R 5: One Model of Effective Independent Reading

What is R5?

* Read
* Relax
* Reflect
* Respond
* Rap

R 5 Overview

R 5 maximizes independent reading time. The length of time needed to devote to any independent reading block is not clear cut. And although studies suggest that giving students as little as 15 minutes a day of uninterrupted silent reading can positively influence vocabulary, comprehension, and attitude (Beers, 2003), we find that even proficient readers need to build stamina for sustained independent reading. Before you decide exactly how much time to devote to R 5 you will want to observe your students to determine who is able to engage while reading independently and who may need extra support and time to build stamina.

Another issue to consider is whether your schedule allows for daily independent reading, or if your students would reap as many benefits from engaging in independent reading a few times a week instead. Teachers continually tell us that they have very little time to allocate for independent reading because of curricular and high-stakes testing demands. Whether you decide to do R 5 daily or a few times a week, make a commitment to never throw it out, ever. Students need to know that you value this time and that you consider it too precious to eliminate for any reason. Also, be very cautious about consistently using R 5 when some of your students are out of the room for other services such as Language, ESOL, Learning Disabilities **.** Although it may be impossible to avoid altogether because in some classes you almost never have all your students together at the same time, it's important to note that challenged readers benefit the most from R 5 it is not just an enrichment or time filler.

R 5 should last approximately 35 minutes total, but the time spent in each phase can be adjusted depending upon student needs. At first, Read and Relax may last only 5-10 minutes, Reflect and Respond 3-4 minutes, and Rap up to 20 minutes. This is for two reasons. First, students need to build reading stamina; asking disengaged readers to sit and read for 20 minutes in the beginning of the year is setting them up for failure. Second, even in the beginning, almost all the kids want to share during Rap. Letting them do so ensures active listening and cognitive participation. Those students who do not volunteer to share need to see that they are responsible for thinking about their reading every time you do R 5, whether they want to or not. Ultimately, all students enjoy rapping. It allows them to do something with what they just read, providing a real and inherent purpose.

During Rap Part 1 students share what they have read with their assigned partner. This pair-share only takes a few minutes. During Rap Part 2 you facilitate the whole-class share by calling on pairs to report on their partner's reading. The rest of the class listens to identify the cognitive strategy or strategies being used in the response

Time spent in the Reflect and Respond phase of R 5 and in Rap Part 1 remain static throughout the year, roughly 3-4 minutes each. It is the Read and Relax and Rap Part 2 phases that fluctuate as students become more engaged. As mentioned, in the beginning of the year the Rap time is extended so that all students become accountable for this time. Once students realize they have to be prepared and really listen, the Read and Relax time can be expanded and the Rap Part 2 time can be reduced. In fact, most students begin to beg for more time reading.

**Read and Relax**

During Read and Relax student sit where they want in the room to read a text of their choice. This is when the teacher does the "Status of the Class" and confers with at least one child about their reading. As previously mentioned this time starts out short but expands as students develop the stamina to read and engage.

**Reflect and Respond**

After Read and Relax the student Reflect and Respond on the R 5 Strategy Response Log (page 72 student sample, blank on p. 198). This log helps students keep track of their book selections, including author, title, and genre. It also gives students some time prior to Rap Part 1 to think about what they just read. The response stems are designed to promote metacognitive awareness of strategy use. For instance, "This book reminds me of..." is likely to lead students into making a connection to their reading. As previously mentioned, students spend three to four minutes in Reflect and Respond. This helps them segue into and prepare for the next part of R 5, Rap Part 1. Reflect and Respond takes about 5 minutes and is static all year.

**Rap**

During the rap phase of R 5, students talk about the book they read. The Strategy Response Log, which is completed during Reflect and Respond, serves as a starting point for student conversations in the pair-share during Rap Part 1. Each student actively listens to the other as they describe their reading that day. In Rap Part 2 you facilitate as students report on their partner's book and thinking. The other students must listen because they are asked to identify the strategies being discussed. These instructional conversations ensure students use strategies independently. If students are having difficulty with discussion you should revisit chapter 3 where we talk about how you can cultivate conversations. Rap Part I remains static too, lasting about 5 minutes. Rap Part II adjusts as students take ownership for their reading (thus increasing the Read and Relax time).

**3 Rules to a Maximize R 5 Time**(page 65)

* Rule #1- Students must have self-selected reading materials prior to the start of R 5.
* Rule #2- Students may not get up during R 5.
* Rule #3- Students may not talk unless they are in a teacher conference or engaged in Rap.

These rules are strictly enforced and they allow students to settle in quickly. Expectations are clear and students adapt to them rapidly. If students have difficulty with these rules I would recommend developing logical consequences. For example, if they do not have reading material for R 5 you will provide them with something (thus taking some of the choice away). Obviously you would not want to give them a book they would hate but the lesson to be learned is to be prepared for R 5.

