# Ten Ways to Enhance the Effectiveness of Repeated Readings

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**Abstract**

Many students struggle academically because of their persistent reading problems. Active student responding is a practice that has been demonstrated to improve student achievement with a variety of important skills, including reading. One form of active student responding effective for increasing reading performance is repeated readings. When students are provided frequent opportunities to orally read text, they make significant gains in fluency. Based on the reading fluency literature, this article provides practitioners with suggestions for making repeated readings more effective.
Keywords: Active Responding, Reading, Fluency, Scientifically Based Reading Instruction, and Research-Practice Synthesis.

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A considerable number of students experience academic failure as a result of their reading deficits. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, approximately 38% of fourth graders and 26% of eighth graders fail to meet basic reading performance standards (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Additionally, early reading failure tends to persist and become even more pronounced as students' progress through school (Fuchs et al., 2001; Juel, 1996; Stewart, Martella, Marchand-Martella, & Benner, 2005). About 75% of students who struggle with reading in third grade will continue to read poorly throughout high school (Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, & Fletcher, 1996). In an effort to address this large achievement gap in education, the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) mandated that teacher's implement empirically validated reading instruction with a goal that every child read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.

Empirically validated teaching practices supported by a substantial body of literature are those that incorporate frequent active student responses to instruction. Active student responding has positively influenced the achievement of a wide range of learners performing a variety of academic skills (e.g., Cavanaugh, Heward, & Donalson, 1996; Christle & Schuster, 2003; Gardner, Heward & Grossi, 1994; Lambert, Cartledge, Heward, & Lo, 2003). One form of active student responding demonstrated to be effective for increasing reading fluency is repeated readings (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Therrien, 2004). When engaging in repeated readings, students read a passage aloud several times while being timed. The goal is to increase the number of words read per minute with each successive attempt (Samuels, 1979). As a result of repeated readings practice, students with and without disabilities in elementary and secondary schools have shown significant increases in oral reading rate, accuracy, and comprehension (Mastropieri, Leinhart, & Scruggs, 1999; Therrion, 2004).

The effectiveness of repeated readings has been documented with (1) elementary school students with reading deficits or learning disabilities (Chalfouleas, Martens, Dobson, Weinstein, & Gardner, 2004; Nelson, Alber, & Gordy, 2004); (2) elementary students who speak English as a second language (Tam, Heward, & Heng, in press); (3) middle school students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Alber, Ramp, Martin, & Anderson, 2005; Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002; Strong, Wehby, Falk, & Lane, 2004); (4) middle school students with visual impairments (Patillo, Heller, & Smith, 2004); and (5) high school students with learning disabilities (Valleley & Shriver, 2003).

In most of the repeated readings research, other components of effective instruction were examined in combination with repeated readings. For example, Nelson et al. (2004) examined repeated

readings with systematic error correction for second graders with learning disabilities, and Alber et al. (2005) incorporated performance feedback into repeated readings procedures with middle school students. By examining repeated readings in combination with other independent variables (e.g., error correction), researchers have revealed several critical instructional components that enhance the effectiveness of repeated readings. Based on these findings, this article provides recommendations to practitioners for making repeated readings more effective.

*Ten Recommendations for Implementing Repeated Readings*

*Use repeated readings daily*. Researchers have identified multiple opportunities for repeated practice as an important variable for achieving reading proficiency (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Coleman & Vaughn, 2000; Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002; Sutherland, Adler, & Gunter, 2003). In almost all of the repeated readings research, brief sessions were conducted daily or no less than three times per week (e.g., Alber et al., 2005; Nelson et al., 2004; Tam et al., in press). Because it takes little time and effort to implement, the practice of daily repeated readings is an efficient way to produce substantial gains in fluency over a short period of time.

*Use repeated readings as a supplement.* Repeated readings provide students with frequent opportunities to practice and increase their proficiency. However, it is not intended to replace a structured reading program. Repeated readings will be most effective if it is used as a supplement to effective reading instruction that addresses both decoding and comprehension. For example, Strong et al. (2004) and Alber et al. (2005) obtained positive results when they added repeated readings to *Corrective Reading* (Engelmann, 1999), an evidence-based direct instruction program.

*Provide materials at the appropriate reading level.* Repeated readings research recommends that students practice with appropriately leveled reading materials (Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002; Gibb & Wilder, 2002). Prior to implementing repeated readings, use an informal reading inventory or curriculum-based assessment to determine each student's independent and instructional reading level. For example, the *Analytical Reading Inventory* (*ARI*; Woods & Moe, 2003) is an informal reading assessment that measures word recognition and comprehension. The *ARI* allows the assessor to analyze student-reading miscues such as word substitutions and omissions and to look for error patterns. Reading errors are converted to a percentage of passage accuracy to determine whether the student reads at the independent (96% -100%), instructional (90-95%), or frustration level (below 90%; McCormick, 2003). During repeated readings practice, each student should be provided with reading passages determined to be at his or her appropriate instructional level.

