Developing Reading Fluency With Repeated Reading

William J. Therrien and Richard M. Kubina, Jr.

Repeated reading has gained popularity as a technique for helping students achieve reading fluency. It is widely implemented and can be used for students with and without disabilities. Repeated reading has several components that make it more efficient. This article shares those components and provides a framework for setting up and using repeated reading in the classroom.

Reading, a complex process some have likened to rocket science (Moats, 1999), has become less of a mystery in recent years. Reports, such as that from the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000), have highlighted extensive research that details how to best teach beginning reading. Topics in the NRP report include phonemic awareness, phonics instruction, comprehension, computer technology, and reading fluency. Fluency, in particular, has received an increasing amount of attention.

Kuhn and Stahl (2003) reviewed the literature for fluency used during developmental and remedial instruction and concluded that teachers should use fluency instruction more often because of the benefits to reading. Fluency serves as a bridge between decoding words and comprehension (Carnine, Silbert, Kame’enui, & Tarver, 2004). Moreover, oral reading fluency has been shown to predict comprehension better than such direct measures of reading comprehension as questioning, retelling, and cloze (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Hosp, 2001).

How can teachers best provide fluency instruction for their students? One answer lies in a technique called repeated reading. Repeated reading represents an educational strategy for building reading fluency in which a student rereads a passage until meeting a criterion level (Dahl, 1977; Samuels, 1979). Research shows that repeated reading can facilitate growth in reading fluency and other aspects of reading achievement (Adams, 1990; NRP, 2000; Therrien, 2004). We present four elements to consider when deciding whether and how to implement repeated reading.

Determine If Students Have the Necessary Prerequisite Skills

Regardless of present grade level, repeated reading appears beneficial for students who read between a first- and third-grade instructional level. The intervention may also be useful for students who, although able to de-
code words above a third-grade level, read in a slow, halting manner. Repeated reading is not recommended for students who read below a first-grade level, as they have yet to acquire foundational reading skills (e.g., letter-sound correspondences, blending words).

The research base for repeated reading covers non-disabled students (Bryant et al., 2000; O’Shea Sindelar, & O’Shea, 1985; Rasinski, Padak, Linek, & Stuttevant, 1994), students with learning disabilities (Bryant et al., 2000; Freeland, Skinner, Jackson, McDaniel, & Smith, 2000; Gilbert, Williams, & McLaughlin, 1996; Mathes & Fuchs, 1993; Mercer, Campbell, Miller, Mercer, & Lane, 2000; O’Shea, Sindelar, & O’Shea, 1987; Rashotte & Torgesen, 1985; Sindelar, Monda, & O’Shea, 1990; Vaughn, Chard, Bryant, Coleman, & Kouzekanani, 2000), high-functioning students with autism (Kamps, Barbetta, Leonard, & Delquadri, 1994), and students with low vision (Koenig & Layton, 1998). The intervention has also been used successfully with students in second (Dowhower, 1987) through eighth (Mercer et al., 2000) grades who have an instructional reading level between first (Weinstein & Cooke, 1992) and fifth grade (Homan, Klesius, & Hite, 1993).

It is instructive to think of repeated reading within the context of stages of learning. Mercer and Mercer (2001) described stages of learning as levels through which a student progresses. As the student advances through the stages of learning, the skill or behavior becomes increasingly more functional. The stages of learning progress as follows:

1. entry level,
2. acquisition,
3. proficiency,
4. maintenance,
5. generalization, and
6. adaptation.

Teachers provide instruction in the acquisition stage and help foster an accurate performance of a skill. At the proficiency stage, the aim is to develop fluency or a behavior that can be performed with both accuracy and speed (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). Thus, repeated reading can be thought of as a well-organized practice strategy resulting in sharpened decoding skills.

Choose an Appropriate Format for the Intervention

Repeated reading has been effectively implemented in a variety of formats. Interventions have been successfully conducted by teachers (Dowhower, 1987; O’Shea et al., 1987), paraprofessionals (Mercer et al., 2000), and peer tutors (Rasinski et al., 1994; Stoddard, Valcante, Sindelar, O’Shea, & Algozzine, 1993). Repeated reading has also been conducted as both a whole-class activity (Homan et al., 1993; Simmons, Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Hodge, 1995) and a pull-out program (O’Shea et al., 1985; Sindelar et al., 1990). Whole class administration can be accomplished with a peer-tutoring format. Peer-tutoring has been demonstrated to be both flexible and empirically sound (Miller, Barbetta, & Heron, 1994). Intervention sessions should be conducted with sufficient frequency ranging from 3 to 5 times a week. Administration of repeated reading requires a time commitment between 10 to 20 min per session.

Implement Essential Instructional Components

Figure 1 shows that there are three essential instructional components to include in a repeated reading intervention (Therrien, 2004). First, passages should be read aloud to a competent tutor. Carefully selecting and preparing competent tutors is imperative because monitoring students’ oral reading and providing feedback is directly tied to program success. A recent meta-analysis (Therrien, 2004).

- Passages should be read aloud to a competent tutor.
- Corrective feedback should be provided.
- Passages should be read until a performance criterion is reached.

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- Tutors must be trained to monitor students’ oral reading and provide feedback.

