Improving Reading Rate of Low Performers

by Siegfried Engelmann

Trying to improve the reading rate of very low performers can be a frustrating experience for both learner and teacher. The learner typically knows that the goal is to read faster, without making a flurry of mistakes, and the learner tries, but the added effort most frequently leads to word guessing, word skipping, word stuttering, and to greatly increased physical signs of high energy, such as clenching their fists, taking deep breaths, and even sweating. The student knows how to try hard physically and that's what he does. But it doesn't work for reading faster.

For the teacher, the task is almost as unfulfilling. The teacher has standards and expectations based on achieving projected "benchmarks," but the learner does not achieve the benchmarks, even when the teacher tries to add stronger reinforcement for reading faster. After trying a few attractive reinforcers, the teacher may even notice that the more desirable the reinforcement the student has earned, the more the student reads with increased signs of energy, but with even less success.

The teacher may also notice that the student's performance is not predictable from one day to the next. The typical pattern is for the learner to perform "better" on one day, and be very happy with his performance and the praise the teacher issues, but almost certainly, he reverts to his old habits on the next day and does poorly.

The teacher often concludes from observations that whatever it is that causes improvement is there one day and gone the next. The bottom-line conclusion is that something is wrong with the learner's learning mechanisms.

This conclusion is thoughtful and comes after the teacher has tried different approaches for improving rate-accuracy. The teacher tried using repeated reading, with the selection repeated until the learner reads it at so many words per minute. The student achieved the goal on eight selections, after reading each passage an average of 12 times before achieving the targeted reading rate. But when the teacher introduces the next passage, which is no

more difficult than the ones the learner has mastered and is composed largely of the same words, the learner performs no better than he did when reading the other selections for the first time.

From this experience, the teacher drew the conclusion that the student is not actually reading better, simply memorizing the passages that are read repeatedly. The teacher next presented passages only one or two times and recorded the student's reading rate over 20 passages. The result was that his improvement was trivial. He read his first passage at about 33 words per minute and his last about 36 words per minute—a gain of only three words per minute. With this plodding performance, the goal of reading at the rate of 45 words a minute seemed very distant and possibly unattainable. Unfortunately, the teacher had received the mandate to reach this goal, and the teacher knew that she would be blamed for "failing" to achieve sufficient improvement. From the teacher's perspective, those who established these reading rates for low performers must have based them on kids that are far different from the ones she worked with.

This is a common scenario with teachers who try to improve the rate of low performers. They set goals that are never achieved for a simple reason: the goals are unreasonable. They put a student in a mold that does not take into account how much practice each student actually needs to achieve the goals.

A Better Way

Teachers need an approach that permits students to show them through their reading behavior how much and how fast they can improve. The basic rule is that if students are properly motivated to read faster and don't, the reason is they can't. They try to will themselves to read faster, but the harder they try, the less effective they may become, particularly if they have to read the material accurately. If they are not constrained, they can rattle off words at a greater rate; however, the recitation has a large number of "wrong guesses."

The practical questions are:

How do you give the student reinforcement without increasing aimless energy and nervousness?

How do you show students that you don't expect them to improve overnight without sending the message that any sloppy effort is acceptable?

How do you give students evidence that shows that they are actually improving and that sustains their motivation?

The short answer is that you use a program that is designed to address these issues. This program differs significantly from the ones teachers typically use. It uses different ways of measuring progress, uses different schemes to show students how they are improving, and uses reinforcement practices that provide payoffs, but that do not punish students when they "regress."

1. How to measure progress

This step is really important. We don't want the task of learning to read a little faster to become an effort like Sisyphus trying to roll the rock out of the pit but never succeeding. This step is built around the fact that students respond to data. They are realistic. They know when they are failing and when they are progressing. If they receive good evidence they are doing well, and meeting reasonable expectations, they will keep trying and persist when they regress or when the material they read becomes a little more difficult.

If they can't see evidence of progress, they will tend to draw a conclusion we don't want them to draw—"I am a failure; I can't do it."

For this step we need data that is very sensitive to the learners' improvement. Unfortunately, the measurement system that has been institutionalized for documenting improvement is reading rate—words per minute. **This measure is highly insensitive to improvement of low performers.**

In the earlier example, a student starts at an average rate of 33 words per minute and after 20 readings improved to 36 words per minute. That's a gain of 3 words per minute, a gain so small that the teacher interprets it as virtually no gain at all compared to the goal rate of 45 words per minute.

