

The goal of all reading is constructing meaning. Fluency in oral reading helps to develop ease, rate and understanding as young readers move into silent reading. Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural, as if they are talking. Young readers need to be given opportunities to re-read sentences and encouraged to make their reading “sound like talking” from their earliest experiences with texts.

When children become fluent readers, they learn to read silently. They recognize words automatically and have learned to decode unknown words quickly and efficiently. These readers group words quickly to help them gain meaning from what they read. Their attention shifts to what the text means. Now they can make connections among the ideas in the text and their background knowledge.

Punctuation plays a role in this shift to fluent reading. Think about how your readers use or don't use punctuation to guide their voice and understanding of the text? Are they reading in meaningful phrased units? Here's an easy way you can analyze if this is happening.

- Copy a page or two from a text that the reader can read comfortably (easy range of 94% accuracy or better).
- Have the reader read while you code the copied text.
- Listen carefully and every time the reader pauses or takes a breath, make a slash between the words where it occurred.
- Analyze the reading and ask yourself these questions:

Did the reader notice punctuation at the end of sentences?

Where did they miss punctuation markers? Did they notice ending punctuation in the middle of a line as well as at the end of the line?

Was there an appropriate pause after a comma?

What did it sound like when dialogue was read?

Did you notice appropriate rise and fall of the voice indicating an understanding of particular punctuation marks?

Were the pauses at meaningful phrased units?

You can now use this quick analysis to guide your fluency instruction. Maybe you will have to model how to read in meaningful phrased units. You might have to guide your reader to notice the punctuation marks in the middle of lines of text. A lesson in how the voice sounds when reading each of the punctuation marks might be necessary. This type of analysis will help you differentiate your fluency instruction for particular readers. Remember, appropriate use of punctuation supports fluent reading. Fluent reading is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension.