

Phrased Text Lesson

For many struggling, dysfluent readers, oral reading is nearly always word by word and choppy. It's disconnected because these readers are decoding or sounding out every single word, sometimes letter by letter. It is nearly impossible for them to see phrasal units as they read, which is where the meaning lies.

Providing practice reading words grouped in phrases can benefit striving readers and assists with comprehension (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010). You are probably familiar with Edward Fry's (1980) frequently used word lists, first developed in the 1950s, which are made up of high-frequency words. According to Fry (1980), the first three hundred words (of one thousand) may be the most critical, since they represent 67 percent of all the words students encounter in reading. Using these three hundred words, literacy educator Timothy Rasinski (n.d.) created Fry Instant Phrases word lists, which are posted on his website (<https://timrasinski.com>) and suitable to use with struggling readers.

The Phrased Text Lesson is an evidence-based practice (Rasinski, 1990; Rasinski, Yildirim, & Nageldinger, 2011) that shows we can improve students' fluency through practice focused on reading phrases. Sometimes, we, as teachers, must make the *implicit* explicit. This is where marking text boundaries lies. The following Phrased Text Lesson strategy provides an explanation and examples.

Keep in mind, practices such as this are skill based and specific and are not meant to take the place of reading connected text. Reading is meaning. However, dysfluent readers may never get there without practicing skills that appear to be more natural for fluent readers.

The Phrased Text Lesson, like other strategies, is built on repeated reading as an evidence-based practice to improve fluency. The Phrased Text Lesson focuses on prosody, reminding us that reading fluency is more than accuracy and automaticity, and includes expression and appropriate phrasing to gain meaning. The following strategy table includes simple steps for the Phrased Text Lesson (Rasinski et al., 2011), which takes place over the course of two days.

Strategy: Phrased Text Lesson

Pillar: Fluency

Grade Level:

- ☒ K
- ☒ 1
- ☒ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6

Instructional Grouping:

- ☐ Whole Group
- ☒ Small Group
- ☒ Individual

Consider This:

- The Phrased Text Lesson combines specific skill instruction on phrases in text with aspects of the Fluency Development Lesson, described in chapter 4 (page 162).
- The Phrased Text Lesson takes place over two consecutive days, about ten to fifteen minutes each day.

What is it? The Phrased Text Lesson is a strategy to help struggling readers develop prosody and learn how to read and recognize phrases in text, lending itself to reading with meaning and expression.

Why is it important? Students who struggle with fluency frequently read word by word and lack in phrasing and expression. Struggling readers often need guidance in how to notice phrases, which carry meaning, within texts.

What works in the classroom?

Sample Phrased Text Lesson

Third-grade level text:

Lily skipped down the sidewalk,/ her backpack bouncing with every hop.// Today was the day of the school fair!// She clutched a crumpled dollar bill in her hand,/ dreaming of all the delicious treats it could buy//.

The schoolyard was a riot of color and sound//. Booths lined the edge of the field,/ each one decorated with streamers and balloons//. Laughter filled the air/ as children raced around,/ playing games and trying their luck at ring toss//.

Lily's nose twitched//. The smell of freshly baked cookies/ led her to a booth run by Mrs. Hernandez,/ her kind neighbor//. "Good morning, Lily//!" Mrs. Hernandez beamed,/ handing her a warm,/ gooey chocolate chip cookie//. "Here,/ try one//!"

Lily took a bite,/ savoring the sweet,/ melty goodness//. "Mmm,/ thank you,/ Mrs. Hernandez//!" she mumbled through a mouthful of cookie//.

Suddenly,/ a loud "Moo!" made Lily jump//. She turned to see a life-sized cow made of hay,/ with a friendly smile painted on its face//. Lily grinned//. The petting zoo was here too//! She couldn't wait to say hello to the fluffy bunnies and the gentle goats//.

With her cookie finished/ and excitement bubbling inside her,/ Lily skipped off to explore the rest of the fun-filled fair,/ ready for a day of games,/ friends,/ and delicious treats.

Source: Generated using Google Gemini AI, accessed at <https://gemini.google.com> on June 9, 2024.

Preplanning

- **Select passage:** Select a short reading passage and mark phrase boundaries for the reader. Passages of approximately one hundred to four hundred words are recommended. Ideally, they should come from texts students have read or will read in the future.
- **Mark phrase boundaries:** Mark phrase boundaries as shown in the preceding sample third-grade text. Mark the phrase boundaries with slash marks; use single slash marks for within-sentence boundaries (short pause) and double slash boundaries (longer pause) between sentences. There isn't a hard-and-fast rule for within-sentence boundaries. As a proficient reader, trust your instincts.
- **Print copies for students:** Print a copy of the text both with boundaries marked and unmarked for students.

Instructional Sequence

Day 1: Text Boundaries Marked

1. **Reading by phrases:** Begin by talking about the importance of reading by phrases rather than word by word.
2. **Explain text markings:** Give each student a copy of the marked text and explain the purpose of the markings on the text.
3. **Model oral reading:** Model oral reading using the boundaries with a sample piece of text. Since the focus is phrased reading, slightly exaggerate the phrases as you read the text several times to make learning visible for students.
4. **Students read orally:** Have students read the text several times chorally using the boundaries. Consider using the Neurological Impress Method (explained in chapter 4, page 156) and serve as the prominent reader, reading slightly louder and faster than the students.
5. **Students practice:** Provide time for students to read aloud in groups of two or three, each student reading several times. Circulate and provide feedback and encouragement to students.
6. **Performance for peers:** Depending on the text you have selected for small group practice, you may consider having students perform for other students. For example, you could pair two groups of students and have students perform for the other group, or have a group of students volunteer to perform for their peers.

Day 2: No Text Boundaries Marked

1. **Reread the text:** This time, use the text with no boundaries marked. Begin by rereading the text while modeling phrasing and expression, with students following along in their unmarked copy.
2. **Students practice:** Students practice with partners using unmarked text to facilitate transfer to typical text. Provide feedback and support to students.

References

- Fry, E. (1980). The new instant word list. *The Reading Teacher*, 34(3), 284–289.
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- Rasiniski, T. (n.d.). *Fry instant phrases*. Accessed at https://timrasinski.com/presentations/dr_edward_fry_instant_phrases.pdf on January 23, 2025.
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