If we look at the same data a different way, it looks quite different. We do that by changing what we measure. Instead of measuring words per minute, we measure **how long it takes for the student to read a 100 word passage**.

At the rate of 33 words per minute, the learner reads the passage in 3 minutes. At the rate of 36 words per minute, the learner reads the passage in 2: 45—**a gain of 15 seconds**, which is a substantial improvement. This may seem like magic, but it isn't. It's just that the measure of words per minute is very insensitive to changes in very low reading rates. Clearly, however, the learner who reads the passage in 15 seconds less than before has improved and deserves to be recognized for that improvement.

If students read fairly fast, say 60 words per minutes, measuring progress in time to read a 100 word passage is less sensitive to improvement than words per minute.

Here are the numbers. The learner who reads at the rate of 60 words per minute reads a 100-word passage in 100 seconds. Let's say the learner improves enough to read 100 word passages in 15 fewer seconds. The gain in time is the same as it was in the first example, 15 seconds, but the gain in words per minute is more than 15. It is 16 2/3. The learner now reads at the rate of 76.66 words per minute.

If we work with a corrective reader who already reads at the rate of about 50 words per minute and we want to use a measure that is sensitive to improvement in rate, **we simply time longer passages**. Time to read a 200 word passage is 2 times as sensitive as time to read 100 words. Time to read 300 words is 3 times as sensitive as it is with 100 words. Here are the numbers:

Passage length	Change in rate.	Change in time to read passage	Gain comparison
100 words	50-60 W/M	120—100 sec	w/m 10 time 20 sec
200 words	50-60 W/m	240—200 sec	w/m 10 time 40 sec
300 words	50-60 W/M	360—300 sec	w/m 10 time 60 sec

The table shows a gain for a student who initially reads at 50 words per minute and improves to 60 words a per minute. As the table shows, the gain in words per minute is the same regardless of the passage length (10 words per minute). The reason is that words-per-minute is always referenced to the same time—60 seconds. The time to read a passage changes as the length of the passage changes. If there is a gain in the time required to read a 100 word passage, that gain is doubled for a 200-word passage, and tripled for a 300-word passage. The time to read is not referenced to the same time, but to a changing time. So if a corrective reader improves reading rate 10 words per minute, the time improvement for reading a 100-word passage is 20 seconds; the time improvement for reading a 200-word passage is 40 seconds and the time improvement for reading a 300-word passage is 60 seconds—a full minute.

In summary, the measure of choice for the slow reader is time to read so many words, not words per minute.

2. How to set goals.

Given that we'll express data as improvement in time to read passages of a fixed length, we face the problem of how to use data to establish "goals" for the rate improvement we expect. In considering how we should do this, we need to consider the issues of the learner's motivation on both good days and bad days. We need to show that the learner is doing okay even if the learner does not show "improvement" on a day. If we set the goal arbitrarily and in a way that does not take into account the fluctuations the learner will experience, the goal will serve as a source of punishment.

The other extreme is to set no goals, and try to keep the learner upbeat. The problem with this position is that it doesn't clearly show the learner what kind

of improvement we expect or provide solid evidence of improvement. So we need to be able to set goals that are clearly achievable and that do not promote frustration.

The solution is to base the goals on the learner's behavior and to use differentiated reinforcement to show the learner what kind of improvement leads to more desirable reinforcement. Differentiated reinforcement means that there is more than one level of reinforcement. A good rate-improvement program has two levels of positive reinforcement and one level of no reinforcement. The lower level of positive reinforcement is modest. It is used for average performance. The higher level of reinforcement occurs in response to performance that is better than average. The no-reinforcement outcome occurs when the reading performance is below the range of "average performances."

This scheme is powerful because it shows the learner what leads to reinforcement and what leads to better reinforcement.

What kind of reinforcers should we use?

The greatest reinforcement we can provide as teachers is through our reactions to the learner's performance. The basic rule is that if we respond to a performance as if it is impressive, the learner will tend to believe us. The belief is strengthened greatly if the learner has some form of convincing evidence that corroborates our reactions.

For the differentiated reinforcement program, we use points. Students keep a visual record of points and therefore of improvement.

If the student reads a passage at a below average rate, the student receives no points for that reading.

