

OSPI and WSASP
Questions and Answers about Reading Fluency – A New Area of Qualification for Specific Learning Disabilities

In December 2007, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Washington State Association of School Psychologists (WSASP) updated the Identification of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities guide to reflect changes in the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) that took effect July 30, 2007. A significant change made by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 included the addition of reading fluency when determining whether a student qualifies for special education services under the category of specific learning disability (SLD). Since the release of the updated SLD guide, several questions have been raised regarding the inclusion of reading fluency as it applies to the severe discrepancy tables, among other inquiries. This paper is a response to those questions, and will be a work in progress as the OSPI and WSASP continue to review and respond to frequently asked questions.

A. Reading Fluency

Question 1: What is meant by the definition of reading fluency?

Answer: In the research, reading fluency consists of three components:

- Speed of reading
- Accuracy of reading
- Prosody (reading with expression)

Reading fluency is defined on page 2 of the SLD guide as follows:

“Reading fluency is characterized as including accuracy, rate, and prosody. Accuracy relates to the ability to decode words in text without error. Rate refers to the time it takes to automatically decode words, and is measured as “words per minute”. Prosody is the use of appropriate phrasing and expression and is believed to be an important factor in comprehension.”

Question 2: How do you interpret reading fluency scores when individual subtests do not yield a composite score?

Answer: There will be no one standard score that can be plugged into the discrepancy table to guide decision-making when it comes to reading fluency. Rather, the evaluation group will need to analyze data from varied sources to make such a decision. These sources may include the three subtests on the WJ-III, (Word Attack, Letter-Word Identification, Reading Fluency), curriculum based measures (CBM) such as Oral Reading Fluency (i.e., DIBELS), and an assessment of prosody.

Once a picture of the child’s performance on the three fluency factors is constructed, a decision will need to be made regarding the extent of deficit and impact of the low fluency (i.e., is it affecting comprehension sufficiently to interfere with reading progress?) The development of a

district rubric will be useful for determining how students will qualify in the area of reading fluency.

Eligibility thus becomes an evaluation group decision and will be independent of the discrepancy tables *per se* as there is no one standard score to use. Professional judgment is appropriate as there is no standardized test that will yield the necessary data. However, there will be scores (standardized, curriculum based, and/or rubric generated) to guide the evaluation group's determination.

Question 3: Can Reading Fluency stand as a lone area of qualification, or does there need to be another qualifying area of need (i.e. reading comprehension)?

Answer: State and federal regulations do not differentiate among the many areas of possible discrepancy. Reading Fluency can be an area of qualification independent of other possible skills (reading or otherwise). However, evaluation and IEP teams should always consider the adverse impact of the disability on school performance and the need for specially designed instruction before making the determination that a student is eligible under SLD. In many cases low fluency alone may be a deficit that can be accommodated without need for specially designed instruction, or the skill may be addressed with interventions available through general education used for all students. Poor fluency may not necessarily have a direct, adverse impact on the student's ability to perform in school. When both an adverse impact and a need for specially designed instruction result from poor fluency, a student may be identified as SLD if professional judgment, as described previously, indicates a severe discrepancy between measured fluency and predicted performance.

Question 4: Can accuracy be considered single-word accuracy such as measured by the Letter and Word Recognition subtest of the KTEA-II or the Letter-Word Identification of the WJ-III?

Answer: Single-word accuracy could be a component of a comprehensive evaluation. See the definition of fluency referenced in *Answer 1*. Accuracy is defined as a student's ability to decode words within text. Rate is the time it takes to automatically decode words and is measured in "correct words per minute".

A curriculum based measure that uses units of "correct words per minute" takes into consideration these two components of reading fluency simultaneously. For example, a student given a Grade 6 oral reading fluency (ORF) measure read 120 words during the 1 minute timing, and made 6 errors. The student's rate is 120 words per minute. The student's accuracy is calculated as (120 words read – 6 errors) / 120 words read or 95% accuracy. The student's rate or correct words per minute would be 120 total words read – 6 errors or 114 correct words per minute.

Question 5: What assessments are available to measure reading fluency?

Answer: There is a variety of reading fluency assessments available that allow for data-based documentation of repeated assessments of achievement at reasonable intervals, as specified in IDEA regulations, as well as the WACs. Fluency measures can also meet requirements to be effective, efficient, specific, sensitive, accurate, easily interpreted, succinct, and instructionally relevant.

An exploration of some norm- and criterion-referenced fluency assessments are listed in bold on Page 3 of the Identification guide.

Although many assessments may assess aspects of fluency, the inclusion of an assessment on this list should not be construed as an accurate measure of any or all relevant aspects of fluency. The assessment of fluency will require multiple subtests from different instruments and any decision should be based on converging evidence of a deficit in all the relevant dimensions of fluency.

IEP teams are responsible for determining the assessment instruments and methods needed to complete a comprehensive evaluation of an individual student. When selecting assessment instruments, only those that have demonstrated sufficient reliability and validity should be considered. WAC 392-172A-03020 (3)(a)(iii) states, "If properly validated tests are unavailable (i.e. measures for prosody), each member of the group shall use professional judgment to determine eligibility based on other evidence of the existence of a disability and need for special education. Use of professional judgment shall be documented in the evaluation report." Specific data requirements are contained within WAC 392-172A-03070.

Table 1: Prosody

"Fluent readers embed prosodic or melodic features of spoken language – stress, pitch variations, intonation, rate, phrasing, and pausing – in their voices" (Dowhower, 1987, 1991; Schreiber, 1980, 1987, 1991; Schreiber & Read, 1980).

Listed below are two rubrics which could be adapted by districts to measure prosody.

