

101



Spelling Bee 101

Everything you need to know about planning and hosting a spelling bee!

hello, spelling bee organizer!

Welcome to Spelling Bee 101. Whether you're hosting a classroom, school, intermediate level or regional competition, you'll find the answers you seek within these pages. We know that this is just one of many responsibilities for you. In this guide, we will make the steps for conducting a bee as clear and simple as possible.

Inside, you'll find information covering:

- Study resources available for spellers
- How to navigate your competition list
- What volunteers you'll need to run your bee
- Answers to some of our most-asked rules questions
- Things to think through if your bee will be held virtually
- How to navigate appeals
- How to use some of our supplemental offerings, such as the Online Testing Platform and tiebreaker test
- And much more!

Remember, a bee is at its best when it sticks to the local traditions and needs of the students who are participating. Feel free to adapt your bee program in the way that makes the most sense for you and your spellers. If you need additional support in crafting the best bee program for your area, please send us an inquiry at spellingbee.com/contact. We would be happy to work with you to answer any questions you have after reading this guide.

By inspiring the exploration of words, the Scripps National Spelling Bee illuminates pathways to lifelong curiosity, celebrates academic achievement and enriches communities. Thank you for your valiant support of this mission. Because of you, millions of students are forming meaningful relationships, building confidence and exploring the world around them through language. We salute you and are always here to help!

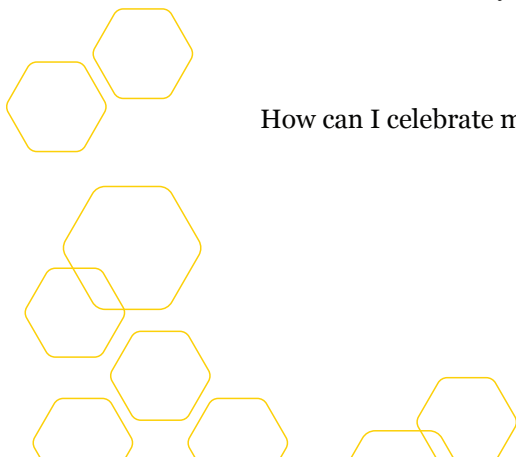
Sincerely,

The Scripps National Spelling Bee



so, you're going to host a spelling bee...

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the speller's journey

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01

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classroom



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regional

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national

the speller's journey

step
01



enroll your school

The first step in any speller's journey is making sure their school is enrolled with the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Enrollment is open beginning in late August each year. Enrolling ensures that your spellers have access to study materials and that bee organizers at all levels have access to competition lists and resources.

step
02



the classroom bee

It's bee season! The first competition of the year will be a classroom spelling bee – a great opportunity for your spellers to show off what they've studied. The winner of each classroom bee will advance to either a grade-level spelling bee or a school-wide spelling bee. You may choose to skip this step and have interested spellers sign up directly for a school-wide bee. We love classroom bees because they have the broadest impact on your school, allowing the most students to learn, compete and make their own bee stories.

step
03



the school bee

It's time to see who will represent your school at the next level of competition. To help your spellers prepare for this level of competition (and beyond), encourage them to download the Word Club app. It's a completely free way for them to study the 4,000-word study list published annually by the Scripps National Spelling Bee. You can learn more about how your spellers can study in the section of this guide called "Study materials for spellers" on page 6.

step
04



the regional qualifier bee

While not all regions host an intermediate level of competition, a regional qualifier spelling bee is an important step in many spellers' journeys. This level could include a county or district competition before a speller advances to their regional spelling bee.

step
05



the regional bee

Regional partners across the country and around the world host this final local level of competition in February and March to decide who will represent their community at the Scripps National Spelling Bee's National Competition!

step
06



the national competition

More than 200 of the best young spellers gather during Bee Week for the Scripps National Spelling Bee's National Competition – a three-day televised event! Who will BEE crowned champion this year?

study materials for spellers



It's often said that the spelling bee is where preparation meets luck. You can't do much about the second part, but there are lots of resources available to help your spellers be prepared for their big moment.

At the classroom and school levels, students can use the **School Spelling Bee Study List**, available for download and distribution through the educator portal. Students have access to 50 words at their individual grade level, complete with definitions and parts of speech. In addition to being organized by grade level, these lists are also grouped into three categories from least to most challenging: One Bee, Two Bee and Three Bee.



All of the words on this study list are drawn from contemporary and classic works of literature, and chosen for their relevance, usefulness and demonstration of spelling principles. Each year, you can find the books from which the words are drawn on our **Great Words, Great Works** list. One way for spellers to study is to read these books, which are carefully curated to be appropriate, entertaining and informative for students at each grade level. Inside each book, your students will find words on the School Spelling Bee Study List in context.



**words of the
champions**
YOUR KEY TO THE BEE

At the regional and regional qualifier levels, the competition lists begin with words from **Words of the Champions**. This study resource, like the School Spelling Bee Study List, is divided into three categories from least to most challenging: One Bee, Two Bee and Three Bee, but this list contains a whopping 4,000 words. Every year, a portion of the words is replaced, so there is always something new to discover!

You can download *Words of the Champions* in the educator portal and distribute it to your spellers. Your spellers can also find a physical or electronic copy of this list available for purchase on Amazon. For definitions and etymological information, spellers should consult Merriam-Webster Unabridged, the official dictionary of the Scripps National Spelling Bee, which can be found at <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com>. Merriam-Webster generously provides a one-year subscription to Merriam-Webster Unabridged for all spellers proceeding to the National Competition.



