

To the Teacher

Rapid Reading Practices consists of 100 timed word practices. These practices cover words at four levels: basic, beginning, intermediate, and advanced. All readers can benefit from word recognition practice with even the most basic words because our goal is to increase readers' automaticity. Reading speed is dependent on how rapidly, or automatically, readers are able to recognize words, but learners are rarely given opportunities to practice word automaticity. Lack of vocabulary knowledge is a problem across all skill areas but is especially apparent in ESL reading. Eskey (1988) found that not being able to recognize the meaning of English words automatically causes students who are good readers in their native language to do excessive guesswork in the second language and that this guessing slows down the process of reading.

Of all the language skills, reading proficiency varies more from learner to learner. All students can improve their reading proficiency, including reading rate, and consistent and plentiful practice is essential. To maximize learners' improvement in reading rate, teachers must ensure that each learner completes all 100 of the practice exercises in this book. We recommend that learners do three to five exercises per day. Such a reading regimen means that this book will last 20 to 30 class meetings.

Improving Reading Speed

After general reading comprehension, perhaps the most serious problem encountered by developing readers is reading speed or reading rate. This might be true for many reasons. The most likely culprit here is students' lack of reading automaticity—that is, their inability to recognize discrete vocabulary items rapidly. When readers are forced to decode a frequent word every time they encounter it, they waste valuable time and cognition that could be devoted to reading comprehension instead of mere word recognition. Practicing automaticity allows readers to free up cognition that can be dedicated to higher-order thinking skills in reading.

Good readers have good vocabulary knowledge. While neither “causes” the other, we know that they are intricately related. Students must work toward expanding their vocabulary knowledge through explicit practice with words and through both intensive and extensive reading. Low reading rates could be due to the tendency of some readers to fixate too long on unknown words instead of continuing to attempt the reading. The timed word selection exercises will work on this problem.

Book Organization

- The **basic level** consists of Exercises 1–25, which include words from the Dolch List.
- The **beginning level** consists of Exercises 26–40, which include very frequent words.
- The **intermediate level** consists of Exercises 41–70, which include frequent words.
- The **advanced level** consists of Exercises 71–100, which include words from the Academic Word List (AWL).

Exercises 1–25 (Basic Level) include words from the Dolch List. These 25 exercises have been arranged by pre-primer (Exercises 1–5), primer (Exercises 6–10), first grade (Exercises 11–15), second grade (Exercises 16–20), and third grade (Exercises 21–25). However, the use of *grade* here is not meant to imply that these words are necessary for children only; rather this use relates to level to help adults who need to improve automaticity.

The Dolch List was prepared by E.W. Dolch in 1936. The words in this list are high-frequency words that make up from 50 to 75 percent of the reading material in English in U.S. elementary schools. Because these words are so important to basic reading, all learners—not just children—need to recognize them automatically; hence, they are often called **sight words**. These words cannot be learned through use of pictures (there are no concrete nouns on the list); children must be able to recognize these words at a glance before they can read confidently. By the end of third grade, all English-speaking students should be able to recognize the 220 words on the Dolch List.

Exercises 26–70 practice frequently encountered words, including many words from the General Service List (GSL) (West 1953). The GSL is a list of 2,000 words whose frequency of occurrence make them of the greatest service to learners, hence the name for this list. The General Service List was widely used for years in designing content of graded readers and other learning materials. Exercises 26–40 (Beginning Level) practice words of higher frequency than those in Exercises 41–70 (Intermediate Level).

Exercises 71–100 (Advanced Level) practice advanced words from the Academic Word List (AWL). The 570 word families in the AWL (Coxhead 1998, 2000) were chosen through a rigorous selection process in which the words had to occur in more than half of the 28 subject areas in the academic corpus of 3,500,000 words from which the word families were pulled. In addition, words had to occur more than 100 times in the corpus, and words had to occur at least ten times in each of the subject areas. These guidelines produced a list of words that are useful for the widest possible range of both native and non-native learners of English. In reflecting the academic nature of this list, the AWL does not include any of the word families occurring in the General Service List.

A Comparison of Word Lists		
List	Words	Notes
Dolch List	220 sight words that elementary school children must be able to recognize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared in 1936 • Based on frequency • Mostly function words; does not include concrete words • Useful in K–3 reading materials
General Service List	2,000 words that are of general service to learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published in 1953 • Based on frequency
Academic Word List	570 word families that occur in a variety of academic text materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published in 1998 • Based on frequency • Only words that occur in many different types of academic material

From *Vocabulary Myths: Applying Second Language Research to Classroom Teaching* (p. 42), by Keith S. Folse, 2004, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Timed Word Selection Exercises

In these exercises, students must read a word or group of words to the left and then find that same answer in a group of five options that look similar. For example, the students must circle the words *two* in the first example, *for you and* in the second, and *then she* in the last.

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|----------------|--|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. two | | the | two | ten | too | twin |
| 2. for you and | | for me and | for us and | for him and | for her and | for you and |
| 3. then she | | then he | when she | then she | when he | then we |

The goals of these exercises are to train students' eye movements in a left-to-right pattern and to provide practice recognizing similarly shaped letters and letter combinations. The four distractors contain letters that have similar shapes such as *b* and *d* or *ei* and *ie* and are therefore confusing to learners.

To improve reading speed, these exercises should be timed, thus encouraging students to work as rapidly as possible. It is recommended that teachers give students **30 seconds** to complete the 25 items in these exercises. Students should then correct their answers. Since it is difficult for students to catch their own errors in this kind of proofreading exercise, it is recommended that students exchange exercises and check each other's work to ensure accurate correcting. For each incorrect answer, students lose one correct answer. This penalty will encourage students to work carefully as well as rapidly. Afterward, students should record the number of correct answers on their progress charts (see pages 103–8). The maximum number of correct items per exercise is 25, so students scores could range from 0 to 25. However, actual classroom use of these materials shows that most students achieve an initial score of 14 to 20 items from the very beginning of the program, and scores gradually increase to near 25. Even when students may appear to have peaked, the consistent and plentiful practice will reinforce reading rate improvement.

In Exercises 1–70, the focus is on short, very frequent words. To improve automaticity, readers need to practice recognizing these words individually as well as in combination with other words. To this end, the 25 items in Exercises 1–70 contain 15–17 single words (e.g., *say*) and 8–10 multi-word items of two words (e.g., *I say*) or three words (e.g., *to live with*). Some multi-word items represent obvious units from a sentence (e.g., *one of the* or *He took the*), but other phrases that may appear less transparent are actually parts of a real sentence (e.g., *any in*, as in “The police searched for the money, but they did not find *any in* the vault”).

In Exercises 71–100, the words from the Academic Word List are much longer and are therefore practiced individually. These 30 exercises contain 750 target words (to the left of the vertical line). The AWL arranges words in frequency bands from 1 (very frequent) to 10 (frequent). Words from Band 1 appear as target words five times. Words from Band 2 appear as target words four times. Words from Bands 3, 4, and 5 appear as target words one time. A small number of words from Band 6 were chosen to complete the 750 target words. However, all AWL words appear in the distractors to the right of the vertical line. Thus, learners will have to interact with all of the AWL words in these automaticity drills.

To be certain, reading rate is an important reading skill, but reading depends on a host of skills. For practice with a wider array of reading skills, including reading rate at both the word and the paragraph level, teachers should look at the third edition of *Intermediate Reading Practices* (Folse, 2004b) and *Beginning Reading Practices* (Folse, 1996).