Fluency, whether in oral or silent reading, is “reading like you talk.” The single best way to develop fluency is by having students do repeated readings of easy text. In doing so, they learn to say the words quickly and in ways that reflect the meaning.

While comprehension is a major factor in fluency (see Example 23), fluency also requires quick, accurate recognition of words on the page. Miscalling look-alike words causes breaks in fluency. If there are too many breaks, reading no longer “sounds like talk.”

Students reading at the second-, third-, or fourth-grade levels sometimes miscall look-alike words, especially the “glue” words in English such as then and when or that and what. Even though students have previously learned each of these words as a sight word, they sometimes say another word that looks like it when reading text. They may self-correct the miscue, but too many of these self-corrections can hinder fluency.

Such miscues usually signal a visual discrimination problem. That is, the reader is not examining words for the visual differences that distinguish one from another. The miscue is often a result of not becoming proficient at visually discriminating among visual symbols at the emergent literacy phase of development (see also Example 16).
Quickly recognizing look-alike words is a skill, not a strategy. We want students to do it instantly and automatically; we do not want them taking a lot of time to figure it out.

**How Will You Know You Need to Teach Quick Recognition of Look-Alike Words?**

*The situation:* When reading text, students frequently miscall similar-looking words (such as saying *there* for *where* or *then* for *when* or *was* for *saw*).

*The data you collect:* Note which words are consistently miscalled during reading.

**Explaining the Forest as Well as the Trees**

Big understandings that you might need to explain when teaching look-alike words:

- That meaning getting is the focus of reading.
- That what authors write should usually be said in the way the author intended.
- That mixing up words makes it difficult to make the text sound "like you talk."
- That fluent reading requires knowing virtually all the words at sight.

**KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING**

This example assumes a group of third-grade readers. They are working on orally reading poetry in fluent, expressive ways for presentation at a local hospital. In previous observations of their reading, it was observed that they frequently mix up words such as *there* and *where*. Today they are going to read "I Met a Man I Could Not See," a poem in John Ciardi’s book *I Met a Man* (Houghton Mifflin, 1961). This poem contains the words *where* and *there*.

**Quick Recognition of Look-Alike Words**

**The Student's Objective**

By the end of this lesson you will be able to read a poem and say the look-alike words *where* and *there* quickly and fluently, and you will be able to tell how you distinguished one word from the other.

**What Is the "Secret" to Doing It?**

Students must:

- Note the visual differences that distinguish one look-alike word from another (e.g., to quickly recognize *where* and *there*, the secret is to note the *wh* and the *th* that differentiate one word from the other).

**LESSON INTRODUCTION**

Say something like:

"I've noticed that you sometimes mix up words that look alike, such as *where* and *there*. It's hard to tell these apart because they look so much alike. By the end of today's lesson, you will be able to quickly say the look-alike words *where* and *there* when you are reading John Ciardi’s poem titled ‘I Met a Man I Could Not See.’ The secret to being able to do this is to look at what makes these words different, not what makes them alike. By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to read Ciardi’s poem without mixing these words up.”
MODELING THE THINKING

Say something like:

“Before we begin reading, let me show you how I quickly recognize these words. The trick to doing this is to look at how the words are different, not how the words are alike. So when I come up against these words, I say to myself, ‘These words look alike because they all have -ere in them. But the way to tell them apart is to look for what is different. If the -ere starts with wh I know it is where. If the -ere word starts with th I know it is there. What I have to think about is what letters distinguish one word from another. When I come to these -ere words in my reading I have to look quickly at the word to see if it starts with th (in which case it will be there) or with wh (in which case it will be where).”

SCAFFOLDED ASSISTANCE

Example 1: Extensive Teacher Help

Say something like:

“I’m going to give you some practice on telling these words apart before we read John Ciardi’s poem. I have two cards, each with a sentence written on it. One sentence has where in it and the other has there in it, with the wh and the th underlined in red to help you tell them apart. I am going to show the cards to you. What I want you to do is to look quickly at the sentence, say it, and tell me how you knew whether the word was where or there.”

Example 2: Less Teacher Help

Say something like:

“Now I’m going to show different sentences to you without underlining the where or there words to help you. You are going to have to say the words without that help this time. When I show the card, say the sentence quickly, and tell me how you knew the word was there or where.”