**Appendix B: NAEP's Integrated Reading Performance Record
Oral Reading Fluency Scale**

Level 4	Reads in primarily large, meaningful phrase groups. Although some regressions, repetitions, and deviations from text may be present, these do not appear to detract from the overall structure of the story. Preservation of the author's syntax is consistent. Some or most of the story is read with expressive interpretation.
Level 3	Reads primarily in three or four word phrase groups. Some smaller groupings may be present. However, the majority of phrasing seems appropriate and preserves the syntax of the author. Little or no expressive interpretation is present.

Level 2	Reads primarily in two word phrases with some three or four word groupings. Some word-by-word reading may be present. Word groupings may seem awkward and unrelated to larger context of sentence or passage.
Level 1	Reads primarily word-by-word. Occasional two or three word phrases may occur, but these are infrequent and/or do not preserve meaningful syntax.

From *Listening to Children Read Aloud* by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 1995, Washington, D.C.

Table 2:

Area	1	2	3	4
Expression and Volume	Reads as if just trying to "get words out." Little sense of trying to make text sound like natural language. Tends to read in a quiet voice	Begins to use voice to make text sound like natural language in some areas but not in others. Focus remains largely on pronouncing words. Still reads in a quiet voice.	Makes text sound like natural language throughout the better part of the passage. Occasionally slips into expressionless reading. Voice volume is generally appropriate throughout the text.	Reads with good expression and enthusiasm throughout the text. Varies expression and volume to match his or her interpretation of the passage.
Phrasing	Reads in monotone with little sense of phrase boundaries; frequently reads word-by-word	Frequently reads in two and three word phrases, giving the impression of choppy reading; improper stress and intonation fail to mark ends of sentences and clauses	Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness; reasonable stress and intonation.	Generally reads with good phrasing, mostly in clause and sentence units, with adequate attention to expression.

Smoothness	Makes frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound-outs, repetitions, and/or multiple attempts.	Experiences several “rough spots” in text where extended pauses or hesitations are more frequent and disruptive	Occasionally breaks smooth rhythm because of difficulties with specific words and/or structures.	Generally reads smoothly with some breaks, but resolves word and structure difficulties quickly, usually through self-correction.
Pace	Reads slowly and laboriously.	Reads moderately slowly.	Reads with an uneven mixture of fast and slow pace.	Consistently reads at a conversational pace; appropriate rate throughout reading.

Scores range 4-16. Usually a score below 8 indicates that fluency/prosody may be a concern. Adopted from Zutell & Rasinski, 1991.

Research related to prosody:

Dowhower, S.L. (1991). Speaking of prosody: Fluency’s unattended bedfellow. *Theory into Practice*, 30, 165-175.

Dowhower, S. L. (1987). Effects of repeated reading on second-grade transitional readers’ fluency and comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 22, 389-407.

Schreiber, P. A. (1980). On the acquisition of reading fluency. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 12, 177-186.

Schreiber, P. A. (1987). Prosody and structure in children’s syntactic processing. In R. Horowitz & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *Comprehending oral and written language* (pp. 243-270). New York: Academic Press.

Schreiber, P. A. (1991). Understanding prosody’s role in reading acquisition. *Theory Into Practice*, 30, 158-164.

Schreiber, P. A., & Read, C. (1980). Children’s use of phonetic cues in spelling, parsing, and—maybe—reading. *Bulletin of the Orton Society*, 30, 209-224.

Zutell, J., & Rasinski, T. V. (1991). Training teachers to attend to their students’ oral reading fluency. *Theory Into Practice*, 30, 211-217.

The following is a link to Pacific Resources for Education and Learning. It contains work completed by Timothy V. Rasinski, Ph.D., on assessing reading fluency.

http://www.prel.org/products/re_/assessing-fluency.htm

Question 6: How can evaluation groups use general ability index (GAI) to establish discrepancy?

Answer: GAI scores were not components of the discrepancy table formulations. An evaluation group would have to use professional judgment (as outlined in accordance with the SLD Identification Guide and WACs 392-172A-03020 and -03070) to make the determination of a discrepancy using GAI. The link listed below provides further information to evaluation groups of when using the GAI might be appropriate.

For more information related to general ability index, please use the following link:
<http://harcourtassessment.com/hai/Images/pdf/wisciv/WISCIVTechReport4.pdf> .

Question 7: Can districts still use assessments not on the OSPI approved list through the end of this school year until newer editions can be purchased?

Answer: This is an ethical and best practice issue. WSASP believes that ethical and best practice dictates that professionals always use the most current evaluation tools available.

Years ago, it was common practice after a revision of a test became available, to continue to use the older tests for a number of years. Additionally, the state list wasn't updated as readily when tests revisions came out.

This may have been due to continued availability of older test materials by the testing companies and lack of funding by districts to replace them with the revisions. This made it easier for school districts to justify the use of the older tests. However, this is not considered best practice or ethical. As such, school districts need to replace all of the obsolete measures as soon as possible.

Considering the new list has just been published and there are only a few months left in the school year, the expectation is that school districts should replace old tests no later than the beginning of the 2008 – 2009 school year.

Miscellaneous Information:

Please note the following errors contained in the newly published SLD guide:

1. Page 14 - Working Memory Index (along with the core subtests) were inadvertently omitted from the WISC-IV test.
2. The Test of Nonverbal Intelligence, 3rd edition (TONI-III) is include on page 16 of the Non-Verbal Intellectual Ability Tests, but is not listed on page 10.
3. GORT 4 – Fluency composite = rate + accuracy.
4. Pg. 17 – WCJ-III NU needs to be added.