

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Fast Track Reading

### What is Fast Track Reading?

*Fast Track Reading* is an intervention program for struggling readers in grades 4 through 8. It is intended to be used in addition to a school's core reading program. The program's components provide struggling readers with phonics instruction and word study strategies, comprehension instruction to help them make meaning from text, and fluency instruction and practice to improve automaticity. The goal of the program is to help struggling readers accelerate learning in order to reach grade level. *Fast Track Reading* can be implemented by the classroom teacher in daily blocks of sixty minutes up to 2 ½ hours and may be used with small groups or an entire classroom of students. There are varied scenarios for flexible grouping and simultaneous multiple-group work. Sample schedules and suggestions for managing multiple groups and whole-class instruction are given.

The *Fast Track Reading* program is divided into three strands: Word Work (including phonics and word study), Comprehension, and Fluency. The Word Work Strand includes the Word Work Assessment Guide, the Word Study Teacher Guide, the MatchWord software program, 12 decodable books, 12 plays based on the decodable books, and the Phonics Teacher Guide with 21 phonics transparencies.

The Comprehension Strand begins with the Fast Track Reading Comprehension Teacher Guide Level 1, a read-aloud anthology with built-in teacher support. This strand is designed for nonreaders and includes directions for explicit teacher support for previewing, discussing, and reviewing text. There are ten stories, read out loud by the teacher, which introduce 28 different language arts components including: recalling facts, inferring character traits, point of view, narrative structure, figurative language, predictions, analyzing character, author's purpose, theme, setting, text structure, summary, inference, conflict, resolution, climax, main idea, supporting details, the 5 W's, diagrams, sequence, captions, procedural text, non-fiction, biography, fact and opinion, cause and effect, and persuasive text.

Comprehension Lessons 2-7 include thirty-six magazine anthologies, six at each level, organized in three themes: Disasters and Survival, Weird, Wild and Wacky, and Sports and Achievement. The magazines are written on six different reading levels using the Dale-Chall readability formula and include fiction and non-fiction articles as well as menus, newspaper articles, directions, and maps. A Teacher Guide provides support for explicit instruction of comprehension and writing skills and strategies. Each lesson focuses on two major comprehension strategies within a format of Before Reading, During Reading, and After Reading.

The Fluency Strand includes twelve Fluency Cards and a CD for each instructional level. Fluency cards, containing a high-interest passage of continuous text, are leveled according to the Dale-Chall readability formula, and coordinate by theme with the magazine anthologies—two for each magazine. CDs provide an audio model for the fluency cards using proper expression, intonation, and phrasing. Students practice by listening to the CDs or a teacher model a passage, reading independently, then with a partner, and finally graphing the results of their reading.



Fast Track Chapter Books provide additional silent reading practice with leveled text. There are six chapter books for each level, one for each magazine anthology. A Fluency Teacher Guide provides explicit teacher directions and blackline masters of graphic organizers and take-home activities to supplement each chapter book.

The Comprehension Placement Assessment Guide is designed to measure accuracy and comprehension for placement into the appropriate leveled magazine anthology. Oral reading accuracy and comprehension are both assessed to determine the student's instructional reading level. A Comprehension Evaluation at each level provides teachers with a tool to evaluate student progress in reading and writing using a standardized test format. These tests measure a student's ability to read, understand, and write in various fiction and nonfiction genres and in commonly seen text access features such as charts and diagrams. The skills evaluated in these assessments are correlated to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) attributes of literacy. For example, Level 2 Evaluation tests a student's ability to summarize, answer questions, sequence information, identify story conflict and resolution, identify speaker or narrator, use text structure to locate information, set a purpose for reading, identify setting, compare and contrast information, analyze character, analyze plot, identify author's purpose and point of view, identify theme, interpret diagrams, and graphs, make and confirm predictions, and use context clues to determine word meaning. Scoring guides indicate when a student has mastered the skills at each level; a score of 90% correct indicates the student is ready to move to the next level, below 70% indicates more support is needed.

