

Understanding How Oral Reading Assessment Affects Children Who Stutter

PARENT HANDOUT



Reading Assessment: Oral reading fluency assessments are one way to measure a student’s ability to read. Three areas of reading ability that are assessed are

- *accuracy* (saying the right word);
- *automaticity* (saying a word immediately, without delay); and
- *prosody* (the way the voice rises and falls when speaking).

School districts use oral reading fluency scores to determine and monitor a student’s reading achievement. The benefit of this type of “speed-reading” test is that students who are falling behind in reading skills can be identified quickly and placed in programs with appropriate interventions. However, some students—such as those who stutter—do not test well when “timed” while reading out loud. These students are at risk for being placed in a lower reading group even when they read well silently and have good reading comprehension. Exclusive reliance on an oral timed test is an invalid approach to assessing students’ reading skills.

Stuttering: Many factors can affect stuttering, including whether the words or ideas are difficult and what demands are placed on the speaker. Speaking tasks that are “speed based,” timed, and require accuracy are especially challenging for students who stutter.

Survey Outcomes: Results of a survey on oral reading fluency measures and accommodations for students who stutter conducted by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) Committee on Reading Fluency for School-Age Children Who Stutter showed the following:

- More than one third of students who stutter are required to take oral reading tests without accommodations.
- Only 37.9% of students who stutter qualify for accommodations.

Accommodation refers to changes in testing procedures to help students reach testing goals. For example, in timed oral

reading fluency assessments, the goal is to find a student’s true reading level. An example of an accommodation may be an alternative test, such as a silent reading fluency assessment. The survey also revealed the need for

- more information about potential accommodations for students who stutter and
- more collaboration among professionals about oral reading tests.

Parent Involvement: Be a proactive part of the team at your child’s school. Make sure your child’s needs are met when they are taking timed oral reading fluency tests.

- Find out about school policies on oral reading fluency measures. Ask a teacher or school administrator.
- If your child has an individualized education program (IEP), ask that they be excused from oral reading testing or receive an accommodation.
- If your child does not have an IEP, talk with the teacher and the speech-language pathologist about options regarding a 504 plan.
- If oral reading fluency measures are used, timed testing results should not determine reading group placement decisions. Make sure that teacher and parent input—and your child’s reading history and daily work—are considered in placement decisions.

Bottom Line:

Children who stutter may not be able to perform oral reading fluency tasks at the speed and level of accuracy that are commensurate with their reading ability. You are your child’s best advocate! Make certain that stuttering does not adversely impact your child’s educational experience.