



Audio support and your literacy programme

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Do you use audio texts in your literacy programme?

Audio-assisted reading has proven to have huge benefits for struggling readers and English language learners – and it's also useful across all year levels. It's a literacy boost that supports the development of reading fluency and comprehension.

Of course, you probably already read aloud to your class, but in this case we're talking about recorded audio texts your students can listen to as they read.

In this article, I want to highlight benefits of audio texts, give you a few tips on what to look for in an audio recording, and point you in the direction of some great audio-assisted resources.

Why should I use audio texts in my literacy programme?

There's a lot of research that proves audio-assisted reading improves not just the reading skills of struggling readers and ELL students, but all readers.

Why? Audio texts **model good reading**.

Having an audio recording provides a model for how fluent reading sounds, and it demonstrates accuracy, pronunciation, pace, expression and phrasing – which students can then emulate.

Audio also gives students access to more difficult material than they might otherwise be able to read, allowing them to focus on meaning and comprehension rather than simply decoding what they see.

Audio texts:

- Assist teachers in catering for a range of skill levels (both reading skills and English language skills) and interests.
- Allow students to learn subject matter across the curriculum at an age-appropriate level.
- Scaffold students as they hear and read new vocabulary in context.
- Develop student's skills in questioning, visualising, making inferences, determining important ideas and synthesising information.
- Provide supported practice in thinking about text in important ways at an age-appropriate level (rather than simply their reading level).
- Let students experience success in reading – motivating otherwise disinterested, reluctant, or nervous students.
- Create an expectation in students that reading makes sense.

What should I look/listen for in an audio recording?

Audio-assisted reading can lead to significant improvement in reading performance, but it helps to pay careful attention to a few factors.

For instance, across the audio recordings you use, make sure you have a range of both male and female voices, so students have the opportunity to get used to both models.

Criteria for good audio recordings:

- The reading is a real human who reads fluently with good prosody (patterns of rhythm and patterns of stress and intonation).
- The reader pauses at punctuation so readers can follow along.
- The pace of reading on the recording varies and is appropriate for a specific age group.
- The recording is professionally produced – that means it has a clear sound (uncluttered by distracting noises) and has been carefully checked for accuracy.

How should I use audio texts in my reading programme?

All students can benefit from listening to an audio recording of a book – but it's particularly rewarding for readers who are reluctant or struggling, readers who read below their age level, readers who aren't fluent or are nervous, and English language learners.

Have groups of students listen to an audio recording together at a listening station (installed or portable), or have individual students listen to the audio recording on a personal CD player, mp3 player, or computer.

One listen of a recording is often enough to render the text accessible to students, especially if they follow along with the text as they listen. If it's not, give students the opportunity to revisit the text along with the audio support.

Audio texts and repeated reading are a great combination. A study by the Centre for the improvement of Early Reading Achievement (2000) examined assisted and unassisted forms of repeated reading practice (repeated reading with and without audio support), and found clear differences in favour of having a recorded model to assist with the text. Students should have enough repeated practice that they become fluent, but aren't 'learning it off by heart'.

Audio resources for your classroom

Rainbow Reading

The Rainbow Reading programme was developed according to a set of research-proven guidelines, and the recordings incorporate an evidence-based recommended procedure, including orientation, repeated listening, independent reading, conferencing, feedback and educational activities focusing on comprehension.

The texts are Hi-Lo: high-interest, low readability. That means they're complex, engaging topics, but they can be read by students with low reading ability. They're also short 3–6 minute reads that can be read several times in a 30-minute session.

The best feature? Audio is provided on a novel, easy-to-use “magic” reading pen, which students find really motivating. Students can even monitor themselves as they read through the ‘record’ function on the reading pen.

CSI Literacy

CSI Literacy kits are an evidence-based resource for teaching reading comprehension strategies to your whole class.

There's a shared reading component which often includes audio cues, but there's also a co-operative learning component, where each text is accompanied by audio. In pairs, students read a text with audio assistance.

Ministry of Education Instructional Series

The Ministry of Education understands that literacy instruction for a beginning reader starts with a rich framework of language experience and being read to, so audio support is provided across the Instructional Series.

Each title in the Ready to Read series is supported with audio, as are the stories from the School Journal Story Library. Selected texts from the Junior Journal and Level 2 School Journal are also available. The audio for each book or journal item, along with teacher support material, can be found at TKI Literacy Online.

About the author

Meryl-Lynn Pluck is the founder of Rainbow Reading, an audio-assisted reading programme for students with literacy needs. Originally a Resource Teacher of Reading in Nelson, New Zealand, Meryl-Lynn trained under Reading Recovery pioneer Marie Clay.

Developed in 1993, Rainbow Reading is now used throughout New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.