Another great way to study is the **Word Club app**, which can be found in the Google Play Store and the Apple Store and is completely FREE. Using the Word Club app, your spellers can hear Dr. Jacques Bailly, the Bee's official pronouncer, pronounce each word on *Words of the Champions*, and they can either type in the letters or choose the correct spelling from a list of options. They can also answer word meaning questions and track their progress from level to level.

All of the words from the School Spelling Bee Study List and *Words of the Champions* are loaded into Word Club, so your speller can prepare for several levels of competition at once.

basic materials list

Use these checklists to help you prepare for your competition.

For every level of bee:

- The words!** This means having several copies of your bee's competition list printed and ready for your spelling bee officials.
 - Where to find: For the classroom and school levels of competition, the competition lists can be found in your educator portal. For the regional qualifier level, the competition list can be found in the regional partner portal. For the regional level, the competition list will be delivered to each regional partner at least three weeks before your regional competition.
- A record-keeping sheet to track competition outcomes**
 - Where to find: your educator or regional partner portal
- A bell** – this is for your head judge to ring when a speller has misspelled. It's a hallmark of the spelling bee! No bell? No problem. There are free bell sound apps available for download in your app store of choice.
- A list of your spellers** to use at check-in
- Loose paper and writing utensils** for your officials to use

Additional materials to consider:

- If you're planning to use the Bee's Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees: **copies of the suggested rules** for your officials, plus some to have at check-in for parents to reference.
 - Where to find: spellingbee.com/rules
- If you're planning to record your bee: **an audio recording device or phone** so your record keeper can record each speller's interaction at the microphone.
- If you're planning to have any written word meaning or written spelling rounds during your bee: **printed copies of the tests and answer keys, writing utensils** for your spellers, and perhaps **clipboards** for them to write on.
- If you anticipate allowing appeals during your competition: **copies of the appeals form** to have at speller check-in.
 - Regional partners can find a sample appeal form in the regional partner portal.
- Placards for your spellers** to wear during competition
 - Regional partners can find a placard maker in the regional partner portal.
- Any **prizes and certificates** you'll be handing out!
 - You can access a variety of certificate designs in your educator or regional partner portal.
- A welcome script** to help kick off the competition
 - You can access a sample script in the regional partner portal.



spelling bee roles

Spelling bee officials

What does “spelling bee officials” mean? What do they do?

Spelling bee officials are the individuals who preside over a spelling bee competition. They exist at all levels of competition: classroom, school, regional qualifier (district, county), regional and national bees. Spelling bee officials are different from bee organizers. Think of the officials as the individuals running the actual competition, and the organizers as the people responsible for the logistics of the event.

What are the various officiating roles?

Pronouncer

The pronouncer is the speller’s key resource during the spelling bee. They pronounce words and word meaning questions, and provide allowed and requested word information to the speller using prepared and approved competition materials.

Head judge

The head judge serves as the administrator of the competition rules during the spelling bee. They maintain a thorough knowledge of the competition rules and confidently rule on internal or external questions regarding the competition with input from fellow judges. The head judge rules on the correctness of speller responses and delivers those rulings vocally or by ringing a bell.

Judge(s)

Judges rule on spellings and answers provided by spellers during the competition. They maintain a thorough knowledge of the competition rules and swiftly weigh in on internal or external questions regarding the competition. The judges, including the head judge, navigate the competition word list and tell the pronouncer the starting place in the list for each round of competition.

**It is helpful but not necessary to have three total judges for regional bees: one head judge and two judges. At classroom and school bees, one judge (the head judge) will typically suffice.*

Record keeper(s)

The record keepers are responsible for documenting and reporting on the spelling bee competition as it happens and preserving the event for posterity. The record keepers manually record the spellings and answers given by each speller in real time, along with number of rounds and number of spellers still remaining in the competition, providing that information to the judges on an as-requested basis. It is recommended that the record keepers also keep an audio recording of each speller’s turn to be played back for the judges on an as-requested basis.

**It is helpful but not necessary to have two total record keepers: one to manually record spellings and one to maintain an audio recording.*

spelling bee roles

How do I recruit spelling bee officials? What skill set am I looking for?

You'll be surprised by how many avenues there are for recruiting officials for your bee. For a pronouncer, you'll need someone who has a familiarity with pronouncing diacritical markings – the symbols used in the dictionary to note a word's pronunciation – although for classroom and school bees the words are often familiar enough that this skill isn't necessary. Local universities and high schools are a great place to start, particularly with individuals who teach classics, English, literature or linguistics. Teachers and librarians also make fantastic judges. For record keepers, someone with a background in editing or writing would be a great fit, as would anyone who displays keen attention to detail.

At the regional qualifier and regional levels of competition, we encourage you to engage your local spelling bee community. Who were the officials for some of the lower-level bees in your area, and would they be willing to officiate at your regional spelling bee? "Retired" spellers (those who are no longer able to participate because they have aged out of the program) are also excellent candidates to officiate. We've heard from many high-school-aged former spellers who are looking for ways to stay involved in their local communities and who need volunteer hours. From their previous participation, many of them are already familiar with the competition rules and with proper pronunciation.

One thing to keep in mind when recruiting officials: you'll need to be sure they don't have a conflict of interest that would interfere with their officiating duties. It's not advisable to recruit relatives of current spellers as officials or to recruit former spellers who are coaching or mentoring current spellers in your program.