The Word Work Assessment Guide identifies strengths and weaknesses in the areas of phonological awareness, phonics, high-frequency words, and word study. The assessments in this guide are intended to be used as pretests before instruction and as posttests after instruction. Twelve mini-screenings are designed to match the Word Work Phonics instruction in the Phonics Teacher Guide. High-Frequency Quick Checks are designed to be used on a frequent basis to record growth in recognition of high-frequency words. These word lists correspond to the *Fast Track Reading* decodable books that students are reading in each level of study. Word Study Assessments align with the ten sections of word study.

In addition to these formal assessments, informal assessment is built in to each teacher guide in the form of writing applications, listening and speaking activities, and blackline masters for each lesson, and progress monitoring is continuous.

### How is Fast Track Reading Aligned with Current Reading Research?

*Fast Track Reading* includes lessons in the five significant components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Each of the lessons within the Phonics Teacher Guide directs teachers to begin with an oral focus, where students are engaged in phonemic awareness activities such as listening for specific sounds as well as additions, deletions, and manipulations of sounds within words and syllables and then blending, segmenting, and manipulating these sounds and syllables.

The twelve phonics lessons in the Word Work Strand are presented in the following order: closed vowel pattern, closed vowel pattern with initial and final blends, closed vowel pattern-2 syllables, silent e, r-controlled, open vowel pattern, 2-syllable vowel patterns, vowel digraphs, vowel diphthongs, consonant + le, vowel/vowel-2 syllables, and compound words/multi-syllabic words/pattern review. Skills are taught in the context of a poem which utilizes decodable text. The lessons are designed with application of words through practice with 12 decodable books and plays, one for each

phonics lesson. MatchWord provides further practice through reproducible flashcards, games, and activities. Additional instruction and practice is suggested for students who continue to experience difficulty at each skill level. However, the phonics component of *Fast Track Reading* may not be sufficient for students who lag severely behind their grade level peers; these students may need a more comprehensive intervention with intensive work in the skills of beginning reading such as letter sounds.

Fluency building in *Fast Track Reading* is a part of each lesson, goals are included, students read text at the appropriate level, both narrative and expository, and ample practice materials and opportunities are provided. Fluency practice, a primary focus of *Fast Track Reading*, is provided through 12 Fluency cards and practice CDs in each level (2 through 7) that correspond to the six magazine anthologies in these levels. The Teacher Guide explicitly directs the teacher to model fluency, guide students in repeated reading with peers, assign students to a fluency listening exercise with a practice CD, and have students practice repeated readings and then chart their progress. When students meet the fluency criteria of 85-100 words per minute with at least 96% accuracy, they move on to the next card. Finally, students are required to check their reading rate, accuracy, and expression with the teacher or another student. Additional reading practice is provided through six Chapter Books, one leveled story for each magazine anthology. The Fluency Teacher Guide provides blackline masters of graphic organizers and take-home activities to help students monitor their comprehension for each chapter book. These graphic organizers include prediction charts, character, setting, and plot diagrams, problem-resolution, character traits, cause-effect, and figurative language activities. This comprehensive approach provides practice that can aid in developing a student's fluency.

The Word Study section divides vocabulary instruction into these ten components: changing word meaning, words with multiple meanings, words with the same or different meanings, shortened words, capitalization, dictionary skills, context clues, origins and derivations of words, content area words, and figurative language. While each of these components provides support for vocabulary instruction, there is no immediate application to reading and interpreting familiar decodable text connected to the actual Word Study sections. Vocabulary instruction is incorporated in the comprehension strand through pre- and during-reading activities and students are exposed to diverse vocabulary through reading both stories and informational text.

Seven categories of comprehension instruction were identified by the National Reading Panel (2000) as beneficial for improving comprehension. *Fast Track Reading* provides direct and explicit instruction for teachers to model and teach these strategies as well as practice and application opportunities for students. Comprehension instruction begins in Level 1 with Listening Comprehension for non-readers. Teachers are provided with explicit lesson overviews, divided into three sections, for ten read-aloud stories. Introducing the Text includes a synopsis of the story as well as pre-reading strategies and questions to help build students' background knowledge. A list of more difficult vocabulary words and their definitions are provided. Reading the Text includes bookmark icons that focus on key text information and stop-and-review suggestions. Revisiting the Text suggests discussion items for whole-group discussion and activities to reinforce concepts and information and provide practice opportunities for the student.