Feedback on word errors
- Student hesitates for 3 seconds: provide word and have student repeat it.
- Student mispronounces/omits word: provide word after reading is complete but prior to rereading.

Performance feedback
- Provide student with feedback on reading speed and accuracy after each passage reading.
- Read passages until student reaches a predetermined fluency level.

Figure 1. Repeated reading essential instructional components.
2004) found that repeated reading interventions conducted by adults or well-trained peer tutors were, on average, three times more effective. Teachers must, therefore, ensure that all tutors are taught the skills needed to monitor tutees’ oral reading and provide effective and timely feedback. Additionally, teachers should closely monitor peer groups during repeated reading sessions. If students have difficulty monitoring peers’ oral reading and providing feedback, additional instruction should be given or adjustments made to the peer groupings.

The second instructional component is providing corrective feedback. Feedback on word errors and reading speed needs to be communicated to students. Depending on the type of word error, tutors should either give immediate or delayed corrective feedback. If the student hesitates on a word for 3 s or omits a word, error correction should be given immediately. Otherwise, error correction should be provided after the passage has been read but prior to having the tutee reread the passage. Error correction in both cases can be as simple as providing the word and asking the student to repeat it. After each passage reading, tutors should provide performance feedback to tutees on their reading speed and accuracy. For example, upon reaching the goal on the fourth reading, the tutor could say, “Great job, Sarah, You made the goal! You read 118 words and only made 1 mistake. That was 11 more words and 3 fewer errors than the last time you read it.” Providing performance feedback often motivates students as it allows them to explicitly see their progress.

The third instructional component is to reread passages until a performance criterion is reached. To ensure that students receive sufficient practice to become fluent, each passage should be reread until the student attains a performance criterion goal. Appropriate performance criterion should be selected based on the student’s instructional reading level. Here are examples of performance criteria based on grade levels: second grade, 94 correct words per minute; third grade, 114 correct words per minute (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 1992). Although the use of a performance criterion is recommended, passages should, in general, be at a difficulty level where the student can achieve the goal in a reasonable amount of time. If a student consistently needs to reread passages for extended periods of time to meet the criterion, easier passages should be used. Similarly, if a tutee is consistently able to reach criterion in a few readings, more challenging passages should be used.

**Select Appropriate Reading Material and Obtain Additional Supplies**

Three items are necessary to conduct a repeated reading intervention: instructional-level reading passages, a timer, and data-tracking sheets. Passages within students’ instructional level (i.e., passages read with 85% to 95% word accuracy) that can be read by students in 1 to 2 min are preferable. Many teachers may find that their schools already have suitable reading materials. If materials are not available, teachers may purchase commercially prepared passages. A digital countdown timer or stopwatch is needed for tutors to be able to track the reading rate of the tutee. If unavailable, tutors can be taught to time readings using the classroom clock. A tracking sheet should be designed and used to record progress through the intervention (see Figure 2 for an example).

**Figure 2.** Sample repeated reading tracking sheet.

Tuttee’s name: **Sarah A.**
Tutor’s name: **Tasha S.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Passage #</th>
<th>Rereading #</th>
<th>Words read</th>
<th>Errors</th>
<th>Correct words</th>
<th>Goal met?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5-4</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-4</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-4</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-4</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

158 INTERVENTION IN SCHOOL AND CLINIC
Follow Repeated Reading Instructional Sequence

Repeated reading can become a routine for students each day during reading instruction. Steps involved with repeated reading may occur with a teacher or paraprofessional assuming the permanent role of tutor or following in the peer-tutor format procedure:

1. Students pair up and gather their reading material. Materials consist of the reading passage (100- to 200-word passages) at the instructional level, a copy of the passage or a transparency and dry-erase marker, and a data sheet.

2. One student begins as the reader and the other student acts as the counter. The student who is the counter may also be the timer, depending on whether the teacher starts the timing for the group or has the students time each other.

3. When the timer begins, the reader reads and the counter marks incorrect or missed words on the reading passage. Should a reader hesitate on a word for 3 s or more, the counter should provide the word and have the reader repeat it and continue reading. If using a transparency, the reader puts the transparency over her copy of the passage and places an X on missed words with the dry-erase pen.

4. After the timer or teacher indicates the 1-min interval has ended, the counter provides feedback and has the reader repeat the correct pronunciation for words she missed.

5. The counter records the number of words read, errors, and correct words per minute on the data tracking sheet.

6. The student engages in another repeated reading by rereading the passage and receiving feedback. Students can reread a passage up to 4 times per session (Rashotte & Torgesen, 1985).

7. Students switch roles, and Steps 2 through 5 are repeated.

8. The teacher and students end the repeated reading procedure on a positive note.

Conclusion

A call has been made for incorporating techniques to develop reading fluency in the classroom (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; NRP, 2000; Rasinski, 2000). Repeated reading directly targets oral reading fluency and can easily be integrated in an existing reading program. Previous research has shown that repeated reading is effective with a variety of students, including students with disabilities. Using essential instructional components and selecting appropriate materials maximizes the effectiveness of repeated reading. Following the guidelines suggested in this article, teachers can easily incorporate repeated reading into their existing classroom routines.

About the Authors

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References


