

Contest Rules of the 2018 Scripps National Spelling Bee

Rule 1: Eligibility

A speller qualifying for the 2018 Scripps National Spelling Bee (the Bee) must meet these requirements:

- (1) The speller must not previously have been declared champion of the Bee.
- (2) The speller must attend a school that is officially enrolled with the Bee.
- (3) The speller must not have passed beyond the eighth grade on or before February 1, 2018.
- (4) The speller must not have repeated any grade for the purpose of extending spelling bee eligibility. If the speller has repeated any grade, the speller must notify the Bee of the circumstances of grade repetition by April 16, 2018, and the Bee will, in its sole discretion, determine the speller's eligibility status on or before April 30, 2018.
- (5) The speller — or the speller's parent, legal guardian or school official acting on the speller's behalf — must not have declared to another entity an academic classification higher than eighth grade for any purpose including high school graduation equivalency or proficiency examinations and/or examinations such as the PSAT, SAT or ACT.
- (6) The speller must not have earned the legal equivalent of a high school diploma.
- (7) The speller must not bypass or circumvent normal school activity to study for spelling bees. The Bee defines normal school activity as adherence to at least four courses of study other than language arts, spelling, Latin, Greek, vocabulary and etymology for at least four hours per weekday for 34 of the 38 weeks between August 28, 2017, and May 21, 2018.
- (8) The speller must not have reached the age of 15 on or before August 31, 2017.
- (9) The speller must have been declared a champion of a final local spelling bee on or after February 1, 2018, or approved for participation through either RSVBee or the school self-sponsorship program.
- (10) The speller must not have any first-, second- or third-degree relatives (i.e., sibling, parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, half-sibling or first cousin) who are current employees of The E.W. Scripps Company.
- (11) The speller, upon qualifying for the Bee, must submit a completed online Champion Registration form, a signed Appearance Consent and Release Agreement, a signed Certification of Eligibility Form, a signed General Liability Waiver, and a photo to the Bee. The speller will notify the Bee, at least 24 hours prior to the first day of competition, if any of the statements made on the Certification of Eligibility Form are no longer true or require updating.

The Bee may disqualify prior to or during competition any speller who is not in compliance with any of the above Eligibility Requirements; and it may — at any time between the conclusion of the 2018 Scripps National Spelling Bee and April 30, 2019 — require any speller who is found to have not been in compliance with any of the Eligibility Requirements to forfeit any prizes, rank and other benefits accorded to the speller as a result of participation in the 2018 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

Rule 2: Preliminaries Format

The Preliminaries takes place on May 29 and 30 and is the first of two distinct segments of the competition, Preliminaries and Finals.

The Preliminaries consists of a multiple choice test (Preliminaries Test) administered Tuesday, May 29, at 8:00 a.m. EDT, one round of oral spelling onstage on Tuesday, May 29, between the hours of 9:15 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. EDT, and one round of oral spelling onstage on Wednesday, May 30, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. EDT. Spellers may earn up to 36 points during the Preliminaries: up to 30 points on the Preliminaries Test, three points for correctly spelling in Round Two and three points for correctly spelling in Round Three.

The Preliminaries Test has 26 multiple choice items divided in four sections, with spellers identifying their responses on Scantron test forms. A speller receives one point for each of the 12 items identified correctly in the Round One Spelling section, one point for each of the 12 items identified correctly in the Round One Vocabulary section, three points for a correct answer to the single item in the Round Two Vocabulary section, and three points for a correct answer to the single item in the Round Three Vocabulary section.

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During the afternoon of Wednesday, May 30, the Bee will email Preliminaries Test score reports to parents and spellers.

Eliminations: There are no immediate eliminations for providing an incorrect answer in the Preliminaries Test. Upon incorrectly spelling a word in Round Two or Three, the speller is eliminated from the competition. Spellers eliminated during Round Two are tied for the same place. Spellers eliminated during Round Three are tied for the same place. Immediately after Round Three, a “maximum of 50” standard is applied to remaining spellers’ scores accrued during the Preliminaries. Spellers’ scores are plotted on a chart. Beginning at 36 on the chart, spellers at each consecutive scoring level are added until a sum of no more than 50 spellers has been attained.