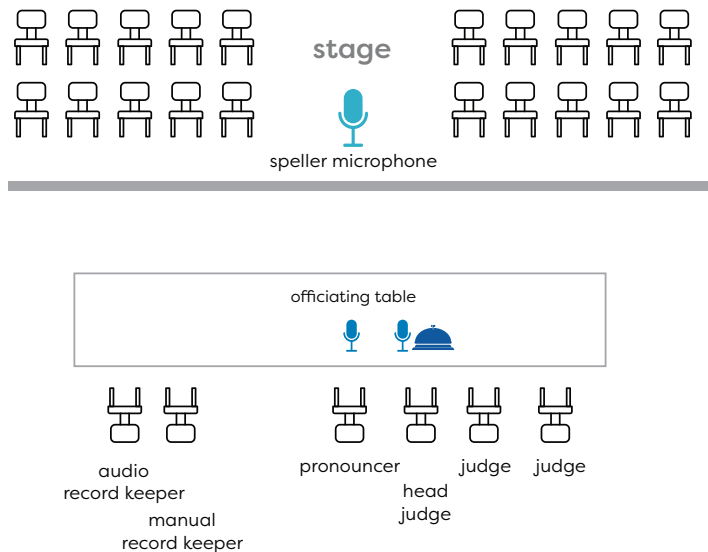
What do my officials need during the competition? How can I help them prepare?

The Scripps National Spelling Bee provides all word list materials that you need for your classroom, school and regional qualifier bees in our online educator and regional partner portals. For regional bees, we will send the regional partner multiple copies of the official word list (both in print and digitally). You can then distribute those to your officials in advance of the bee so they have time to prepare.

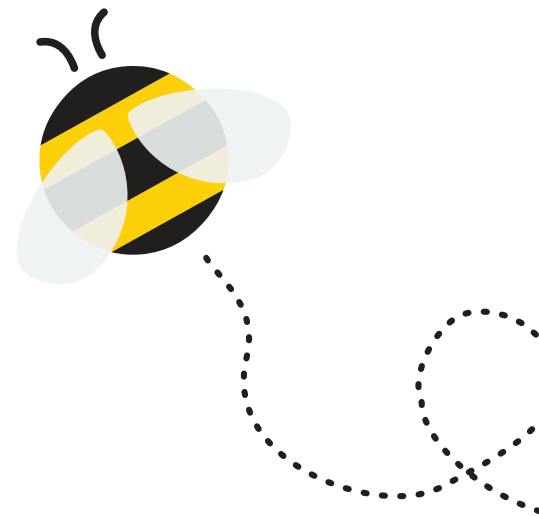
On the day of your competition, it's recommended that you provide your officials with copies of the word list you're using, the suggested rules (available at spellingbee.com/rules), writing utensils and loose paper for note-taking. A diagram of the recommended setup for your officials during the competition is below. Please feel free to adapt to suit your competition space, your spellers and your officials.



spelling bee roles



Competition stage and officiating table diagram



Spelling bee organizers

What does “spelling bee organizers” mean?
What do they do?

While your spelling bee officials are the ones administering the competition, your spelling bee organizers are the ones making sure the event itself happens and runs smoothly. Organizers often start their work well in advance of the competition, securing the event space, recruiting officials and helpers, and communicating with spellers and their families.

On the day of the spelling bee, organizers do everything from checking in spellers, setting up the stage and physical event space, and receiving appeals and communicating them to the officials, to answering questions from parents, spellers and audience members.

What are the various organizer roles?

Pre-bee communications and event organizers

These individuals determine the details and logistics of the upcoming spelling bee, and they are responsible for communicating those details to the spellers who will be competing. At the classroom and school levels, this involves selecting the date of those bees and sharing that information with the spellers who are participating and their parents. At the regional qualifier and regional levels of competition, this involves collecting the emails of your school champions and their parents and communicating with them regularly about the upcoming competition. Communications templates are available in your regional partner portal. Organizers at this level must also find a venue for the competition and recruit officials and volunteers for the event.

spelling bee roles

Stage managers

These individuals help set the physical space for the spelling bee and help direct spellers when it's their turn to spell. This helps to keep the spellers in their original order during the competition. When a speller is eliminated from the competition, stage managers can help escort the speller off the stage. This role can also be responsible for securing microphones for the speller, the head judge and the pronouncer if that applies to your bee.

Registration helpers

These organizers help check in spellers as they arrive for the spelling bee. They can distribute nametags, any welcome gifts, and copies of the Suggested Rules if you are using them. Since registration helpers will be the first real point of contact for attendees at the event, they may receive questions about everything from schedule to rules to restroom locations. You'll want to prepare these volunteers for those questions, or for who to go to for answers on the day of the event.

Officials' liaison

If you are using the Suggested Rules during your competition and anticipate that you may have appeals, it's a good idea to identify one of your organizers as the officials' liaison. This individual can be the recipient of any appeals forms and be responsible for delivering the appeal to the officials.

Greeters

These organizers place event signage, welcome spellers and their parents to your bee, and direct spellers and parents to your registration area. Greeters are a "luxury role," but can add a great deal of warmth to your event.



rules faq

If you are planning to use the Scripps National Spelling Bee's Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees for your spelling bee competition, you can access them at spellingbee.com/rules. See below for answers to some of the most-asked questions we get about the rules.

Eligibility:

1. What if a school advances a 15-year-old who is still in the eighth grade?

- Spellers must not have reached their 15th birthday on or before August 31, 2022, to be eligible for the National Competition in 2023.

2. If a speller does not win their classroom bee, can they move to another school and try again there?

- No. Once a speller has been disqualified or eliminated from any level of a regional partner's spelling bee program between August 2022 and April 2023, the speller may not advance through another regional partner's program or through a different school in the same regional partner's program during the 2022-2023 program year.

The words:

1. Do I have to use the competition list provided to my regional partner?

- No. The SNSB generates annual competition lists for all levels of competition. While spelling bee officials are encouraged to use these lists, it is not a requirement.

