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topic facts

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"I want to read you a story."

What parents can do to promote reading fluency at home

m *y daughter wants to read me a story. I am delighted and wait expectantly, hoping she won't be frustrated with her book and abandon it on the sofa. Maybe she'll know the words she's reading and not have to work so hard to form each word, sound by sound.*

Reading fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. It is the bridge to reading comprehension.

Her halting reading is delivered carefully in a soft, monotone voice. My hope that words will be strung together to form sentences is unrealistic. With her slow rate of reading, meaning eludes her. Her gift is her determination to read to me each night. I celebrate her eagerness.

Reading fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. It is the bridge to reading comprehension. When children focus their attention on word by word reading, they have little attention left for comprehension. Research indicates that difficulty in knowing a word instantly (automatic

word recognition) significantly affects a child's ability to comprehend what he or she is reading.

The ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words is called *phonemic awareness*. This skill is very important for reading fluency. Isolating and identifying sounds in spoken words and blending sounds in printed words are necessary for children to read words, sentences, and longer text selections effortlessly.

Naming letters and objects quickly is a predictor of reading fluency. Letter reading is associated with recognition of the alphabet. For fluency to



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occur, children must be able to name letters quickly and automatically. Children with learning difficulties will require much practice in order to identify letters automatically. Such activities as single-word drills help promote reading fluency. Children also need to be taught about word phrasing, word intonation, and punctuation in order to read beyond the word level with the rhythm of spoken language.

Once children are able to read known words quickly and apply strategies to help with unknown words, they can read with greater comprehension. They are freed from the struggle to figure out what a word is, and they can bring their own background knowledge to connect with the information in the text and the author's ideas. Finally, repeated reading and oral practice helps children to read automatically and with expression.

Listed below are some suggestions for parents to promote reading fluency at home by playing with sounds in words (phonemic awareness), identifying and labeling letters and words with speed and accuracy (rapid naming), and through repeated oral reading. You will learn what works best for your child. Work with your child's teachers by asking them to recommend reading material. Enjoy your time together and praise your child often for his or her effort to develop reading fluency.

At the preschool level

You can help your child by

- labeling everything you see to reinforce identification of objects and build vocabulary
- talking together a lot to develop oral language
- playing with words by segmenting and deleting sounds and syllables, b_a_t = bat, bat without the b is 'at', without the t is 'ba'
- identifying letter names and sounds
- having your child pretend to read a story

For children at the early elementary level

Parents can help with letter recognition by

- identifying magnetic letters on the refrigerator
- playing "Go Fish" for letters. The person with the most pairs wins and must also mix up and read the letter cards in their pile at the end of the game. Time how fast it took and compare the time from game to game.

To help children identify words

Parents can

- play "Fish" and "Concentration" with words that your child learns in school
- ask your child to point out unknown words in text prior to reading a passage so you can identify the word before reading

You and your child can take turns reading aloud to each other.

- You read the first passage to model fluent reading.
- Your child reads the same passage out loud, or you read together.
- You give help with word recognition and provide a lot of encouragement as you continue to read the text together.
- Reread the book three to five times over the next few days.
- Choose books your child can read independently.
- You can help your child listen to others read.
- Use audiotapes of books and have your child read along.

Resources

Poetry books for repeated and phrased readings (www.LisaBlau.com)

- Sing a Song of Popcorn: Every Child's Book of Poems***, selected by Beatrice Schenk de Regniers, Eva Moore, Mary White, and Jan Carr
- Treasure Chest of Poetry***, by Bill Martin, Jr., with John Archambault and Peggy Brogan
- The 20th Century Children's Poetry Treasury***, selected by Jack Prelutsky
- The Random House Book of Poetry for Children***, selected by Jack Prelutsky
- Where the Sidewalk Ends: The Poems and Drawings of Shel Silverstein***, by Shel Silverstein

A Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices, by Paul Fleishman and Eric Bellows