All remaining spellers are eliminated. All spellers eliminated after Round Three and before the start of the Finals are tied for the same place.

Rule 3: Finals Format

The Finals takes place on Thursday, May 31, and is the second of two distinct segments of the competition, Preliminaries and Finals.

The Finals consists of rounds of oral spelling beginning with Round Four and continuing, with breaks as the officials deem necessary, until a champion is declared, or co-champions are declared. The Finals also includes a Tiebreaker Test, which will be offered to all spellers remaining in the Finals at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 31. The Tiebreaker Test consists of 24 multiple choice items: 12 spelling and 12 vocabulary. Each correct response is worth one point.

All spellers who have not been eliminated from the competition spell one word in each round. Upon incorrectly spelling a word during an oral spelling round, the speller is eliminated from the competition, except as provided under “End-of-Bee Procedure” herein. All spellers eliminated in the same round are tied for the same place.

End-of-Bee Procedure: If all spellers in an oral spelling round misspell, all remain in the competition and a new round begins with the spellers spelling in their original order. If only one speller spells correctly in a round, a new one-word round begins and the speller is given an opportunity to spell the next word on the list (anticipated winning word). If the speller correctly spells the anticipated winning word in this one-word round, the speller is declared the champion. If the speller misspells the anticipated winning word in a one-word round, a new round begins with all the spellers who spelled correctly and incorrectly in the previous round: These spellers spell in their original order.

Round Limit and Provision for Declaration of Co-Champions: There will be no more than 25 consecutive rounds of oral spelling involving three or fewer spellers. At the end of a round when it is mathematically impossible for a single champion to emerge through oral spelling in subsequent rounds, the officials will disclose only the Tiebreaker Test scores of the spellers remaining in the competition. The speller remaining in the competition with the highest Tiebreaker Test score will be declared champion, and the ranking of the other remaining spellers will be determined by their Tiebreaker Test scores. If, however, there is a tie on the Tiebreaker Test among the remaining spellers, the spellers with the highest tying score will be declared co-champions.

Rule 4: Official Dictionary and Source of Words

Merriam-Webster Unabridged, available at <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com>, is the final authority and sole source for the spelling of words; the primary source used to craft the pronunciations, definitions and language origins for the Bee; and the only authority consulted by officials, as well as the sole source used during the Bee to verify the information in our prepared lists. If more than one spelling is listed for a word, any of these spellings will be accepted as correct if the following three criteria are met: (1) the pronunciations are identical, (2) the definitions are identical, and (3) the words are identified as being variants of each other. Spellings having temporal labels (such as *archaic*, *obsolete*), stylistic labels (such as *substand*, *nonstand*) or regional labels (such as *North*, *Midland*, *Irish*) that differ from main entry spellings not having these status labels will not be accepted as correct.

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Rule 5: Time

Constraints: During the Preliminaries Test and Tiebreaker Test, the speller may make or change responses on the test form during the time that the test is being administered by the pronouncer, and for 10 minutes afterward. During oral spelling rounds in the Preliminaries and Finals, the speller's time at the microphone has a limit of 2 minutes. Time begins when the pronouncer first pronounces the word. For the first 1 minute and 15 seconds, the speller will have the benefit of viewing a monitor displaying a green traffic light. After 1 minute and 15 seconds, the monitor will show a yellow traffic light and the time clock as it counts down to the 30-second mark. At the 30-second mark, the monitor will show a red traffic light and a countdown of the remaining 30 seconds. The judges and pronouncer will not communicate with the speller during the final 30 seconds. The judges will disqualify any speller who does not provide a complete spelling before the expiration of time (0 seconds). If the judges and pronouncer need to discuss a competition-related matter while a speller is contemplating a word, they may pause the time clock, and they will inform the speller when they pause and resume the time clock.

Schedule modifications: Bee officials may, in their sole discretion, announce schedule and/or location changes in response to unexpected circumstances.