2. What if a speller spells a homonym of the word given?

- If the speller spells a homonym and the definition of the word was not given during the exchange, reinstate the speller.
- If the speller spells a homonym and the definition of the word was given during the exchange, the judges' decision should be upheld.

3. How do I know if a word has a homonym? And if it does, what do I do?

- The SNSB has made every effort to identify words with homonyms in your competition list. In the case of a word with a homonym, we have added wording to read to the speller and instructions for the pronouncer alongside the word in the list. Remember, it is important that a speller automatically receive the definition of the word to be spelled, but it is ultimately the speller's responsibility to understand which word is being offered, not the pronouncer's.
- If you suspect that a word has a homonym or that it could be confused with another word and that information is not indicated in your competition list, it's always a good idea to offer the definition anyway.

4. If a speller spells a word as it appears in a dictionary other than Merriam-Webster Unabridged, should I consider that a correct answer?

- If you are using the Suggested Rules and SNSB competition lists, no, spellings from other dictionaries should not be considered.

rules faq

The words (cont'd):

5. If a word has a hyphen, does the speller need to indicate that?

- No. The speller does not need to note the capitalization of a word, if a word has a diacritical mark, if a word has a hyphen or if there's a space in an open compound. They can if they choose to, but officials should only be listening for the correct letters in the correct order.

The speller's role:

1. A speller in my bee requires special accommodation. Is that okay?

- Yes. You are the authority of your bee, and you can make decisions that work for your bee and for your spellers. For more suggestions about special accommodations, see section 3 of the 2023 Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees and page 21 of this guide.

2. Can a speller ask for a sentence?

- Yes. A speller can ask for the definition of the word, pronunciations, the part of speech, the language of origin and an example sentence. The SNSB discourages requests for root word questions at all levels of competition other than the National Competition, and a speller should not request other definitions of the word, alternate sentences or for the pronouncer to slow down their pronunciation.

3. Can a speller start over if they have already started spelling the word?

- Yes. A speller can begin their word again, but cannot alter the letters or sequence of letters from their first attempt. So, if a speller is offered the word "chicken" and they say, "C-H-Y... can I start again?" and then spell, "C-H-I-C-K-E-N," their first spelling stands even though they corrected themselves, and they should be eliminated from the competition.

4. If a speller doesn't say the word before and after they spell, are they disqualified?

- No. Spellers are encouraged to pronounce the word before and after they spell, but it is not required.

The officials:

1. If a speller doesn't understand the word they're being asked to spell, can the pronouncer help them?

- Yes. The pronouncer may offer information listed in the competition list if they feel it will be helpful to the speller.

2. Can a judge speak during competition?

- Yes. Judges are encouraged to speak up if they suspect a speller is mispronouncing their word. They would then ask the pronouncer and the speller to work together until the judges are satisfied that reasonable attempts have been made to assist the speller in understanding the word. Again, it is ultimately the speller's responsibility to understand the word they are being asked to spell.

rules faq

Word meaning:

1. In an oral word meaning round, if a speller answers the question with the correct letter but the wrong answer text, are they out of the competition?

- Yes. A speller must correctly identify both letter and answer or just the answer to move on to the next round. For example: A speller receives the question, “Which of the following is an animal? A. a dog, B. a shoe, C. a song.” The speller must either answer “A” or “A, a dog” to be considered correct.

2. Can a speller ask for a sentence or a definition in an oral word meaning round?

- No. The pronouncer can provide the pronunciation of the word, the spelling of the word, the question, and the answer choices, but no other information.

3. Do I have to include word meaning?

- No. The SNSB encourages but does not require word meaning to be part of your competition.

Ending your bee:

1. Does a speller need to spell one extra word before they are declared champion?

- If only one speller remains at the end of a round, that speller is given the next word in the list (potential championship word) in the next round. If they spell the word correctly, they should be declared the champion. If they misspell, all spellers who spelled incorrectly in the previous round are reinstated and a new round begins with spellers spelling in their original order.

2. What happens if there are three spellers left and all misspell in the same round?

- If all spellers misspell in the same round, all spellers who competed in that round should be reinstated and should spell in the next round in their original order.

Appeals:

1. What happens if a speller or their parent/guardian appeals the judges’ decision?

- Local bee officials determine whether or not to allow appeals at their bee. There are two versions of our Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees available in the educator and regional partner portals: one that includes appeals and one that does not. Remember, decisions of local spelling bee officials are final. Please refer to page 23 of this guide for information about the appeals process.

makeup of the competition list

It is strongly recommended that you familiarize yourself with the makeup of your competition list ahead of your spelling bee event. The makeup of each level of competition list is listed for you below:

1. the Classroom Competition List

- Words 1-225 are selected from the School Spelling Bee Study List.
- Words 226-250 are selected from Merriam-Webster Unabridged and do NOT appear on the School Spelling Bee Study List.
- A word meaning supplement is available, allowing you to include written or oral word meaning in your classroom bee.

2. the School Competition List

- Words 1-225 are selected from the School Spelling Bee Study List.
- Words 226-375 are selected from Merriam-Webster Unabridged and do NOT appear on the School Spelling Bee Study List.
- A word meaning supplement is available, allowing you to include written or oral word meaning in your school bee.

3. the Regional Qualifier Competition List

- Words 1-75 are selected from the School Spelling Bee Study List.
- Words 76-300 are selected from *Words of the Champions*.
- Words 301-400 are selected from Merriam-Webster Unabridged.

