Florida Center for Reading Research
Failure Free Reading

What is Failure Free Reading?

Failure Free Reading is an intervention/remedial program designed for the lowest performing (bottom 15 percent) readers in grades 1-12. The program can be taught by certified and non-certified individuals. It lends itself to use in a regular classroom, extended day program, resource room, pull-out program, or lab setting. Lessons are 45-60 minutes in length and can be taught in a one-to-one or small group format. The goal of the program is to improve sight vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension skills.

Failure Free Reading is composed of Evaluation Description Language (EDL) Core Vocabulary (Taylor, Frackenpohl, White, Nieroroda, Browning, & Birsner, 1989) and includes four color-coded instructional levels: red (readability levels 1.2-2.9), green (readability levels 1.6-4.6), orange (readability levels 2.3-5.6), and teal (readability levels 6.1-9.7). Although part of the program is implemented by the teacher, a large portion requires technology that utilizes talking software lessons and print reinforcement activities. The program has two parts, the instructional component and the independent component. The instructional component contains a series of sequential instructional presentations delivered through a five-step process that involves a pretest, an oral guided lesson, computer guided instruction, print-based activities, and a post-test/comprehension test. In addition, an instructional procedure for previewing, listening, presenting, reading, and reviewing is included. The independent component includes age-appropriate, decodable text delivered via the Joseph's Readers Talking Software, *Failure Free Reading's* technology component that includes an audio presentation of text. The independent component also includes print reinforcement exercises (e.g., matching, word illustration, sentence illustration, sentence unscramble, and alphabetical order).

The teacher materials consist of a scripted Teacher's Manual to provide direct instruction, Talking Software that includes age-appropriate student readers that students can navigate by themselves, a Talking Software User's Manual that explains technical logistics for installation, an Instructional Reader Booklet that contains exact text from the student readers, an Independent Activities Binder which includes reproducible blackline masters, a Parent Communication Packet, Flash Cards for student practice, and Criterion Reference and Screening Tests to ensure accuracy of student placement within the program. Student materials consist of workbooks that contain reading comprehension questions, cloze procedure exercises, and scrambled sentences. In addition, Instructional Readers that contain stories with simple sentences and text structure are included.

Assessment for *Failure Free Reading* consists of placement, fluency, and comprehension tests. The placement test provides a lexile score that establishes an instructional level for each student. The fluency and comprehension tests provide continual student progress monitoring for teachers throughout the program. It is important to note that students in the *Failure Free Reading program are placed at* their Frustration Level (Challenge Level according to the program) during the pretest instead of their Instructional Reading Level.

The premise for this is that the program's design provides such high impact instruction by scaffolding, repetition, reinforcement, and monitoring that the student is able to perform successfully at this level.

How is Failure Free Reading Aligned with Current Reading Research?

The goal of *Failure Free Reading* is to build fluency, comprehension, and sight vocabulary. Therefore, phonemic awareness and phonics instruction are not emphasized. *Failure Free Reading* is different from many intervention programs in that it was designed to improve the word level reading skills of struggling readers without explicitly and systematically teaching phonics. It focuses on improving reading ability by providing reading practice to build students' sight vocabulary as a means to fluent reading.

The National Reading Panel (2000) concluded that guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels. The research-based strategy of repetition is utilized in *Failure Free Reading* via the Joseph Talking Software. The software models prosody for the student prior to the student reading the text. After the story is read, the software reads each comprehension question to the student and if the student answers incorrectly, the program will not advance to the next screen. Instead, the question is repeatedly provided for the student until the right answer is selected.

In *Failure Free Reading*, comprehension is monitored using questioning. In each lesson, comprehension questions are asked immediately after the story is read aloud by the teacher. Evaluation questions are posed so that students expand on the ideas presented in the text. An oral cloze procedure is provided to assess students' understanding of previously read text. Vocabulary is presented in the program as a prerequisite to comprehension. Sight and content vocabulary are explicitly and systematically taught within each lesson. In particular, a key vocabulary section is included in each reading passage. Listening, reading, and speaking vocabularies are addressed in the format of the daily lesson. Students are provided with multiple opportunities to work with new words by spelling words, reading words/sentences, and writing words/sentences. Previously introduced words and paragraphs are reviewed cumulatively over several lessons.

Professional Development is provided at an additional cost to the purchase of the curriculum. An on-site workshop is available in two three-hour teacher sessions with an additional one-hour session provided for administrators. *Failure Free Reading* offers on-site follow-up visits. Schools can also purchase a train-the-trainer package (T3 model) that delivers certification in the *Failure Free Reading* methodology. In addition, training tapes, CD-ROM, and web-based asynchronous (no timing requirement for transmission between computers) training, and product updates are offered.