Rule 6: Special Needs

The Bee strives to provide accommodation for spellers who have diagnosed medical conditions. All requests for accommodation of special needs should be directed in writing to the executive director of the Bee before May 1, 2018. The judges have discretionary power to amend spelling requirements on a case-by-case basis for spellers with diagnosed medical conditions.

Rule 7: Pronouncer's Role

The pronouncer strives to pronounce words according to the diacritical markings in Merriam-Webster Unabridged.

Homonyms: If a word has one or more homonyms, the pronouncer indicates which word is to be spelled by defining the word.

Speller's requests: In oral competition the pronouncer responds only to the speller's requests for repetition of the word's pronunciation, a definition, a sentence, part of speech, language(s) of origin and alternate pronunciation(s). When presented with requests for alternate pronunciations, the pronouncer or associate pronouncer checks for alternate pronunciations in Merriam-Webster Unabridged. If the speller wishes to ask if the dictionary lists a specific root word as the root of the word to be spelled, the speller must specify a pronunciation of the root (not a spelling), its language and its definition. The pronouncer will grant all such requests as long as they are in accordance with time constraints outlined in Rule 5.

Pronouncer's sense of helpfulness: The pronouncer may offer word information – without the speller having requested the information – if the pronouncer senses that the information is helpful and the information appears in the 2018 Scripps National Spelling Bee word list or Merriam-Webster Unabridged.

Rule 8: Judges' Role

The judges listen carefully, determine whether or not words are spelled correctly, and uphold the rules. The decisions of the judges are final.

Misunderstandings: The judges will not respond to the speller's question(s) about the word and its pronunciation but, if the judges sense that the speller has misunderstood the word, the judges will direct the speller and pronouncer to interact until they are satisfied that reasonable attempts have been made to assist the speller in understanding the word within the time constraints outlined in Rule 5. It is sometimes impossible to detect a misunderstanding until a spelling error has been made, and the judges are not responsible for the speller's misunderstanding.

Pronouncer Errors: The judges compare the pronouncer's pronunciation with the diacritical markings in the word list. If the judges feel that the pronouncer's pronunciation does not match the pronunciation specified in the diacritical markings, the judges will direct the pronouncer to correct the error as soon as it is detected.

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Disqualifications for reasons other than clear misspelling: The judges will disqualify a speller (1) who does not approach the microphone when it is the speller's time to receive the word unless there are extenuating circumstances that, in the judges' sole discretion, merit holding the speller's word in reserve and offering it to the speller after all other spellers in the round have spelled and before the close of the round; (2) who engages in unsportsmanlike conduct; (3) who, in the process of retracing a spelling, alters the letters or sequence of letters from those first uttered; or (4) who, in the process of spelling, utters unintelligible or nonsense sounds.

Speller activities that do not merit disqualification: The judges may not disqualify a speller (1) for failing to pronounce the word either before or after spelling it; (2) for asking a question; or (3) for noting or failing to note the capitalization of a word, the presence of a diacritical mark, or the presence of a hyphen or other form of punctuation.

Rule 9: Speller's Role

The speller makes an effort to face the judges and pronounce the word for the judges before spelling it and after spelling it. The speller while facing the judges makes an effort to utter each letter distinctly and with sufficient volume to be understood by the judges. The speller may ask the pronouncer to say the word again, define it, use it in a sentence, provide the part of speech, provide the language(s) of origin and/or provide an alternate pronunciation or pronunciations. The speller may also ask root word questions that meet the specifications delineated in Rule 7.

Misunderstandings: The speller is responsible for any misunderstanding of the word unless (1) the pronouncer never provided a correct pronunciation; (2) the pronouncer provided incorrect information regarding the definition, part of speech, or language of origin; or (3) the speller correctly spelled a homonym of the word and the pronouncer failed to either offer a definition or distinguish the homonyms.

Aids: The speller may not wear or bring to any segment of the competition any object that could be construed as having potential to convey spelling advice unless the object is an approved accommodation in accordance with Rule 6: Special Needs. Further, the speller may not bear on the palms of hands or any visible part of the body any inked writing that could be construed as having potential to convey spelling advice. Failure to comply may result in the judges taking action in accordance with the unsportsmanlike conduct clause in Rule 8: Judges' Role.