If the student reads at an average rate, the student earns one point.

If the student reads at an above-average rate, the student receives two points.

To make sure that the reinforcers are reinforcing to the student, we follow three simple rules.

We refer to performance daily.

We praise the student for average performance; “Good job. You’re reading as well as you have been reading recently. That’s a lot better than you had read earlier.”

We praise the student more positively for above-average performance. “That is really good. You just keep reading better and better.”

For passages that receive no reinforcement we do not praise the student, but we don’t scold. “You didn’t earn any points on that reading. But that happens once in a while when you are improving as fast as you’re improving.” Or we may indicate, “I think this passage is harder than some of the others you’ve been reading. You’ll probably do better on the next timing.”

The best part about well designed differentiated reinforcement is that learners are reinforced far more often than they receive no reinforcement. If the learner achieves an above-average performance on 1/3 of the reading, an average performance on 1/3 of the readings, and a below-average performance on 1/3 of the readings, the learner who reads no better than he has in the past will receive reinforcement on 2/3 of the readings. If the learner’s performance improves (which it will) the learner will receive reinforcement on more than 2/3 of the trials. The learner who improves at a modest, but consistent overall rate may receive reinforcement on nearly all readings.

3. How to determine average, below-average and above-average performance.

The two most critical issues with respect to this scheme are:

How do we determine what is average, above average and below average?

How do we change our expectations as the learner’s average performance improves?

The answer to the first question is that we take data on the learner’s performance on reading six passages and simply designate the two fastest times as above average, the two middle times as average, and the two slowest times as below average.

To respond to changes in the learner’s average reading rate, we simply change the rules for issuing reinforcement after every ten readings. We use the

times for the most recent six passages the learner has read as our guide for the next round of passages the learner will read. We base our new expectations for above average, average, and below average on these six times.

Establishing initial goals: For the baseline measure of reading rate, the learner reads six different 100-word passages during six sessions. These are stories the learner has read at least 10 days earlier in the reading group. We time how long it takes the learner to read each passage. We record each time. After the learner completes each passage, we verbally reinforce the learner for reading well, and we award **one** point for each reading. We do this to assure that the learner is motivated and tries hard. **Note that we do not use differentiated reinforcement for this baseline period.** We simply award one point for each reading and praise the learner for trying hard.

Here's an example of the learner's performance on the six 100-word passages:

Selection	time
1	3:04
2	3:10
3	3:06
4	2:57
5	2:59
6	3:01

The times vary, but the times for the last passages read are definitely better than the times for the first passages. Clearly if we used a reinforcement system that demanded progressive improvement, the learner would become frustrated because there was no improvement for the last two readings. We don't know why this happened, but we do know that the learner is tending to read better.

To compute the basis for reinforcement, we simply arrange these times from fastest to slowest and then divide the times into three groups.

Selection rank	Time	Reinforcement
1	2:57	
2	**2:59**	++
3	3:01	
4	**3:04**	+
5	3:06	
6	3:10	

The three groups are created by designating time 2 as the slowest time that will earn 2 points and time 4 as the slowest time that will earn 1 point.

So here are the criteria for the next group of selections that are read**.**

2:59 is the slowest time that earns 2 points.

3:04 is the slowest time that earns 1 point.

Any time slower than 3:04 earns no points.

The teacher follows this schedule for the next ten readings (passages 7-16). After passage 17, the teacher follows the same basic procedure used for baseline:

Arrange the last 6 times from fastest to slowest.

Designate time 2 as the slowest time that earns 2 points during the next ten readings.

Designate time 4 the slowest time that earns 1 point during the next ten readings.

Here is an example.

Passage	Time	Pts.
7	2:59	2
8	3:12	-
9	3:01	1
10	3:03	1
11	2:58	2
12	3:11	-
13	2:53	2
14	3:02	1
15	3:00	1
16	2:56	2

Criteria for Next 10 Passages

1	2:53	
2	**2:56**	
3	2:58	
4	**3:00**	
5	3:02	
6	3:11	

Slowest time for 2 points: **2:56**

Slowest time for 1 point: **3:00**

The first two columns present the times for passages 7-16. The third column shows the points the student earned. The student earned 2 points on four

readings, 1 point on four readings, and no points on two readings. So the learner received reinforcement on 8 of the ten readings.