In Comprehension Lessons 2 through 7, twenty-four magazine articles form the base of instruction. Again, teachers are provided with explicit before, during, and after-reading instruction strategies. In the Before Reading Coach section, the teacher helps students build background knowledge and preview vocabulary. In the

Demonstrate section, the teacher models a comprehension strategy. In the During Reading Coach section teacher and students read together, and then students are given the opportunity to read on their own and practice the strategy that was introduced by the teacher. In the After Reading section the teacher leads the students in a discussion of the text and students are assigned writing, listening and speaking activities. Teachers then assess students and move on or reteach as indicated by the assessment results.

A typical full-day professional development training is offered upon implementation and further professional development is available for purchase. Presentation of training includes direct instruction, modeling and practice of strategies, group discussion, and participant activities. Topics introduced are program introduction, assessment, phonological awareness/phonics, word work, word study, comprehension, fluency, MatchWord, and management. The professional development is based on customer needs. Follow-up support visits are flexible and include assessment of the site's current needs, working with leadership teams, classroom observations and demonstrations, analysis of student work to monitor progress and determine instructional goals, lesson design, classroom organization and management, planning and goal setting, and collaboration with administrators. INSIGHT strongly recommends that the administration build in time for collegial interaction and learning. A participant manual provides detailed instructions and examples.

### Research Support for Fast Track Reading

In 2001, a field test of the *Fast Track Reading* program was conducted in six states with 66 students in grades 4-8. Students were administered Form A of the Woodcock Johnson III Test of Achievement as a pretest, and Form B as a posttest. Students received from 45 to 90 minutes of instruction using the *Fast Track Reading* program daily for a 10-week period. No control groups were included and students were not selected randomly, but chosen based on their need for reading intervention.

Pretest scores on the Broad Reading score of the Woodcock Johnson III showed that 44% of the students tested within one standard deviation of the mean and 56% scored one or more standard deviations below the mean. After ten weeks, 83% of students were within one standard deviation of the mean and 17% were one or more standard deviations below. For example, on average the grade equivalent for the 6<sup>th</sup> graders increased from 4.8 to 5.6 and for the 8<sup>th</sup> graders the grade equivalent increased from 6 to 8.2. Although these numbers appear to show progress, the design of this study (no control group) makes it impossible to attribute these reading improvements to use of the *Fast Track Reading* program. That is, it is unknown whether maturation, teacher influence, or other educational experiences may have contributed to the students' reading improvement.

The instructional content of *Fast Track Reading* is consistent with current research on reading comprehension and fluency. Future studies with sound experimental designs including control groups may determine the efficacy of the *Fast Track Reading* Program in the classroom.

### Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Fast Track Reading*:

- Fluency practice is explicitly structured and ample practice opportunities are provided.

- Magazine anthologies (high interest/low reading level) and decodable Chapter Books are engaging.

*Weaknesses of Fast Track Reading:*

- Preskills of reading, such as knowing the names and sounds of individual letters and digraphs, are not a component of this program.
- Phonics instruction is not sufficient for students with severe reading difficulties; Practice opportunities in the phonics strand are limited and systematic review of previous phonics skills is not included.

### Which Florida districts have schools that implement Fast Track Reading?

Alachua	352-955-7880	Lafayette	386-294-4107
Brevard	321-631-1911	Lake	352-253-6510
Broward	754-321-2600	Marion	352-671-7702
Collier	239-377-0212	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Dade	305-995-1430	Pasco	813-794-2651
DeSoto	863-494-4222	Putnam	386-329-0510
Dixie	352-498-6131	St. Lucie	352-253-6510
Hillsborough	813-272-4050	Volusia	386-734-7190

### For More Information

<http://www.wrightgroup.com/index.php/programsummary?isbn=0076034240&longCopy=Y>

### References

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D.C.



Woodcock, R.W. (1973). *Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests*. Arile Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

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