**Some R 5 FAQ's**

1. Should I limit and/ or intervene with book selection based on Lexile or Accelerated Reader (AR) test availability, or another factor?
2. Should I require students to read a certain number of books or pages?
3. Should I read when the students are reading?
4. How does R 5 fit into a comprehensive literacy block?

Should I Limit and or Intervene with Book Selection Based on Acclerated Reader, Lexile Level, or Another Factor?

**ANSWER**: In recent years, many schools and teachers have restricted independent reading book selection to those for which they have an Accelerated Reader (AR) test or according to the students' Lexile reading level. In general, when we limit students' book selection in this way, we may be inhibiting rather then contributing to intrinsic motivation. Motivation is critical to developing comprehension skills (Gambrell, 2001), and reading instruction should foster the desire to read (Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2002). When students are motivated they are more likely to spend time engaged in a learning task (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, Donovan, & Pellegrino, 2000), including independent reading. One important way to motivate students to read more is by allowing them to choose their own books. When students choose their own reading material they are more interested in their reading, they are more willing to read, they focus more on their reading, and they read more (Arthur, 1995; Gardiner, 2001). In other words, choice encourages motivation to read (Allen, 2000; Allington, 2006; Gambrell & Marinak, 1997) and promotes independence (Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998). Until they are "firmly and unshakably hooked on reading" students need to choose most of their reading materials for independent reading (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005, p. 658.

Limiting book selection based on AR test availability creates a false sense of what it means to be an avid reader. None of us select pleasure reading and then take a computer test on what we have read. Would that motivate you as a reader? This doesn't mean students should not be accountable for their reading; it just means we need to be very careful in how we hold them accountable. There are many other ways to monitor students and encourage engagement without requiring them to take a test on the books they read.

Limiting book selection based on Lexile level is just as disconcerting. Many students want to read books with which they are familiar, but that are not within their Lexile range. Whether their familiarity stems from the recommendation of a friend, seeing a movie based on the book, or hearing the teacher read-aloud other books in the same series or by the same author, students are curious and motivated to read books they recognize (Gambrell, 1996). If a student has the desire and prior knowledge needed to read a certain book, shouldn't we let him? Furthermore, the Lexile level does not always reflect students' actual performance. Some students do not test well but can read at higher levels, and many students have background knowledge that supports them when reading challenging texts on subjects of interest. To restrict reading materials by Lexile level may limit students' growth potential.

Furthermore, by limiting book selection, we control students' reading. Students may comply and even receive recognition for reading in the form of extrinsic rewards yet still not choose to read on their own. These students will be less likely to share books with others or engage in tasks that are not assigned (Guthrie et al., 1996). Limiting student book choices also sends confusing signals about what makes a great book. Statements like "If it's not AR, it's not on par" send the message that students aren't capable of judging the quality of a book. Often the books on Lexile lists are difficult to find. Our experience has been that on a page full of suggested titles, students will be lucky to find one or two titles that actually interest them or that they have access to. Worse, what will students do when there are no more AR or Lexile selections to guide them? If our goal is to develop avid readers, then we need to be careful when placing limits on books students can read.

Although choice reading is best, in terms of intrinsic motivation, there are some cons to this approach, too. Unfortunately, many students do not know how to select books. You, the reading expert, need to be familiar with your students' interests and abilities in order to help them with text selection and council them into more realistic choices (especially those Unrealistic or Wannabe readers.) You just need to be prudent when doing so. All children do not make inappropriate choices. When a few do, it's important to confer with them individually to help them choose books they can read and want to read. You also need to know a lot about books and have a classroom library that offers a wide selection. Do you have to read every book students read? No, but you need to be prepared to discuss what your students are reading and to guide them to compelling, accessible books. To do this you will need to have knowledge about both books and your students. An Interest and Wide Reading Inventory (see pages 29-30 for a tool) can be very helpful in figuring out students' interests, experiences, and reading tastes.

During the Read and Relax portion of R 5, students read what they like and you monitor what they are reading. This will help you know if they are in the right book and how much they are reading. You'll start to notice students are spending more time reading outside of R 5 when they start to fly legitimately through books. Each day you will take a status-of-the-class ( p. 194 blank) by walking around the room with a clipboard and recording each student's book title and page number (Atwell, 1998) This five-minute walk through the classroom helps students realize that you are keeping track of their book choices and monitoring their progress. A quick intervention check-in lets kids know you expect them to be reading books they are able to enjoy. Plus, an occasional enthusiastic comment on book selection informally reinforces good book choices and demonstrates your knowledge of books. The status sheet can also be used as a temperature check of what the class is reading on the whole and guide you in selecting your next book talk or read aloud. Only if a student is having an engagement issue should you step in and intervene, and even then this is best accomplished by letting them choose from a set of texts you have thoughtfully selected. Your main goal is to teach students to successfully select their own texts that they truly enjoy.

Should I Require Students to Read a Certain Number of Books or Pages?