The table to the right show the last 6 passages (11-16) arranged from fastest to slowest. Time 2 (2:53) is the slowest time that will earn two points. Time 4 (3:00) is the slowest time that will earn one point. The teacher will use these criteria for awarding points for the next ten readings.

For readings 17-27, the student earns two points for reading passage in at least 2:56 or receives one point for reading a passage in at least 3:00 or faster.

This procedure for changing the rules for earning points is repeated after readings 26, 36, 46. . .

Accuracy criterion:

In addition to attending to rate performance, we need to establish a criterion for accuracy. Setting the criterion is not as easy as it may seem. We want the learner to read with perfect accuracy, but if we set the accuracy criterion so the learner receives no points if he makes more than two errors, the learner's energies will be so focused on accuracy that the learner will not experiment with different techniques for reading faster. There is no wiggle room.

If we have a very lax rate criterion such as permitting as many as 10 mistakes per 100 words, we will be reinforcing the learner for sloppy reading. So we use a somewhat arbitrary criterion that is between these extremes. If we permit the learner to make 5 mistakes per 100 words, the criterion will be tough enough to discourage sloppy reading and continued recurrence of the same mistakes but lax enough for the learner to experiment in looking at the next word sooner and possibly anticipating some words.

The procedures for responding to accuracy of 100-word passages are as follows:

1. Tell the student the accuracy criterion. "You don't earn points for reading a passage if you make more than 5 errors."

2. Mark all errors on a second copy of the selection.

3. Count one error for every word that is misread, added, skipped, or is not read in about 2 seconds.

4. If the learner does a lot of self correcting—saying the wrong word and then saying a different word,—permit 2 self corrects per hundred words. Count the third self correct and all following self corrects as errors.

5. After the learner has read the passage, a good plan is to go over any words the learner misidentified.

Caution: If the learner gets stuck on a word for more than 2 seconds, tell the learner the word. If you don't follow this procedure, the time for reading the passage will be greatly distorted.

If the learner exceeds the error limit, you may present the passage again with a one-point limit. (The learner receives no more than one point even if the learner's rate-accuracy performance would earn two points.) Before presenting the passage, make sure you go over any words the student had misidentified on the initial reading.

Charts and graphs:

To keep track of the daily times the student achieves, use the data form on the following page. Record the time and errors for each reading.

Name _____

Slowest time for 2 points: _____.

Slowest time for 1 point: _____.

Passage	Errors	Time	Pts.

Rank	Arranged by Time	Pts.
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

Slowest time for 2 points: _____.

Slowest time for 1 point: _____.

Passage	Errors	Time	Pts.

Rank	Arranged by time	Pts.
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

The page provides tables for recording results of 20 readings and for establishing new criteria. Note that lines that say, “slowest time for 2 points,” and “slowest time for 1 point” refer to the chart **that is below them**. At the top of the page are the criteria computed for the last ten selections on the preceding data-summary page. Those times apply to the top ten times recorded on the summary page shown above.

When you establish criteria for the ten times in the top chart, you record them in the spaces above the bottom chart, and you use the criteria for the ten readings on the bottom chart..

After you fill in the bottom chart and figure out the criteria for the next ten lessons, you write it **at the top of the following summary page**.

Below is the record for lessons 7-16 for the example above.

Note that the error column is filled out. The student made no more than 5 errors on any passage.

Name _____

Slowest time for 2 points: **2:59**

Slowest time for 1 point : **3:04**

Passage	Errors	Time	Pts.	Rank	Arranged by time	Pts.
7	4	2:59	2	1	2:53	
8	3	3:12	-	**2**	**2:56**	
9	5	3:01	1	3	2:58	
10	3	3:03	1	**4**	**3:00**	
11	3	2:58	2	5	3:02	
12	2	3:11	-	6	3:11	
13	4	2:53	2			
14	2	3:02	1			
15	3	3:00	1			
16	4	2:56	2			

Slowest time for 2 points: **2:56**

Slowest time for 1 point: **3:00**

Passage	Errors	Time	Pts.	Rank	Arranged by time	Pts.
				1		
				2		
				3		
				4		
				5		
				6		

The slowest times recorded at the top of the page are criteria that were established after the first six passages had been read. The slowest times in the spaces below the top chart are used for the next ten passages, which will be recorded on the chart below the criteria.

