

Aim to Read a Chapter a Day: How Silent Reading Rates Inform Daily Reading

By Sarah Collinge



Last month Peter explored the topic of time in his blog article, How Much Time Should Intermediate Classrooms Devote to Reading Instruction? He recommended 90-minutes of reading a day, with 45-minutes of that time devoted to silent reading and responding. To continue the theme of time, we will explore the topic of silent reading fluency and how much time students need to complete a chapter of reading a day!

A Chapter a Day!

Walk into a middle-grade classroom during the silent reading time, and you are likely to see every student nose-down in a chapter book! There is something appealing about picking up the next book in the *Magic Treehouse*, *Percy Jackson*, or *Hunger Games* series that excites students at this age level. But just because students are choosing to read chapter books doesn't mean they are successful at reading them!

As it turns out, time is a big factor in successful chapter book reading. Reading in chunks or chapters helps readers keep the story in their head. Readers who read to the end of a chapter get to a natural stopping place. They can more easily pick up the book later and continue reading if their last stopping point was at the end of a chapter. When readers get interrupted in the middle of a chapter, it is harder for

them to remember what was happening in the book. They must take more time to recall what was already read before diving back into the reading. Some readers will wind up going back to the beginning of the chapter and starting again.

Knowing this, it is important for us as reading teachers to understand how much time is needed for our students to get to a natural stopping point in their reading and provide the necessary, uninterrupted time for silent reading in our classrooms.

To determine how much time is needed, we will look at the following data points:

- Average length of a chapter,
- Average oral reading and silent reading rates.

Average Length of a Chapter

Readers who are new to chapter book reading are still developing their ability to focus for extended periods and recall what was read. This is why chapter books for lower readers include shorter chapters, usually with wider margins and spacing, and a few illustrations to keep the reader engaged (think *Magic Treehouse*). As readers increase their stamina, skill, and memory, chapters become longer and include more words per page (think *Percy Jackson*).

The average length of a chapter by grade level:

Grade Level	Pages in a Chapter	Words in a Chapter
3 rd Grade	2-5	500-1,000
4 th Grade	4-7	1,000-1,500
5 th Grade	6-12	1,500-2,500
6 th Grade	8-15+	2,000-3,500+

These figures are general guidelines.

How Much Time is Needed to Finish a Chapter?

In 2006, Jan Hasbrouck and Gerald Tindal completed an extensive study of oral reading fluency rates for students in grades 1-8. The data collected in that study provides mean oral reading fluency rates and includes fall, winter, and spring benchmarks. To keep things simple, we will just look at the fall benchmarks for students at the 50th percentile in grades 3-6.

It is estimated that a student's silent reading rate is about 25% higher than their oral reading rate. The table below shows Hasbrouck and Tindal's benchmarks and uses that data to predict a student's silent reading rate and time needed to complete a grade-level chapter.

Grade Level	Oral Reading Rate (WCPM) 50 th Percentile Fall Benchmark	Silent Reading Rate 25% above	Minutes needed:
3 rd Grade	71	88	6-12
4 th Grade	94	117	9-13
5 th Grade	110	137	11-18
6 th Grade	127	158	13-22+

Implications

In third and fourth grade, students will need at least **15-minutes** of uninterrupted silent reading time to be able to finish reading a chapter in a grade-level text.

For 5th and 6th grades, students will need at least **20 minutes** of uninterrupted silent reading time to be able to finish reading a chapter in a grade-level text.

I recommend doubling these times if you are asking students to respond to the text after reading, either through discussion or writing.

Conclusion

Call me a nerd, but I think this data on silent reading rates is super helpful! Teachers can use this data to more accurately schedule reading times across the day, make recommendations for at-home reading, and help students with time management and goal setting.

I also hope this data will help *you* set aside time for meaningful silent reading in your own life! After all, the best reading teachers are readers themselves! Adults should aim to set aside about 12-20 minutes of reading a day to complete one chapter in a standard adult novel, or 20-40 minutes for technical books and classic literature. Have I inspired you? I hope so!

Happy Reading!

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About the author: Sarah is president and founder of Read Side by Side Publications, LLC, and author of the *Read Side by Side Reading Program*. Prior to this work, Sarah taught for 11 years in Title 1 schools, focusing her work on middle-grade literacy. Her classroom research and knowledge of best practices brings efficacy to her work.

References:

Hasbrouck, J., & Tindal, G. A. (2006). Oral Reading Fluency Norms: A Valuable Assessment Tool for Reading Teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 59, 636-644.

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