Additional resources:

- The 50 questions in the intermediate oral word meaning round are based on words from the School Spelling Bee Study List.
- The 50 questions in the advanced oral word meaning round are based on words from *Words of the Champions*.
- The 25 questions on the intermediate written word meaning test are based on words from the School Spelling Bee Study List.
- The 25 questions on the advanced written word meaning test are based on words from *Words of the Champions*.

makeup of the competition list

4. the Regional Competition List

- Words 1-350 are selected from *Words of the Champions*.
 - These words are not subdivided into groups having specific levels of difficulty, although they do gradually increase in difficulty.
- Words 351-500 are additional words selected from Merriam-Webster Unabridged.

Additional resources:

- Optional written tiebreaker test: If you have more than two spellers remaining when you reach word 475 in your list, use the included instructions to conduct a written tiebreaker test.
- Optional oral word meaning words: These 100 questions are based on words selected from *Words of the Champions* and may be used for an oral word meaning round or rounds during your oral spelling bee.
- Optional written spelling and word meaning test: This test is made up of 20 spelling words from *Words of the Champions*, five spelling words from Merriam-Webster Unabridged, 20 word meaning questions from *Words of the Champions* and five word meaning questions from Merriam-Webster Unabridged. Answer forms and answer keys follow the pronouncer's script.

Additional information:

- You do not need to give all pronunciations for each word. Many pronouncers give the first pronunciation and only offer available alternates if a speller asks or if it seems the speller is unsure of the word. If, however, an alternate pronunciation is clearly the most familiar one in your region, you might consider providing it as well as the main pronunciation.
- Audio recordings are available for all words found in Scripps National Spelling Bee competition lists at the regional qualifier and regional levels. Words found in the Regional Qualifier Competition List and Regional Competition Lists are sent to your regional partner for reference shortly before their bees. Your pronouncer for these levels of competition can reach out to your regional partner for access.

navigating your competition list

There is no rule stating that you need to start your spelling bee at word one and go straight through, word for word, until the end of your competition. In fact, you should feel free to move through the list in a way that makes sense for the pace of your competition. Here are a few quick tips on navigating the competition list for your spelling bee.

1. Start with studied words. Having a few rounds of studied words gives your spellers a chance to show off what they've learned.

- The Classroom Competition List and the School Competition List both begin with 225 words from the School Spelling Bee Study List.
- The Regional Qualifier Competition List begins with 75 words from the School Spelling Bee Study List followed by 225 words from *Words of the Champions*.
- The Regional Competition List begins with 350 words from *Words of the Champions*.

2. Between rounds of spelling, have the judges take a moment to evaluate the progress of the competition. Did only a few spellers misspell in the previous round? Maybe it's time to consider jumping forward in the list by 25 or 50 words.

3. If you're starting a round near the end of the studied words, be sure you have at least as many words in that section as you have spellers in the competition. To preserve fairness, you never want to move to the additional words in the middle of a round.

4. After several rounds of studied words, you may notice your spellers are really prepared. That's fantastic – you should feel good about all the wonderful words they've learned because of your program. However, you also need to name a champion. This is where the additional words come in.

- The Classroom Competition List ends with 25 additional words.
- The School Competition List ends with 150 additional words.
- The Regional Qualifier Competition List ends with 100 additional words.
- The Regional Competition List ends with 150 additional words.

5. Before you start the first round of additional words, have your pronouncer or a judge make an announcement to the spellers and audience. This has two benefits: warning spellers that they're about to hear words they haven't studied and letting the audience (parents) know these words may sound easier than the words in the previous rounds. The additional words start with familiar words, but the challenge lies in the fact that students have not had the chance to study them.

6. Again, if your spellers are just too good, jump forward by 25 or 50 words in the additional words. You can always dial back the difficulty by skipping back in the section if, after a round, you feel you've gone too far forward in the list. In order to do this smoothly, it's best practice for judges to carefully track which words have been used in their word lists as the competition progresses. And remember, for the fairness of the competition, don't move back to a point that will include both studied and unstudied words, and don't skip around in the middle of a round.

7. All competition lists include optional sections of oral and written word meaning. Consider having a round of oral word meaning or asking your spellers to take a written word meaning test to add challenge and an additional learning opportunity to your bee. Word meaning can often help if you've gone several rounds without any misspellings.

how to use the online testing platform

What is the Online Testing Platform?

The Online Testing Platform (OTP) is a tool developed by the Scripps National Spelling Bee to give you more options in administering your spelling bee. The platform contains pre-made tests for every level of competition — classroom, school, regional qualifier and regional tiebreaker — and each test has the option to include word meaning as well as spelling.

When should I use the OTP?

There are two main situations in which we recommend you use the OTP:

1. To winnow down the number of spellers who will be competing in your upcoming bee, or
2. To break a tie between your final spellers

Let's consider the first situation. An ideal spelling bee has between 20 and 40 spellers. This helps maintain word list fairness from round to round and ensures that you won't run out of words. But what if over 100 spellers qualify for your bee? Consider using the OTP as a sort of in-between step for your spellers. All 100 spellers can take the test, and then only the 20 spellers who score the highest will advance to your spelling bee.

Now, let's look at the second situation. Let's say your final two or three spellers have been back and forth without misspelling for five rounds of the competition and you're close to running out of words or time. Consider using the OTP for those spellers after your event in order to break the tie.

Can I use the OTP in place of hosting a bee?

We think that whenever possible, a spelling bee should be held in person to ensure the best experience for your spellers. However, we know that for the health and safety of all, this isn't always possible. In this scenario, we hope you consider hosting a virtual spelling bee on a platform like Zoom or Google Meet. You can learn more about hosting a virtual bee on page 19 of this guide. We don't recommend using the OTP as a wholesale replacement for your event.

I've decided I want to use the OTP. Now what?