Graphing Points

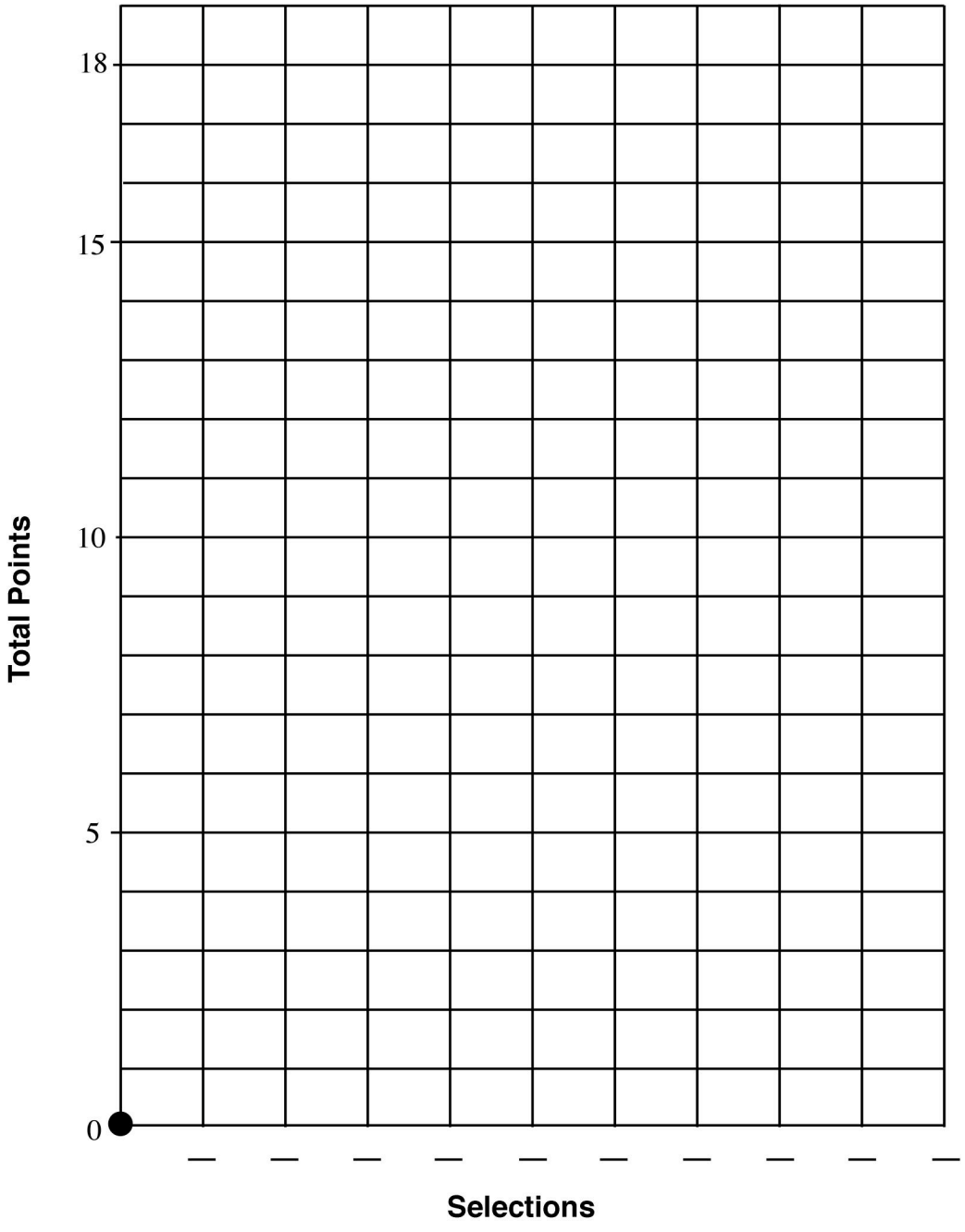
A final component of an effective system for working with slow readers is some form of graphing procedure. The purpose of the graphing is to make sure that the learner attends to the evidence of improvement. Like other components, it is effective if you respond to the results as if they are important.

You may graph every day after baseline or after every fifth reading. The value of doing it after every fifth reading is that the trends are more obvious. Also, if students have problems creating the lines for the graph, it is easier to do it in one sitting and provide the learner with massed practice.

