

Lesson 5.3

Secrets to Fluency

Reading truly fluent writing can be such a pleasure that you can lose yourself in the text, never hearing the doorbell or the voices of people trying to get your attention. Has that ever happened to you? If so, you know that fluent writing can sweep you along in its rhythm the way a river carries a raft. How does it do that? In this lesson, you'll explore several fluent (and less fluent) passages to see if you can uncover some of the secrets to fluent writing.



Sharing an Example: *Troy*

Following is a short passage from *Troy*, by Adèle Geras. The book is based on the story of the Trojan War, something you may have read about before. Read the passage aloud, softly. Think about some of the things this writer does to make this passage fluent.

Alastor opened his eyes and wondered for a moment if this was the kingdom of Hades. He was lying flat on his back on a thin pallet on the ground. This place was nowhere he recognized, but it smelled of men, sweating and bleeding, and there were sounds of groaning coming from somewhere. He tried to turn his head, but pain like knives heated on a blacksmith's fire and plunged into his neck stopped him, and he was left staring into the darkness about

his head. He closed his eyes. Had he really seen him again: the Black Warrior, the one who had come so close to him on the battlefield? He'd been there, yes, yes he had . . . in the corner of this very room, staring at me from under the iron helmet, his eyes as cold as death. I remember, Alastor thought, exactly where I saw the Warrior before. He said his name was Ares.

Troy
by Adèle Geras

Reflection

Rate the fluency of this passage from **1** (difficult to read) to **10** (like rafting the river).

1 **2** **3** **4** **5** **6** **7** **8** **9** **10**

Now see if you can list several specific things this writer did to make the fluency strong. These might be things you learned about in previous lessons or things you never thought about before.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Share and Compare

Meet with your writing circle to discuss your responses to the passage from *Troy*. Did you agree in your ratings? Did you notice different strategies for achieving fluency? At the beginning of this lesson, you identified a passage you felt was particularly fluent. With your teammates, share your passages now, listening for any additional strategies no one has mentioned yet. Finally, use your team lists to create a whole class list titled *Secrets to Fluency*. Post this where you can see it, refer to it, and add to it.

Read and Rank

Reading is one of the best ways to improve your own writing. You stumble across problems to avoid and discover strategies you can try. Here are three pieces that vary in fluency. Read each example at least twice, aloud if possible. Ask yourself, “Is it easy to read? Does it flow smoothly?”

Example 1

I don't know if I could ever live somewhere that wasn't within at the most a two-hour drive from the beach. I like being close to the beach so that I can walk and collecting driftwood is fun with the sound of the surf washing away stressful thoughts, which helps me recharge my batteries, as my mom loves to say. I think the beach is the most special place on the planet. I want to write a novel one day I think I'll have the story set at the beach!

First thoughts: _____

Example 2

This summer's most memorable experience was watching my brother learn to ride his bike. As the older sister, I feel responsible for him, even proud of him sometimes. Because he draws trouble like a magnet, we fight like cats and dogs. Still, I can't stand the idea he might really get hurt, which made it even scarier when he tried to show off for me. He'd been yelling for me to come outside and watch how fast he could go . . . and I watched, all right. He was looking right at me when he hit a bump. Before I could call out, he flew over the handlebars and hit the pavement. Hard. For a few seconds, everything went silent. I stopped breathing. Then I heard him call my name, and I ran.

First thoughts: _____

Example 3

Even if not everyone agrees (and you probably don't) but I still think cats make the best pets or anyhow better than dogs or fish just thinking about all the pets a person could have. Even hamsters or rabbits. Because cats are independent. This means not needing a lot of attention or you won't need to talk to them all the time. Dogs are different. This is their nature. Also, cleaning the fish tanks. The other thing is you can leave your cat for a whole weekend it will be just fine when you return it might be a little upset with you. This is typical! Because, if you think about it, this is the most important thing.

First thoughts: _____

Fluency Rankings

With a partner, discuss the three examples and rank them, using the guide below.

HINT: Keep the list of fluency secrets in mind, along with your first thoughts.

___ BEST IN FLUENCY: Top notch! Very easy to read aloud!

___ RUNNER-UP: Not bad, despite repetition and some bumpy spots.

___ NEEDS WORK: A challenge! Very little flow or logic!

Be prepared to share and defend your choices with the whole class.

Revision Time

Working on your own, revise the example you think most needs work. Revise it by following these steps:

1. Read it aloud once more, softly, to get the main message.
2. Keep that message clearly in mind as you work.
3. Use scratch paper, or if you have computer access, do your revision digitally.
4. Revise the sentences one by one, using any strategy you wish.
5. Read aloud as you revise.
6. Leave big margins so you can make additional changes once you finish.
7. Do one final read-aloud after you finish revising.

Share and Compare

Meet with your writing circle to share your revision and compare it with other possibilities. Feel free to borrow additional ideas, fine-tuning your own revision.

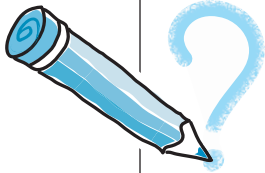
Following your group discussion, watch and listen as your teacher models his or her revision of the same passage. Pay particularly close attention to the process your teacher uses.

More Secrets

Think about all the different ways you have explored fluency in this lesson:

- Reading the example from *Troy* by Adèle Geras
- Sharing fluent examples you and your teammates found on your own
- Ranking three student examples for fluency
- Revising the weakest of those examples
- Watching your teacher model his or her revision

Have you uncovered any additional secrets to fluency? Discuss them, and add them to your list!



A Writer's Questions

As you revise your writing for fluency, what other traits come along for the ride? In other words, how else does your writing improve?



Putting It to the Test

What are some quick things a writer can do to check or revise for fluency in an on-demand writing situation?