If you want to use the OTP to administer a classroom- or school-level test, you will need to create a school admin account first. You will find step-by-step instructions for this process in your educator portal, as well as instructions on how to set up your test.

If you want to use the OTP to administer a regional qualifier or regional tiebreaker test, you can find step-by-step instructions for this process in your regional partner portal.

virtual bee tips

Initial preparations

Set up a video conference using the platform your organization recommends. If there is no preferred platform, try Zoom or Google Meet. Create a virtual background for pronouncers, judges and other officials so they are clearly identifiable. You can also find Bee-branded virtual backgrounds to download in your educator or regional partner portal.

Communicate with parents about the date and time of your competition and about what to expect. If you've decided to use them, you should also share the Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees and the Bee's Integrity Pledge (both resources can be found in your educator or regional partner portal). Also, decide whether you will allow parent or student spectators during the competition and share this information.

Rehearse a few days before your actual competition. Arrange in advance how officials will communicate with each other – for example, a group text or a private chat feature in the video conference platform. You will also want to think through the following: end-of-bee scenarios, how you'll transition to additional words, and how you'll report on competition progress between rounds and who will be responsible for doing so.

Provide your officials with the competition list ahead of your competition date. At the regional qualifier and regional levels of competition, audio recordings of all the words are available along with the competition list. Officials can listen to these files ahead of the competition to study the pronunciations of any tricky words.

Roles & responsibilities

- Pronouncer – For a virtual spelling bee, you will need a pronouncer to pronounce words for spellers.
- Judge(s) – These individuals focus on the accuracy of participants' spellings. Determine beforehand how the judge(s) will indicate a misspelling, whether using a bell, a sound effect or informing the speller verbally of the misspelling. Whichever method you choose, you should test the sound in the virtual environment to ensure it is audible.
- Record keeper – This person keeps a written record of how each speller spells their word. (You can find downloadable record-keeping sheets in your educator or regional partner portal.)

Additional roles to consider in a virtual environment:

- Audio record keeper – This person records the audio of the competition with a separate device (phone, tablet or digital recorder) and can use it for immediate playback to verify a spelling or answer when necessary.
- Alternate official – This person monitors the competition and can jump into any of the officiating roles if someone experiences connection issues.
- Platform monitor – This person can mute and manage participants' video and also begin the recording of the competition. This person should be the "host" of the video conference.

virtual bee tips

For the competition

- Ask spellers to change their on-screen name to include their full name preceded by their speller number for ease of competition administration (e.g. “1 - Jane Smith”).
- Request spellers use headphones to clearly hear the pronunciation of words.
- Suggest students use an Ethernet cable plugged directly into their computer instead of using Wi-Fi, if possible.
- Have officials use headphones to hear the spellers clearly and to block out ambient noise.
- Suggest or require an adult witness to be in the room with the speller to address concerns of integrity.
- Disable the platform’s chat functionality or set it to allow chat to and from the meeting hosts only.
- Record the entire competition through the video conferencing platform.

Instructions to give to spellers

- Ask the spellers to keep their hands in the camera view during their entire turn. They can do this by resting their chin on their hands, putting their hands on their head or doing whatever feels most comfortable to them.
- Review the Bee-provided Integrity Pledge with the spellers before the event begins and ask them all to agree to it.
- To save on bandwidth, ask spellers to mute their audio and disable their cameras until closer to their turn.
- If a speller is eliminated from the competition, tell them they should remain on the video conference at least until the end of the round.
- Explain that if a speller’s internet connection freezes or they get disconnected, they can reconnect to the video conference. Depending on how long that takes, explain that the competition will continue when they reconnect, or they will be moved to the end of the round and receive a new word. If they spell correctly and continue in the competition, they will return to their position in the original numeric order.

Concluding the competition

- When your champion is named, make sure you celebrate them! This can be done through a special background, applause or simply saying a few words.



special accommodations

Special circumstances occasionally arise that require thoughtful planning and possible accommodations. There is no one-size-fits-all solution, but we've put together some considerations to help you navigate this journey. Remember: YOU have the power to accommodate spellers with special circumstances as much as you can, and your situation will be different from that of many other bees.

Once you've been contacted about a special need, our #1 piece of advice is to start a conversation as soon as possible with the speller's parent(s) or guardian(s). Consider looping in a teacher or school contact if the family is comfortable with that.

Here are some things to discuss:

- What element(s) of the spelling bee will be challenging for this speller?
- Will the speller be able to hear the pronouncer and the judges?
- Will the speller be able to communicate orally with the pronouncer and the judges?
- Will the speller be able to read information provided, or take a written test?
- Will the speller require accommodations at the venue for accessibility or comfort?
- Does the speller have an IEP (Individualized Education Program) in place that provides a plan for how best to accommodate this speller? If so, does the family feel comfortable sharing relevant portions of the plan?

The SNSB does not have a single solution for all situations because each speller – and each bee – is unique. While we do not have specific requirements for how you handle accommodations, we can provide suggestions for circumstances we hear frequently. Again, we want YOU to feel empowered to make accommodations in keeping with how you can best serve that speller and maintain the integrity of your spelling bee.

If the speller has visual impairment

Consider having a judge work with the speller if your bee ends with a written tiebreaker test, or if you are using a written spelling or word meaning test before your bee. If the speller requires a larger font size on printed materials, consider having written materials prepared in advance in an appropriate size. It might also be an option to have materials in Braille created for the speller. Check with the speller's school to see if they have a contact for converting typed documents to Braille.