**ANSWER**: Not many of us are motivated by being told how many books and how many pages to read. Students do need to read, and we want them to continue to progress with their reading, but quotas are often a disincentive. What you require is usually what you get. If you mandate that students read one book every two weeks, or that they must read 20 pages per week, they will most likely oblige. Unfortunately they may read something well below their reading level or reread the same text over and over again to meet the quota. Doesn't it make more sense to "require" them to read texts that they truly enjoy and are able to read?

There are other ways to communicate your expectations rather than telling students they must read x-number of books in a month or x-number of pages in a week. There may be some students who need that type of structure, but they can be addressed on an individual basis. During R 5, the status-of-the-class allows you to monitor how much students are reading. Even though students don't have a required amount they must read, they are aware that you are paying attention and noticing their progress. For many, this subtle accounting is just enough to keep them from switching books each day or only reading a couple pages per week.

Should I Read When the Students Are Reading?

**ANSWER:** One common practice during independent reading is for the teacher to model reading (Gambrell, 1996). The rationale is that the students will see the teacher as a reading role model, and this will reinforce the value of independent reading. However, the practice of reading while the students read limits the amount of support a teacher can provide (Beers, 2003). We believe there are other ways you can model a love of books. This can be done during read aloud, shared reading, book sharing, and book talks that occur throughout the course of each day. Frankly, when we read along with our students we are sometimes fake reading. It is difficult to escape into a book when you are responsible for more than 20 students in a classroom. And if you do get into your book, you aren't giving your students any support whatsoever. So like Gambrell (1996), we feel teachers can be more active and explicit role models by sharing how reading enriches and enhances their own lives:

When we, as teachers, share our own reading with students, we show how reading enhances our lives. In this way, we demonstrate to our students that reading helps us learn more about the world in which we live, gives us pleasure and enjoyment, develops our vocabulary, and helps us become better speakers and more effective writers. Most importantly, when we share appropriate selections from our personal reading, students begin to see us as real readers. If we serve as explicit reading models for our students and specifically associate reading with enjoyment, pleasure, and learning, our students will be encouraged to become voluntary lifelong readers. (p. 21)

During R 5 the teacher does not read. In fact, your role during the Read and Relax portion of R 5 is to monitor, coach, and facilitate. You are not correcting papers, answering e-mail, or writing notes to parents, either; instead you are observing, talking, encouraging, and listening to students. It is during these conversations with students that you further demonstrate your own knowledge of and passion for books.

We asked Nicki's students, "How do you know Mrs. Grace is a reader?" Their responses are insightful:

* "She does a lot of book talks...in order to do a book talk you have to read and know what the book is about" (Jessica)
* "I know she reads because she does reviews of books and she's written several books." (Lyndsey)
* "She has a terrific vocabulary." (Katie)
* "She helps me with my writing and makes me elaborate...because you get good elaborations from other books and she knows where to go to find them." (Victoria)
* "She's an author. She reads a lot, like when she was in surgery she read. She read some of the hardest books to us, like Hatchet andKingdom Keepers. (Brian)

Being a model during independent reading does not necessarily result in kids thinking you are a reader. As you can see, kids are much more astute; when you share your enthusiasm for reading and love of books they know you are a reader.

How Does R 5 Fit Into a Comprehensive Literacy Block?

**ANSWER**: One of the main goals of R 5 is to give students slightly scaffolded practice using the reading strategies that have been taught during direct instruction. Although it informs your teaching, R 5 is not direct instruction-it is supported independent practice which can be used with any reading curriculum.

R 5 was originally designed to give readers guided practice as they gain independent use of a reading strategy. It is a defining piece in our Metacognitive Teaching Framework (MTF), which follows an "I do, we do, you do" apprenticeship model (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2007). MTF units begin with explicit teacher modeling of a cognitive reading strategy (for example, visualizing), then instruction moves to other whole- and small-group strategy lessons and finally to independent strategy use (literature circles and R 5 ). Because you cannot guarantee or even assess whether or not students make this final step to independent use, some form of in-school structured and monitored independent practice is necessary. This is where R 5 comes in, regardless of the reading series or program used at your school. It gives students time to practice, with varying amounts of teacher scaffolding depending on student need, as well as peer modeling and support. Teacher support comes in the form of noticing and recording what students read and individual conferences. Peer modeling occurs as students read and relax as well as when they rap with partners and share with the whole class.

R 5 takes about half an hour and should be done two to three times a week for optimal benefit. In a typical 90-minute reading block, you might spend 30 - 35 minutes on R, 20-30 minutes on direct, whole-group reading instruction, and 30-40 minutes in small groups. In class you will get to watch R 5 in action and try it.

How I Know R 5 Works

* Helps student engage in reading
* Provides structured, supported reading practice
* Improves reading proficiency
* Enhances metacognitive awareness
* Supports wide reading
* Promotes social interaction
* Develops active listening

Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2007