Example 3: No Teacher Help

Say something like:

“Now I’m going to make it still harder. I’m going to show you sentence strips, but these are really hard because they have both where and there in them. When I show you the sentence strip, read the sentence fluently, and then tell me how you knew there was there and where was where.”

APPLICATION IN READING

This example illustrates how you could teach a skill first and then apply it in a selection. When the students demonstrate both instant recognition of there and where and can state how they tell the two words apart when they encounter them in print, they then read the Ciardi poem. Ultimately this skill would be applied when students make their presentations at the local hospital. Subsequently the teacher would ensure that the skill is used in other real reading situations.

Adapting This Example to Other Situations

This example assumes a third-grade situation. You would not normally teach this lesson to students reading at less than a second-grade level because they possess relatively few sight words, and reading with intonation and phrasing is still very new to them. Consequently, teachers will teach this skill to first graders only when, in their professional judgment, students have adequate prior experience with both the words and with intonation.

It is not unusual, however, to discover a need to teach this skill in grades above second grade. Even some middle school students miscall look-alike words. In cases where fluency is hampered, this example can be adapted and used. The “secret” remains the same, but text that is appropriate to the students’ age should be used.
EXAMPLE 23

Intonation and Phrasing

Fluency is not speed reading. In speed reading, words are skipped and the reader skims and scans the material as quickly as possible. There is no concern with how it sounds. In contrast, fluent reading, whether oral or silent, is reading of the text with the proper phrasing and intonation. That is, the text is read smoothly and with meaning.

When readers read with intonation and phrasing, they understand what the author was intending to convey, and say it the way the author intended that it be said. In this sense, fluency is not only a matter of knowing the words at sight; it is also a matter of comprehending the material accurately.

This balance between instant word recognition and appropriate phrasing is an important part of becoming a good reader. One seldom learns to enjoy reading until these dual aspects of fluency are experienced.

How Will You Know You Need to Teach Intonation and Phrasing?

The situation: Even though students know all the words in the text at sight, they read in a monotone, or they use inappropriate intonation and phrasing.

The data you collect: In oral reading, ask students to read a selection in the way the author intended for it to be said, or, in silent reading, ask students to describe the feeling the author was conveying.
Explaning the Forest as Well as the Trees

Big understandings you might need to explain when teaching intonation and phrasing:

- That fluency requires that each word be read instantly, or at sight.
- That the author is conveying a message, and that the text should be read as the author would say it.

KEEPING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING

This example is set in a fourth grade, and the class is involved in a poetry-writing project. The teacher has been developing the concept of poetry as a form of personal writing by which individuals gain insight into themselves, their thoughts, and their feelings. Students are given the option of sharing their poems with the class.

To aid in developing an understanding of poetry as personal understanding, the teacher has been reading poetry selections from *Salting the Ocean: 100 Poems by Young Poets*, by Naomi Shihab Nye (Greenwillow Books, 2000). She has used these as examples of poetry that develop insights into self while also modeling for students appropriate phrasing and intonation. She now wants to use this background information to help the students read their own poems with intonation and phrasing. While the immediate application is an oral reading situation, she also wants students to use proper phrasing and intonation in their silent reading, especially when reading poetry.

The Student’s Objective

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to read your own poems, both orally and silently, in ways that communicate the emotion and feeling you wish to convey, and you will be able to state why you decided to read each one as you did.

Intonation and Phrasing

What Is the “Secret” to Doing It?

Students must:

- Know what meaning or feeling is to be conveyed.
- Emphasize with the voice the words that convey that meaning or feeling.

LESSON INTRODUCTION

Say something like:

“We have been reading a lot of poems from *Salting the Ocean*, in which young poets express strong meaning and feelings, and you have been writing your own poems in which you have been trying to convey personal feelings that have real meaning and feeling for you. In reading the poems in *Salting the Ocean*, I have tried to model for you how good readers read poetry in ways that convey the feeling the author intended. If you have a poem you decide to share with the class, you will also want to read it in a way that conveys the meaning and feeling you intend. So, today I am going to show you how to do this. The secret is to think about what feeling you want to convey and then to emphasize with your voice certain parts so that the meaning you want is conveyed to the listener (or to yourself, if you are reading silently).”