If the speller struggles to speak while at the microphone

It might be possible for them to write their spelling on a whiteboard instead of saying the letters aloud. To mimic the experience other spellers have at the microphone, consider following this pattern: speller writes one letter, judge says letter aloud, speller writes next letter, judge says letter aloud, etc. Alternately, consider having a judge watch as they write to be sure no letters are erased and changed. The pronouncer could also automatically read all word information for this speller, limiting the amount of interaction required, and the pronouncer could possibly ask leading questions such as, "Would you like to hear the pronunciations again?" so that the speller merely needs to nod or shake their head instead of speaking.

special accommodations

If the speller has limited hearing

Some spellers with auditory processing disorders have listening devices that can make the spelling bee experience easier for them. Others might find it easier to have the pronouncer come quite close during their interaction. Still others might be more comfortable with a sign language interpreter, and they – or their school – might already have someone in mind. If the speller works with an interpreter, consider the following:

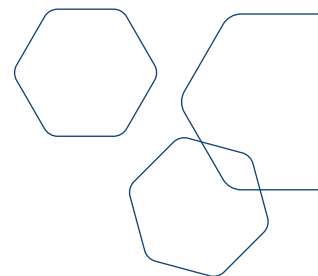
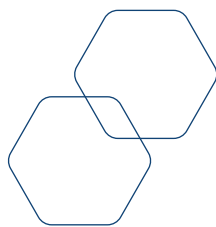
- An interpreter can use a sign or picture associated with the word given if one exists. If one does not exist, the interpreter could sign the definition of the word for the speller. It may go without saying, but the interpreter should not spell out the word in question if they do not know a sign for it.
- If the speller's speech can be understood, the speller can spell the word into the microphone. If the speller cannot speak clearly, consider the following process: (1) The speller signs the first letter of the word to the interpreter. (2) The interpreter orally states the letter to the judges. (3) The speller signs the next letter of the word to the interpreter. (4) The interpreter orally states the letter to the judges. (5) The process continues until the speller concludes their spelling. In this case, we would encourage you to let the interpreter work independently with the speller and without monitoring. Interpreters have taken an oath of truth in communication and will work with the speller to accurately communicate all relevant information.
- If you anticipate holding an especially long bee, consider having a backup interpreter for the speller.

If the speller requires additional space

Consider allowing the speller to sit at the side of the stage until just before their turn to spell, and then allow them to return to that location at the end of their turn. This speller might also require additional space should your bee end with a written tiebreaker test or if you use a written spelling or word meaning test before your bee.

If the speller struggles with gross motor skills

This will probably only present a challenge if your bee ends with a written tiebreaker test, or if you are using a written spelling or vocabulary test before your bee. If that is the case, consider having one of your officials work with the speller to record their spelling for them. This will require additional space, so again consider adequate spacing of the spellers or even an additional private testing room in this scenario.



appeals

What is an appeal?

An appeal is a challenge to a decision made by spelling bee officials or a challenge to competition results. Appeals can happen at any level of competition, and both your spelling bee organizers and officials should feel prepared to confidently handle them.

What do the Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees say about appeals?

The Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees, which can be found in their entirety at spellingbee.com/rules, provide great guidance on how to handle appeals. There is also a version of the Suggested Rules that does not include an appeals provision, and you can decide which version is better for your spelling bee program. If you choose to allow appeals, here is a summary of the suggested appeals rule:

The time and manner in which an appeal can be lodged:

- The appeal must be written and not orally delivered (unless there are fewer than five spellers remaining in the competition).
- Only the speller, parent or guardian of a speller, or a teacher, principal, or regional partner of a speller may lodge an appeal.
- The written appeal must include:
 - The speller's name
 - The name and contact information (phone number) of the individual filing the appeal, as well as their relationship to the speller
 - The word in question
 - The grounds for reinstatement
- The appeal must be filed before the speller affected would have received their next word or word meaning question had they remained in the competition.

Acceptable grounds for appeal

1. The speller correctly spelled the word but was eliminated for misspelling it.
2. The speller correctly spelled a homonym of the word in question and was not given the definition of the word.
3. In an oral word meaning round, the speller correctly identified an answer matching the definition of a homonym of the word, and they were not given the spelling of the word they were asked to define.
4. The speller correctly spelled an alternate spelling of the word as listed in the official dictionary (1) whose pronunciation is identical to all pronunciations of the word in question, (2) whose definition is identical to the definition provided for the word in question, and (3) that is clearly identified as a standard variant of the word in question.
5. The officials did not adhere to the end-of-bee procedure.

Invalid grounds for reinstatement

- The pronouncer allegedly mispronounced the word.
- The pronouncer offered pronunciations and/or word information that the speller did not request, and the unrequested information contributed to the misspelling.

appeals

Invalid grounds for reinstatement (cont'd)

- One or all officials indicated to the speller that the speller was pronouncing the word correctly, but the speller's spelling indicates that the speller wasn't pronouncing it correctly.
- One or all officials did not inform the speller before spelling that the speller's pronunciation was incorrect and/or that the speller was misunderstanding the word, and this inaction contributed to the misspelling.
- The speller offered a correct spelling as indicated in a dictionary other than Merriam-Webster Unabridged or other online or print sources.
- The pronouncer did not answer a root word question or provide the correct root word.
- The pronouncer did not honor the speller's request to slow down the pronunciation of the word, break the word's pronunciation into syllables, or provide an alternate definition or sentence.

So, how should we handle an appeal?

