

STOPWATCH READING

What is it?

Stopwatch Reading is a fluency-building practice involving the timed repeated reading of a text. It is a useful and engaging way to help individual readers learn more sight words and speed up their processing. It is also a really effective way for teachers to provide the feedback a reader needs to build his or her skills. In this activity, a student reads a single text repeatedly to a teacher while being timed on each reading. If the reader comes to a word she does not know, she is given some pause time (2 seconds) then is simply told the word, which she repeats before reading on. After each reading, the number of words read correctly are discussed and recorded on the text and on a graph (see page 4).

Why is it important?

Timed repeated readings (Samuels, 2006) is a powerful technique for increasing accuracy and reading rate. Research shows that repeated reading is a very effective way for students to develop word recognition, reading fluency and comprehension. When reading the same passage over and over, the number of word recognition errors decreases, reading speed increases, and oral reading expression improves (Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005). The improvement in reading expression is an easily observed indicator that shows students are understanding what they are reading rather than just decoding print. The improvement in their reading and accuracy rates also helps boost their confidence as readers.

Things to consider before starting

Collect all the resources you need before beginning your sessions with students. This is a timed activity and time is precious. You will need a stopwatch or timer. A smartphone or tablet app can also be used to set the time period (timer) or to time (stopwatch) the reading. Gather a range of texts that you think will motivate students and that are somewhat challenging for the readers you are going to work with. Texts can be from a range of sources – non-fiction texts are good, or excerpts from favourite stories, feature articles or interesting news stories. Make two copies of each text so you can record errors or good examples of expressive reading on one while the student reads from the other. Use a progress chart (see example on page 4) showing time in seconds and the number of words read correctly. Multiple entries can be made on one chart for all attempts at a single text.

Steps in a Stopwatch Reading session

1. *Decide on your approach to Stopwatch Reading before starting.* Two options are common. Some teachers like to set a timer for one minute and see how much the reader can read in that time. Other teachers prefer to set a passage (of a length they expect a student can read in under two minutes) and then have the student read the whole text. There is no single right way to do this; both approaches have advantages. Choose what makes sense to you and your students, and record either the number of words or the number of seconds.
2. *Preview the text.* Work quickly with the student to review the text she will be reading. Simply and quickly give a brief overview of what the text is about. Also point out and pronounce any tricky vocabulary as the reader looks on. These clues will provide the reader with some prior knowledge and help her recognise challenging words easily. Remember – this is not a comprehension lesson so you do not need to spend time on this. Simply identify the challenges and move on. If the task is particularly challenging, you may choose to read the text aloud to model reading before the student begins.
3. *Review data and set goals.* With the student, look more carefully at the text and discuss the reader's current goals for reading rate, expression and accuracy. You might discuss the need to read more quickly or remind yourselves that although speed is good, it is also good to take enough time to look at the words more carefully so fewer errors are made. Set a specific goal for this reading session – it should be a reasonable goal that can be attained within the next few attempts. For example, if Magda reads about 100 words in around 2 minutes (120 seconds), her goal might be to get 5 seconds faster in this session, reading 100 words in 115 seconds or less.
4. *Get the student reading.* Start the timer and set the student reading. If he gets stuck on a word, wait 2 seconds before saying the word. Don't work on decoding or asking questions, simply supply the word and have the reader keep going. Record all errors on your own copy so you can revisit them after the reading is complete.
5. *Chart the progress!* At the end of each reading, the teacher and student celebrate successful completion of the task, discussing expressive reading as well as speed.
 - a. Together complete the reading rubric (see page 4) to help the student self-rate for phrasing, expression, reading speed and how well they understood what they were reading.
 - b. THEN count the correct words read or seconds taken by the reader. Praise the reader for a great effort. Record the results on a graph (see page 4).

6. *Problem-solve errors together.* Before reading the text again, revisit errors such as tricky words that were omitted or mispronounced, and model the reading of them while the student observes closely.
7. *Repeat steps 4–6 two more times,* recording data as you go.
8. *Revisit the learning goals at the end of the session.* If the student has not meet his goals for reading speed, accuracy or expressions within the agreed timeframe with two or fewer errors, they can take the text away to re-read it independently or with a buddy or at home. The next time they come for a Stopwatch Reading session, they can start by revisiting this text before beginning another. Do not ask your student to read the same text more than six time as this risks demotivating them.
9. *Don't forget to celebrate successes!* Giving your student immediate feedback about specific goals is a very powerful motivator and has a great impact on their learning, engagement and disposition. When students feel they are successful readers, they are more likely to keep reading and striving to improve.

More ideas for Stopwatch Reading

- Suggest that students record their own oral reading and then chart their reading speed and rate of errors as they listen to the playback.
- Encourage students to work in pairs to listen and record the reading speed and accuracy of their peers.
- Suggest that shy readers read into a phone handset linked to a recording device in order to build up their confidence.

References

Hudson, R.F, Lane, H, & Pullen, PC. (2005) Reading Fluency Assessment and Instruction: What, Why and How? *The Reading Teacher*. Vol 58, (pp. 702-715).

Samuels, S.J. (2006), Toward a Model of Reading Fluency. In S. J. Samuels (Ed.), *What Research has to say about Fluency Instruction* pp. 24–46, Newark, DE: International Reading Association.



Name:

Date:

Text Title:

words/seconds 120 115 110 105 100 95 90 85 80 75 70 65 60 55 50 45 40 35 30 25 20 15 10 5				I read with great phrasing and expression, listening to my voice as I went along. <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Time 1</th> <th>Time 2</th> <th>Time 3</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3									
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