MODELING THE THINKING

Say something like:

“Let me show you how to do this. Let’s start with an example like this sentence:

I don’t care what you say.”
"Depending on the way you say it, this one sentence can convey six different meanings or feelings, like this:

1. I don't care what you say.
2. I don't care what you say.
3. I don't care what you say.
4. I don't care what you say.
5. I don't care what you say.
6. I don't care what you say.

"Is it important which way I say it? Yes, because I convey different meaning when I emphasize different words. Do I mean I don't care? Or do I mean that I don't care what you say (but I might care what someone else says)? Or do I mean that I don't care what you say (but I might care what you think)?

"The secret to knowing how to say it is to think of the situation being described and then think about what I know about that situation. I decide what words to emphasize according to what my experience tells me about that situation.

"Let's say I am writing a poem about getting up on Monday morning to go to school. I think about how I feel about getting up and going to school on Monday mornings. If I love school and am conveying the meaning that I can't wait to get to school, I read it so that it sounds cheery and bright. But if I hate getting up on Monday morning and going to school, I read it in a much more dreary, dragging kind of voice. Reading your poems fluently means that you not only read all the words but also say those words in ways that communicate the feeling and meaning you want."

SCAFFOLDED ASSISTANCE

Example 1: Extensive Teacher Help
Say something like:

"Let's do an example together. Let's say I had written this poem:

The cemetery at midnight
Was dark and shadowy

With ghosts flitting here
And there,
And I was alone.

"If I am going to read this with a voice that conveys an appropriate meaning, I have to first think about what I know about cemeteries at midnight and the feeling that comes with being out there with ghosts. Think about your experiences. How would you feel? Would you read this with a cheery, happy voice? Or with a deeper, mysterious voice? Yes, you would probably want to read it with a deep, mysterious voice, because that is the meaning you want to convey."

Example 2: Less Teacher Help
Say something like:

"Now let's see if you can do one with less help from me. Let's say you were going to read two poems. One is a poem about flowers blooming in the spring and new hope in the world. The other is about the pain and fear of being a soldier in a war. Would you read them both the same way? No, of course not. First you would decide what meaning or feeling you wanted to convey. What feeling do you want to convey in the poem of flowers and new hope? Yes, that's an upbeat feeling, and probably you would read that in a bright and cheery voice if you were trying to convey an upbeat meaning. Is that the same feeling you'd want to convey in the poem about soldiers in war? Probably not. So how might you read that poem to convey a meaning that was appropriate for conveying fear and pain?"

Example 3: No Teacher Help
Say something like:

"Now try to use what you have learned without any help from me. I am going to show you some short poems from Salting the Ocean. Read each poem to yourself, decide what meaning you want to convey and how you need to say it to convey that feeling. Then
you can read it to us, and tell us how you decided to read it with
the intonation and phrasing you used.”

**APPLICATION IN READING**

In this example what was learned will be applied when students share
the poems they have written. However, students should be reminded
to read with intonation and phrasing in other silent and oral reading
situations, as well.

**Adapting This Example to Other Situations**

This lesson was set in a fourth-grade poetry unit in which stu­
dents applied what they learned about intonation and phrasing to
the poems they had written themselves. However, intonation and
phrasing can be learned at any level and applied to a variety of text.
For instance, first graders reading Bill Martin Jr.’s *Chicka Chicka
Boom Boom* (Scholastic, 1989) can decide what intonation and
phrasing would be appropriate when D says, “Wheel! I’ll beat you
to the top of the coconut tree.” And seventh graders reading Louis
Sachar’s *Holes* (Dell Yearling, 1998) can decide what intonation and
phrasing would be appropriate when Mr. Sir talks to Stanley on his
first day at Camp Green Lake. The example provided here can be
adapted and used to explain intonation and phrasing in those situa­
tions.

**HOW WILL YOU KNOW THE LESSON
HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL?**

You will know the lesson has been successful if, in oral reading, stu­
dents use intonation and phrasing appropriate to the meaning and
feeling in the text or if, in silent reading, students are able to describe
the meaning and feeling being conveyed.

**APPLICATION IN WRITING**

Intonation and phrasing are applicable in writing because writers
give readers clues regarding what intonation and phrasing to use. For
instance, a writer might say a character “whined,” or that the character
“screamed,” or that the character was “shy.” These are clues regard­
ing what intonation and phrasing the reader should use. Encouraging
young writers to include such clues when composing their own stories
will help them be aware of using similar clues when they are reading
text written by others.