Fluency by Modality

When the mechanics run on their own, the mind is free to make meaning.

Fluency is not a reading word. In all four modalities it is the same thing: the mechanical layer running automatically, so attention is free for meaning. The skill has to become nearly **effortless** before there is room to think.

Reading

Fluent word reading is the price of admission to comprehension. When word recognition hums along behind conscious effort, the reader can think about the meaning of the words. Labor over decoding the words, and there is little mental space left to think with.

Writing

Fluent transcription frees the writer to compose. When handwriting and spelling are automatic, the mind can hold and shape ideas. A child forming letters one at a time will struggle to also hold a thought.

Listening

Fluent processing keeps pace with the speech we hear. The stream of language arrives in real time and will not wait, so the listener has to catch words and sort out language structure fast enough, or the words are gone before their meaning comes clear.

Speaking

Fluent retrieval of language clears the way for organizing a message's meaning. When words come smoothly and articulation is automatic, the speaker can attend to the message and to the listener. Groping for the next word compromises understanding for both.

Fluency is never the finish line. It is what frees the mind to reach it.

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