The graph that we use is based on the fact that the learner will receive no points, one point, or two points for every reading. Below is a graph.

Name _____

Fluency Points



This chart accommodates 10 readings. You do not use it for baseline. Starting with reading 7, when differential reinforcement starts, you graph points earned.

You fill in the lesson numbers at the bottom of the chart. You start at 0 and make the line for selection 7.

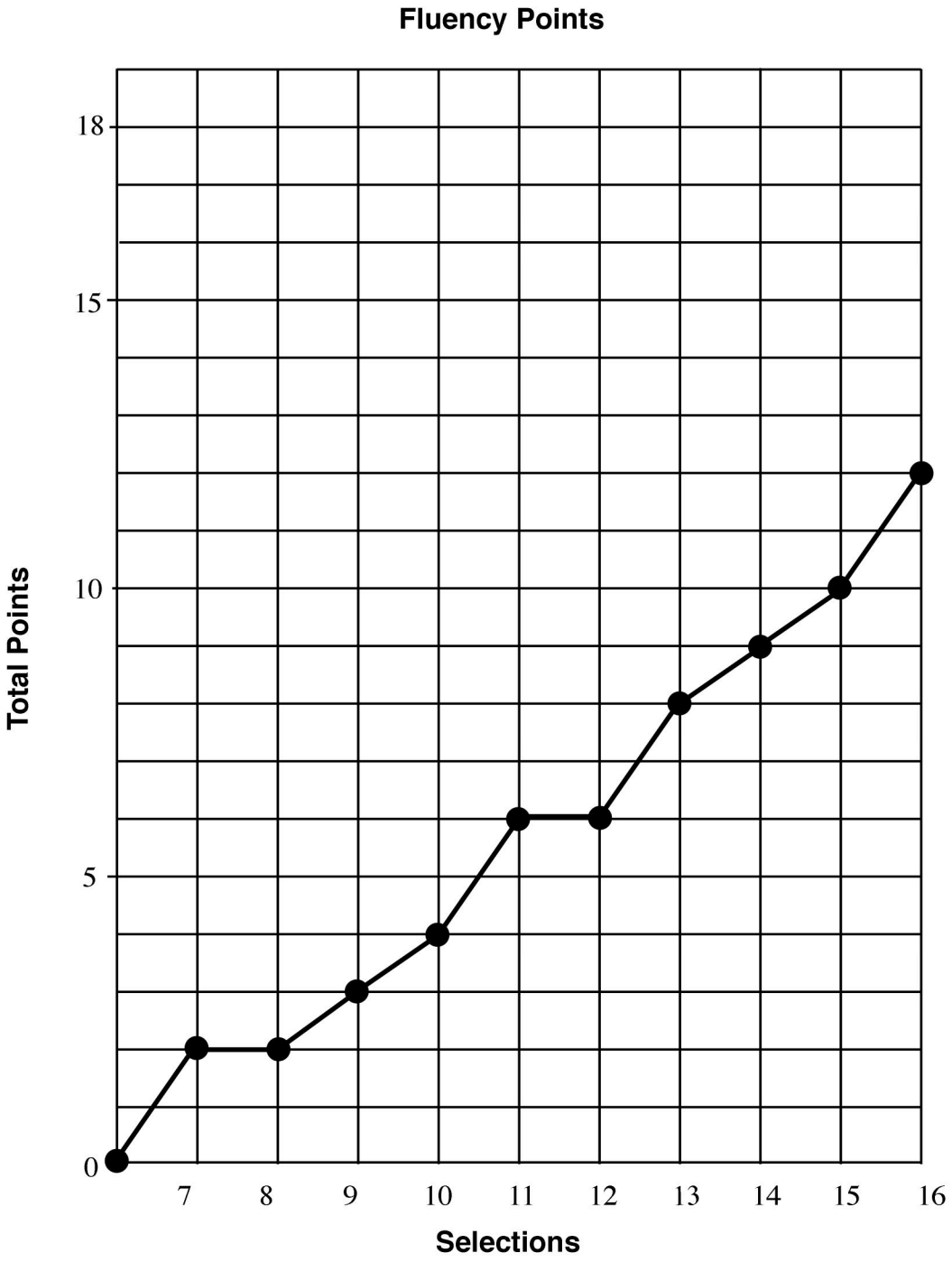
The line is horizontal if the student earns no points.