If you choose to allow appeals, it's our recommendation that you have an appeals process in place prior to your spelling bee and that you are transparent about the process with your participants. Things will go much more smoothly if your bee organizers and officials and your spellers and their families know what to expect ahead of time. Here are some things to consider ahead of your competition:

- Consider printing out appeal forms (available in your educator and/or regional partner portal) and having them available by request at your registration table.
- Consider printing out copies of the Suggested Rules and having them available for participants at your registration table.
- Decide who will receive appeals as they are filed. This should be a spelling bee organizer and not an official. You do not want the filing of an appeal to interrupt the flow of the competition, so all appeals should be filed with a designated individual who is not actively administering the competition.
- Decide how the person receiving the appeals will communicate the appeal to the judges. In between rounds is a great time for this. Have the pronouncer or head judge make an announcement to the spellers and audience once a round has concluded that there will be a brief break. Use that time for the officials to huddle and review the appeal.
- Decide how you'll handle a reinstatement if there is one. Will you announce it before the next round has started? You should also think through what you'll do if an appeal is denied. How will you communicate that to the person making the appeal, and who will be responsible for doing so?

Do you have any additional tips on handling appeals?

- If you are planning to allow appeals at your spelling bee, we highly recommend that you have an audio record keeper join your panel of officials. This individual can use a recording device or their phone to record each speller's turn at the microphone. These recordings are extremely helpful for judges to reference in the case of an appeal.

appeals

Do you have any additional tips on handling appeals? (cont'd)

- Let your officials know that it's okay to take their time reviewing an appeal. They should review the Suggested Rules – or the rules in use at your bee – and any audio or video recordings as many times as they need to feel comfortable with their decision. If you have a large audience, it may be helpful to have an adjacent space available for the officials so they may discuss the appeal privately.
- The appeal should only be discussed by the judges. The speller, the person making the appeal, and other representatives of the speller or members of the audience should not be consulted or brought into any discussions regarding the appeal. The officials should use the completed appeal form as the basis for their discussion. If more information is needed, an official may opt to contact the person making the appeal to ask any follow-up questions.
- Remember that you and your officials are there to act in the best interest of all the spellers. If your officials are having a hard time reaching a unanimous decision on an appeal, it's advisable to rule on the side of caution in an effort to preserve fairness.



how to use the tiebreaker test (regional bees only)

If you get near the end of the additional words section of your Regional Competition List (RCL) and you have two or more spellers remaining in your competition, the SNSB first recommends incorporating a round of oral word meaning questions if you have not already done so. If after a round of word meaning questions two or more spellers remain, the SNSB recommends moving to the tiebreaker test. This test covers the final 25 words of your RCL and is administered as a paper test. There are three main components to running your tiebreaker test: preparation, execution and assessment.

Preparation

The SNSB strongly encourages regional bee coordinators to prepare to administer a tiebreaker test prior to the day of your event as part of your contingency plans. To make the process smooth for organizers and spellers:

1. Gather materials in advance. This includes printing copies of the tiebreaker test, located after the index of additional words in your Regional Competition List, and bringing pencils and erasers for the spellers. Consider printing a copy of the answer sheet if you feel it would be helpful.
2. Consider your space. Spellers will need a surface to take their test on, so plan to have seats and tables, desks, or clipboards available.

Execution

To run a tiebreaker test, you will need a few key people:

1. **Pronouncer.** Your pronouncer will act in the same capacity as they do during your oral spelling competition. Instead of answering questions from spellers, the pronouncer will read ALL word information for each word, followed by a pause to allow spellers to write their answers. At the end of the test, the pronouncer should read through the list of words one more time without the additional word information, pausing for roughly 5-10 seconds between each word. This gives spellers time to review their spellings.
2. **Support staff.** These are people that are already working at your bee and are prepared to move spellers to their desks or give out clipboards, hand out tests and writing utensils, and ensure the pronouncer and judge(s) have the materials they need to administer the test.
3. **Officials.** Other than the pronouncer, the SNSB recommends having at least one judge monitor the administration of the test. You might also consider having your record keeper record the test; an audio or video recording can be helpful if there are concerns about the administration of the test.

Assessment

You will need at least one person to grade the test. That person either needs access to the Regional Competition List, which contains the answer sheet, or a printout of the answer sheet itself.

In the unlikely event of a tie, the SNSB recommends using the Online Testing Platform (OTP) to break the tie. For more information about the OTP, please refer to page 18 of this guide.

how to celebrate

Don't forget to celebrate your champion! Your spellers deserve congratulations for their hard work. Get creative and make sure you let them know how proud you are of their achievement!

Here are some easy ways to recognize your champions at every level:

At the classroom and school level:

Check out the Prizes tab in your educator portal. Here you'll find certificates not only for your champion but also for students who showed the most improvement, demonstrated good sportsmanship and many other categories.

At the regional level:

Your champion will receive:

- a one-year subscription to Merriam-Webster Unabridged
- a one-year subscription to Britannica Online Premium
- the Samuel Louis Sugarman Award: a United States Mint Proof Set
- an official certificate of participation

If you are a regional partner, check out the Stay Connected tab in the regional partner portal for templates that will allow you to share the good news about your champion with your local community!

Other ideas for celebration:

Consider creating custom prizes for your spellers and/or champions that reflect the uniqueness of your bee. We've seen football trophies, custom jerseys, branded stuffed animals and so much more over the years. If you need ideas, or want to order something Bee-branded for your champ, visit spellingbee.shop.

Celebrate yourself and your volunteers:

You pulled off a meaningful event, continued or started a treasured community tradition, and gave the kids in your program a learning experience that will stick with them their whole lives. Send a quick thank-you note or email to your volunteers — a few words go a long way to make people feel appreciated and increase volunteer retention. And make sure you brag about yourself, too. Report out on your event to your colleagues: everyone loves to hear about student achievement!

Visit spellingbee.com/contact if you have additional questions.



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