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explain how repeated reading can
improve all aspects of second language
fluency and comprehension

Repeated Reading Works

In the past decade, reading fluency and its link to reading

comprehension has become the focus of teachers and researchers in first language (L1) settings (National Reading Panel, 2000; Samuels, 2006). Language educators in L1 settings have devoted whole volumes to specific, in-class methodologies for improving reading fluency in K-12 students with the aim of increasing learners' automaticity and accuracy in recognizing words in text, and using appropriate knowledge of prosody and syntax to comprehend (see Rasinski, 2003 for an approachable resource). The link between reading fluency and comprehension lies in the notion of automaticity of word recognition in texts. Many low-level L1 readers are thought to have poor reading comprehension because their word recognition is slow and laborious. When such readers slowly decode a sentence word by word, their working memories reach capacity and they no longer remember what the beginning of the sentence was about. Hence, comprehension collapses. However, when word recognition is effortless and accurate (fluent), more attentional resources in working memory are made available for higher order cognitive processes, such as parsing grammar, activating background knowledge, and invoking cultural knowledge to comprehend a text (Samuels, 1994; Segalowitz, 1991; Segalowitz, Segalowitz, & Wood, 1998). While this psycholinguistic explanation may sound abstract, what we witness as teachers is clear: Reading is difficult and laborious for some learners. The learners come to hate reading, and thus avoid the best way to improve, which is reading.

This image is likely also familiar to second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) teachers. In English classes as a second or foreign language in the U.S., Vietnam, or Korea, and in French or German or Japanese as a foreign language class in the U.S., students struggle to get through reading texts, forever reaching for their dictionaries, decoding word by word, and just not getting the richness of meaning teachers want them to get from the text (nor the vocabulary, nor the grammar, nor the cultural content) (Anderson, 1999; Segalowitz, Poulsen, & Komoda, 1991). As in L1 settings, L2/FL language educators are beginning to recognize the development of reading fluency in learners as a critical goal (Day & Bamford, 1998; Grabe, 1991, 2004; Silberstein, 1994). This is particularly true for FL settings in which reading may be the most significant source of linguistic input available to learners (Gebhard, 1996; Redfield, 1999).

One powerful and yet intuitively simple means of increasing L2 and FL reading fluency, Repeated Reading (RR), has emerged in recent years. With RR, 500-word portions of an easy text are read repeatedly, often with an audio model, resulting in faster reading rates and better comprehension of new, unpracticed texts. With modest and steady RR treatment sessions (just twice a week at 25 minutes each time), gains in reading fluency and comprehension have been found to be cumulative and ongoing, and learners in two countries have reported increases in their use of reading strategies, and motivation to read. In this article, RR will be described, and evidence for significant, meaningful gains in reading fluency and comprehension from EFL reading studies carried out in Japan and Vietnam will be presented.

Repeated Reading: What it looks like

There are a few variations of RR. The most basic element is that students read a short passage that is right around their reading level (no more than five unknown words), and then they immediately read the same passage again. A student tracks his or her reading time with a stopwatch for each occurrence. One element that differs in some uses of RR is the number of back-to-back repetitions the student completes. Keep in mind each reading in a session is the exact same passage. Studies have been done with five and seven repetitions. "Don't the students get bored?" This does not seem to be the case, as students are delighted to see such powerful and immediate increases in reading speed and comprehension. Many of the comments ESL students at a U.S. university give include a variation of "I was able to understand the story after I read it a few times." Selecting topics of interest for the reading passages also helps. The students mentioned here, international teaching assistants in chemistry and physics, report feeling benefit using reading passages for RR taken from a junior high school level popular science website.

One other variation of RR is assisted and unassisted RR. Assisted RR includes repetitions in which a student reads a passage silently while at the same time listening to the same passage being read aloud, either by a live model or on tape. Many books of suitable level and topic are also recorded and can be obtained as "graded readers" for ESL/EFL from publishers such as Longman (<http://www.penguin-readers.com>), or MacMillan (<http://www.macmillanenglish.com/readers>), and as authentic texts for K-12 from Recorded Books (<http://www.recordedbooks.com>). New graded readers in Spanish have been published for Spanish as a foreign language, and it would not be difficult to ask a native or proficient speaker of Spanish to make audiotapes for 500-word segments of the stories from publishers such as Prentice Hall *Graduated Readings for Students of Spanish* and *edelsa* in Spain.

It is important to note that assisted RR is not the same thing as story time or listening practice. The students, who have already read the passage silently at least once, will read the passage again as they listen to the audio model. Here they are building a psycholinguistic connection between orthography, words, and sounds. The audio model also adds a depth of meaning for learners through hearing meaning-rich features of pronunciation (pitch, intonation, rhythm, and emphasis) embedded directly in the text. Unassisted RR will still benefit students in their reading fluency (Taguchi & Gorsuch, 2002) but students' comments comparing assisted RR and extensive reading (which was not assisted with an audio model) show that assisted RR with an English speaker on audio is often what the students are most excited about (Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass, & Gorsuch, 2004).

Providing students with appropriate material for RR is its own challenge. We suggest reading passages of no more than 500-words for adult or young adult learners. Students should be able to read the passage once in just three to six minutes. Most short stories in graded readers have about 4,500 words total. So, to create a series of nine