The line goes up one space if the student earns one point.

The line goes up two spaces if the student earns two points.

Below is a chart that shows the line drawn for readings 7-16 in the example above.

Name _____


Fluency Points
Total Points
18
15
10
5
0
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
Selections

For lesson 7, the student earned 2 points, so the line goes up two spaces. For lesson 8, the student earned no points so the line is horizontal. For lesson 9, the student earned 1 point, so the line goes up one space.

During the ten-lesson span, the student earned 12 points. That is a good record. It is more than one point a reading.

When you fill in the chart, ask the student, “How many points did you earn for reading number 7?”

“So how many points does the line go up?”

Draw the line or tell the student to draw it.

Preparation

The DRF program *(Differentiated Reinforcement Fluency program)* will be available through SRA in 2009. There are versions for *Reading Mastery* K, Reading Mastery 1, *Corrective Reading Decoding* B1 and B2.

The program has selections that are the right length, scripts, charts, practice pages, and all other material needed to present the program.

You may use DRF procedures before this program is available (or instead of this program). Simply:

Reproduce the record forms that appear in this article.

Set a schedule that allows about 10 minutes per student for daily reading and data recording.

Use stories that have been read earlier in the structured lessons, and present them in the sequence they appear in the program.

Mark the starting word and the ending word of passages with 100, 200, or 300 words.

When you present selections to the student,

Do not permit the student to examine the material before reading. Place the story face down.

Turn it over. Point to the starting word and say, “Touch this word and start reading”

Start timing.

After the student has read the last word in the passage being timed, tell the student to stop. Tell the student the time.

If the time is good, tell the student something like, "That is one of your best times. Good for you"

If the time is average, tell the student. "That was as good as you've been doing lately."

If the time is below average, tell the student, "That wasn't quite as good as you've been doing, but I think that story was a little tricky."

Go over the mistakes the student made.

Optionally, tell the student, "We'll read it again before you go to the next story."

Record the data on the summary sheet and optionally direct the student to graph the results.

Duet Reading

For readers that do not show much improvement after 20 readings, continue the timings, but also introduce *duet reading.* For duet reading, you and the student sit next to each other and alternate reading words from the same story. You read the first word; the student reads the next word; and so forth. **This technique is as close to magic as you'll find in the field of instruction.** The learner's performance will improve quite quickly.

There are 2 levels of difficulty for duet reading.

For the easier level you point to the words.

For the more difficult level the student points.

The best procedure for each session is for you and the student to read the selection twice. For the first reading, you read the first word and every other word.

For the next reading, the student reads the first word and every other word.

After the second reading, the student will have read all the words in the passage.

This technique is effective with all slow readers, but is particularly effective for those who have superstitious reading behavior, like pausing a second or more before saying the word, touching under the letters several times before reading it, saying the wrong word and then saying the right word, or looking at you after every word to see if you approve of the response.

Duet reading should not be done with a peer. The technique will not work unless the pointing is done in a particular way, and done consistently. There are other requirements for the person directing the reading that militate against a peer being able to do it well without receiving training in correcting errors and praising the student..

Duet reading is effective for 5 reasons:

1. It removes the learner from the familiar reading context, because it's more like fast word reading than sentence reading. (Often the poor reader performs better on reading words in a list than the same words in a sentence.)

2. The task is easier than reading isolated words because there are context cues.

3. There is a "Simon says" effect. The student hears words read quickly and accurately. This provides a prompt for the learner to read words more quickly and accurately.

4. The procedure has built-in provisions for isolating the skill of looking ahead to anticipate the next word to be read. The skill is a lot easier to learn if someone else is saying every other word.

5. The technique pre-corrects words that appear several times in the story. If these words are read first by the teacher, they will tend to be easier when they appear as the student's word. If the word *boat* appears as the teacher's word in the first sentence, the probability is greatly increased that the student will perform well when the word appears as the student's word.

Procedure

Tell the student, “You and I are going to read this story together. We will take turns reading words. I will read the first word. You will read the next word. Then I will read the next word. We’ll practice on the first sentence. Then we’ll read the whole story. “

Seat the student next to you. Tell the student, “I will start.”

Touch under the first word. Say the word.

Quickly touch under the next word. Say, “Your turn.”

Quickly touch under the next word and immediately say the word.

Quickly touch under the next word and say, “Your turn.”

