the reader.

Mary Person (1990) describes a variation on Say It Like the Character. She prints words for specific feelings on cards, such as fear, rage, sadness, excitement, and joy. She also prints a variety of sentences on sentence strips (e.g., "The children ran screaming down the hallway." "We were surprised to hear the knock on the door. Who could it be?") Each student chooses or is assigned one feeling card and one sentence strip, and reads the sentence in a way that captures the emotion on the card.

Mumble Reading

Mumble reading allows many students to do repeated readings simultaneously, without disturbing other students. It was originally described by Hoffman (1987) as part of his Oral Recitation Lesson, which is described in Chapter 6. Students select a passage of 50 to 100 words from their guided reading material. Then, in a soft and low voice, they spend five minutes practicing their passages. After the practice period, students read their passage aloud to the teacher or to the entire reading group.

Cooperative Repeated Reading

Cooperative repeated reading has been shown to improve students' reading fluency and general reading (Koskinen & Blum, 1984; 1986). In a 10 to 15 minute period during guided reading or independent reading, students work with a classmate or two on a short passage. Passages usually come from the basal text or trade book that is being used in guided reading. To do cooperative repeated reading, follow these steps:

1. Have partners find quiet, comfortable spots in the room for reading. Give each student a copy of the Cooperative Repeated Reading Response Form. (See Figure 4.6.)
2. Have one student read her passage to her partner three times. Ask the partner to listen and provide assistance where necessary. The partner should also give feedback on the student's reading, based on the response sheet's criteria.
3. Have students reverse roles and repeat step 2.

Figure 4.6

Cooperative Repeated Reading Response Form

Reader: _____ **Rater:** _____ **Date:** _____

How did your partner read? Rate him or her in each of the following areas for the first and last reading.

Decoding *(was able to read the words correctly)*

Outstanding ..... Good ..... Fair

First Reading: **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**

Outstanding ..... Good ..... Fair

Final Reading: **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**

Pacing *(was able to read at a good pace and adjusts pace where appropriate)*

Outstanding ..... Good ..... Fair

First Reading: **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**

Outstanding ..... Good ..... Fair

Final Reading: **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**

Expression *(was able to read with good expression and in phrases—not word by word)*

Outstanding ..... Good ..... Fair

First Reading: **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**

Outstanding ..... Good ..... Fair

Final Reading: **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**

A Center Approach to Repeated Reading Instruction

You may want to establish a repeated reading center that students go to at designated periods each day for 15 to 20 minutes. The center should contain a set of passages at various levels of difficulty, with recorded versions of each passage available if possible. Assign each student a set of passages at his or her instructional level. (See Figure 4.1, page 81 for guidelines on determining readability levels.) When students enter the repeated reading center, their job should be clear: to practice their assigned passages several times through until they believe they can read them independently and fluently. Students who need a bit of oral reading support may opt to listen to a passage on tape while reading it aloud.

Students read and listen to a passage several times until they can read it fluently on their own.

From time you time, check on how your students are doing by having them read the passages to you. Of course, a volunteer aide would help immensely here. The aide could keep track of materials and assess students, noting progress on charts similar to that in Figure 4.4.

The school library can also be used as a repeated reading center of sorts. Students can choose books at their instructional level, with accompanying recordings, and practice the book while listening to the tape until they feel they can read it on their own. At that point, they can read the book to the librarian or teacher aide who is in charge of the program.