Research Support for Failure Free Reading

Failure Free Reading was developed in 1988 with additions and revisions taking place in 1992 and 1996. The revised version that is described in this report was made available in 2000. The instructional design of the program utilizes repetition, text control, and immediate corrective feedback while integrating teacher, text, and technology. Its design draws from the research of Sandra McCormick (1994), Charles Hargis (1982), Jane Braunger & Jan Lewis (1997), and Elfrieda Hiebert (1998).

Specifically, McCormick's work substantiates the use of repetition as a catalyst to increase achievement in vocabulary development. Hargis' work confirms the need to teach sentence structure to struggling readers. Braunger and Lewis' work authenticates the importance of interpretable story content as it relates to prior knowledge. Hiebert's work validates the use of controls within the program: abundant graphical information, meaningful story content, and simplified sentence structure.

One study, using *Failure Free Reading* to supplement instruction, was conducted in two suburban schools with 58 third and fourth graders (Lockavitch & Algozzine, 1998). Students received instruction in the program with a teacher trained in the *Failure Free Reading* program. Students were randomly assigned to the *Failure Free Reading* or to a control group that did not receive the *Failure Free* instruction. At pretest and end-of-year post-test, students were administered a 10-item silent reading screening test to assess reading comprehension, as well as a 30-item word-recognition measure. At post-test, students who had received the *Failure Free* instruction scored significantly higher on the tests of word recognition and comprehension. These results indicate that the instructional components of *Failure Free Reading* are sufficiently powerful to produce gains in reading beyond those typically experienced by struggling readers in late elementary school.

Another study was conducted at 27 (18 elementary, six intermediate, three high schools) suburban schools in the southwest (Rankhorn, England, Collins, Lockavitch and Algozzine, 1998). It examined the effects of teaching word recognition and comprehension skills using *Failure Free Reading* to 39 students with severe reading problems. Students were randomly selected from the lowest reading groups (two or more years below grade level) and their ability was measured by the Weschsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R). Their reading achievement was measured using the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement. A discrepancy score was calculated by taking the difference between students' ability (WISC-R) and their achievement (WJ) scores for pretest and post-test. Results showed that, on average, students gained from 9 to 18 months in reading ability during the year. Discrepancies between intellectual ability and reading achievement decreased in more than half of the students in all areas tested. A control, or comparison group was not used in this study.

To conclude, the instructional content and design of *Failure Free Reading* is consistent with many findings from current research. However, it does depart from current research and theory in reading in that it does not attempt to teach phonemic decoding skills to students who are struggling with reading accuracy and fluency. Existing empirical research, however, provides at least a moderate level of support for the program as an intervention program to increase reading fluency and comprehension. Currently, *Failure Free Reading* is one of four reading programs being utilized in the Power4Kids Initiative, which is a randomized field trial of intervention methods for struggling readers in grades 3 and 5. The design of this study will provide important new information about the effectiveness of each of the methods in the study and will examine their relative effectiveness when compared to one another.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Failure Free Reading*:
- Modeling and progress monitoring are utilized throughout the program.
- Immediate corrective feedback is given to students.
- Repetition and cumulative review are consistent throughout the program.
- Spanish directions and definitions are provided to help English Language Learners.
- Typically, students are independently engaged for 45 to 50 minutes of the 60 minute instructional period, freeing the instructor to monitor and guide as needed.
- Minimal teacher preparation is required, enabling teachers, assistants, or tutors to implement the lessons.

Weaknesses of *Failure Free Reading*:
- Comprehension strategies are not explicitly taught.
- When students answer comprehension questions incorrectly, scaffolding (in terms of providing a cue to help them determine the correct answer on their own) is not provided.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Failure Free Reading?

District	Phone	District	Phone
Alachua	352-955-7880	Jackson	850-482-1200
Bay	850-872-7700	Jefferson	850-342-0100
Brevard	321-633-1000 ext. 402	Lake	352-253-6510
Broward	754-321-2600	Leon	850-487-7147
Charlotte	941-255-0808	Levy	352-486-5231
Citrus	352-726-1931	Manatee	941-708-8770
Collier	239-377-0212	Marion	352-671-7702
Columbia	386-755-8000	Martin	772-219-1200
Dade	305-995-1428	Monroe	305-293-1400
DeSoto	863-494-4222	Okaloosa	850-833-3109
Duval	904-390-2115	Okeechobee	863-462-5000
Escambia	850-469-6130	Orange	407-317-3202
Franklin	850-653-8831 ext. 102	Osceola	407-870-4008
Gadsden	850-627-0401	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Glades	863-946-2083	Polk	863-534-0521
Gulf	850-229-8256	Putnam	386-329-0510
Hamilton	386-792-1228	St. Johns	904-819-7502
Hendry	863-674-4642	St. Lucie	772-429-3925
Hernando	352-797-7001	Sumter	352-793-2315
Highlands	863-471-5564	Suwannee	386-364-2604
Hillsborough	813-272-4022	Volusia	386-734-7190
Holmes	850-547-9341	Washington	850-638-6222

For More Information

www.failurefree.com

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