Return to the beginning of passage. Tell the student, “This time I won’t say your turn. I will just point to the words you are to read.”

After reading an entire selection in this manner, re-read it with the student reading the first word and you reading the next. You will probably notice that the student’s rate is better on this reading.

Cautions

1. **Always** point under the next word, as soon as the previous word is read —whether you read it or the student reads it.

2. When it is your turn to read a word, read it as soon as you point under it. Do not pause and do not adjust your rate according to the student’s pace.

3. Do not behave in any way to suggest that you are hurrying the student. If the student takes a second or two to read the word, do not show any sign of rushing the student; however, as soon as the student reads the word, immediately point under the next word and read it.

4. Model the notion that you enjoy the activity. After the reading is completed, tell the student, “That was fun. We did a pretty good job of reading that story.”

Variations

After you have done duet reading on 2 or 3 passages, introduce the practice of timing the reading.

Caution the student about trying to read too fast. “We do a good job of reading together. So don’t try to read so fast you make mistakes. Take your time.”

Keep track of times. Praise the student for improvement.

After you and the student have duet read 8 or more passages, change the format so the student points. At first, this may be a difficult task. If the student has great difficulty, direct the student to do the pointing and you read all the words. Then repeat the first part of the selection with the student pointing as you and the student take turns reading words.

You can help the student by physically prompting his points (possibly even moving his hand). At first, you may do the pointing for the whole selection, then repeat the first half or so with the student doing the pointing.

The pointing helps the student develop strategies of looking ahead because the student must point to each word and therefore attend somewhat to each word even if it is not word designated for the student to read.

The final variation of duet reading is introduced after the learner has become fairly good at pointing. For this version, each person reads two words per turn. For this variation, you point and read the first two words. Read them quite fast, then point to the next word and the one after that as the student reads these words.

After you have duet read the entire selection this way, read it again, with the student reading the first two words and every other pair of words.

Interfacing Duet Reading with Timed Reading

During the time that you do duet reading with the student, it is a good idea to keep the other timings going. This pairing allows the student to apply what the duet reading teaches.

For students who initially read at a rate of less than 30 words per minute, introduce duet reading before starting the timings. The goal would be to read at least 30 words per minute before starting the timings. The simplest procedure is to do 10-12 duet sessions with the student before introducing the timings. Continue to present the duet reading at least 2 times a week in addition to the daily timings.

Stop the duet reading when you and the student are able to duet read a 100 word passage in two minutes or less.

Use duet reading to provide a performance boost to students who perform very poorly on the first 2 or 3 selections that are timed. A reasonable option for these students is to drop the daily timings for 5-10 lessons and replace them with duet reading (of selections the student has read earlier in the program).

Summary

Slow-reading low performers can achieve substantial progress in reading faster and more accurately. The procedures that lead to realization of this goal, however, must revolve around patience and an understanding of the learner's predicament. The learner wants to read faster. The learner, however, cannot will this performance to happen any more than the learner can will himself to run faster each day. Instead, it happen relatively slowly at first and then more rapidly. It is also characterized by early setbacks, particularly when new words are introduced.

During the early focus on rate, the teacher needs a program that permits the learner's actual performance to serve as the basis for setting performance expectations. The DRF process is built around this requirement. The system is designed so that all that is demanded by the standards is for learners to do as

well as they have been doing. Learners receive reinforcement for this “average” performance. If the learners do better than their current performance, they receive more recognition for their success and tangible evidence of improvement. In this context students learn “at their own rate”; however, the DRF has provisions to assure that they try to improve and that they receive the strongest possible evidence to show their improvement. In a sense, the program a type of affirmative action for students who otherwise would not much progress.

How is this program different from the formats the teacher has used, such as repeated readings and paired practice?

1. The DRF program records performance as time to read so many words, not as words per minute.

2. The learner’s average performance is assessed and updated after every ten lessons.

3. The schedule for reinforcement is based solely on the learner’s performance and is therefore updated every ten lessons.

4. The program has an accuracy criterion; however, it is liberal enough to allow the learner to take some risks and experiment with procedures for reading faster.

5. The program has graphing provisions, which show the big picture of improvement, even when the learner does not earn points on all the passages.

In summary, the procedures represent a “scientific” approach for improving reading rate and for giving students confidence that they are capable of achieving goals of reading faster and accurately.