*Use systematic error correction*. Reading errors provide opportunities for corrective feedback and additional active responding. Nelson et al. (2004) used the following systematic error correction procedures for second graders with learning disabilities. For each miscued word, the teacher provided the correct word, the student repeated the word, and then reread the sentence. Then prior to timing the student, the teacher reviewed each miscued word. Other researchers used similar kinds of error correction procedures (Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002; Strong et al., 2004; Tam et al., in press). When reviewing miscued words (either before or after the timed practice), error correction should be immediate, direct, and result in the student emitting the correct response.

*Provide performance feedback*. Performance feedback has been documented to produce greater gains in reading fluency. In the research of Chalfouleas et al. (2004), performance feedback consisted of telling the students how many words they read correctly per minute at the end of each session. Additionally, Alber et al. (2005) provided students with a comparison to their previous performance (e.g., "You read 75 words in one minute today, that's 10 more words than last time."). Interestingly, Eckert, Dunn, and Ardoin (2006) found greater improvements in reading rates when students were provided with

performance feedback of *incorrect* words over performance feedback of *correct* words. Examining individual student performance is recommended for identifying the most appropriate type of performance feedback.

*Reinforce student performance*. Desired behaviors will not improve, maintain, or generalize unless they contact reinforcement. To increase the likelihood of increased reading proficiency, teachers should program reinforcement procedures into repeated readings instruction. Student participation, effort, and improvement should be followed by praise (e.g., Alber et al., 2005; Nelson et al. 2004) and, if necessary, tangible rewards (e.g., Chalfouleas et al. 2004; Velleley & Shriver, 2003). As students become more proficient, the schedule of reinforcement should become increasingly thinner and intermittent. Eventually, natural contingencies of reinforcement may acquire control over continued reading improvement. For example, a student who has become a fluent reader may begin reading more and more for enjoyment.

*Monitor progress*. Providing a way to monitor progress enhances the effectiveness of reading fluency instruction (Gibb & Wilder, 2002; Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002). Displaying student performance on a graph will supply teachers with important feedback on how well the intervention is working. This will enable teachers to make appropriate instructional decisions about whether or not to modify instruction. A graphic display will also provide students with an accurate picture their own learning. In order to promote increased independence and generalization, consider providing students with a system for self-monitoring and recording their own performance (e.g., Mooney, Ryan, Uhing, Reid, & Epstein, 2005; Rock, 2005).

*Assess reading comprehension*. In general, reading comprehension improves when oral reading fluency increases (e.g., Daly, Andersen, Gortmaker, & Turner 2006) Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp, & Jenkins, 2001; National Reading Panel, 2000). However, this is not the case for many students. In addition to assessing reading rate and accuracy, teachers should also monitor and assess reading comprehension. Alber et al. (2005) assessed explicit and implicit reading comprehension by asking students a series of questions after they finished reading a passage. Other ways to assess reading comprehension include having the student retell (Hansen, 2004) or paraphrase the story (Fisk & Hurst, 2003); or having the student complete a story map (e.g., Babyak, Koorland, Mathes, 2000; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998; Taylor, Alber, & Walker, 2002). A story map is graphic organizer that provides visual prompts for the student to write in the important elements of the story (e.g., characters, setting, problem, etc.). Another method of assessing reading comprehension (often used on standardized tests) is the cloze procedure (e.g., Benjamin, 2001; Spear-Swirling, 2004). In the cloze procedure, every 5$^{th}$ or 7$^{th}$ word of the passage is omitted and the student must fill in the blank with a word that is contextually appropriate. If daily progress monitoring reveals that reading comprehension is not increasing with reading fluency, instruction should be modified to incorporate reading comprehension strategies.

*Include a brief comprehension strategy*. Activating prior knowledge related to the content of a reading passage is likely to enhance reading comprehension. For example, Alber et al. (2005) used a prediction strategy, in which students read the title and made predictions about the story. Next, the students read the first two sentences and revised their predictions. After reading the passage, students compared their predictions to the content of the story. Another brief comprehension strategy is self-questioning. This is a procedure in which the student stops reading at pre-determined points in the story and asks himself a few questions to monitor comprehension (Taylor et al., 2002). A comprehension strategy that is ideal for content area reading uses the following procedures. Prior to reading the passage, the students write a few statements about what they know about the topic and what they want to learn about the topic. After they read, they write down what they learned from the passage.

*Provide individual instruction*. In most of the repeated readings research, students participated in a one-on-one teaching arrangement. In busy classrooms, it is difficult for teachers to find time to work individually with all of the students who need it. For this reason, teachers should consider involving parents, paraprofessionals, and peers to assist with reading fluency instruction.

*Conclusion*

Reading deficiencies are a huge contributor to the substantial achievement gap for students in American schools. To close this gap, teachers should incorporate frequent opportunities for active student responding when delivering instruction. An active student responding procedure that is efficient for increasing reading fluency is repeated readings. Combining repeated readings with other effective practices will help students attain their optimum reading performance so they can be successful in school.

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