

2020 Rules for Local Spelling Bees

Preface

The Scripps National Spelling Bee (SNSB) encourages spellers, parents, teachers and spelling bee officials to read these rules prior to any local spelling bee. The SNSB defines a local spelling bee as any spelling bee other than the May 25-28, 2020 championship spelling bee in Oxon Hill, Maryland (“national finals”).

Spellers and spellers’ parents and teachers should check with their local spelling bee officials for the rules in effect in their area, as local spelling bee officials are encouraged but not required to use these rules. Spelling bee officials include the pronouncer, judges, coordinator and sponsor.

While local spelling bee officials have the prerogative to amend Rules 2 through 11, amendment(s) — particularly any amendment(s) to the end-of-bee procedure — should be undertaken only with careful consideration of the various outcomes that may result from the amendment(s).

The SNSB has no authority over the conduct of local spelling bees and will not render judgments relating to their conduct or outcomes. Individuals bearing complaints about local spelling bees should register their concerns with local spelling bee officials. **DECISIONS OF LOCAL SPELLING BEE OFFICIALS ARE FINAL.**

These *Rules for Local Spelling Bees* are not the rules in effect at the national finals. When a local spelling bee official says, “We use the national rules,” he or she is probably indicating that the *Rules for Local Spelling Bees* are in effect.

The national finals operate under a significantly different set of rules called the *Contest Rules of the 2020 Scripps National Spelling Bee*. These rules contain provisions that are specific to unique conditions at the national finals. The successful implementation of many national finals rules at the local level is considered impossible and therefore is not recommended.

Rules

1. Eligibility: A speller qualifying for the 2020 SNSB national finals must meet these requirements:

- (1) The speller must not have won a SNSB national finals.
- (2) The speller must attend a school that is officially enrolled with the SNSB.
- (3) The speller must not have passed beyond the eighth grade on or before August 31, 2019.
- (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 SNSB of the circumstances of grade repetition by March 31, 2020; and the SNSB will, at its sole discretion, determine the speller’s eligibility status on or before April 30, 2020.
- (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 eschew normal school activity to study for spelling bees. The SNSB 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 26, 2019, and May 18, 2020.
- (8) The speller must not have reached his/her 15th birthday on or before August 31, 2019.
- (9) The speller must have been declared a champion of an SNSB-sanctioned final local spelling bee taking place on or after February 1, 2020, or be a spelling champion whose application for participation in the SNSB’s self-sponsorship program has received final approval by the SNSB.
- (10) The speller, upon qualifying for the 2020 SNSB national finals, must submit to the SNSB a completed Champion Bio Form, a Certification of Eligibility Form, a signed Appearance Consent and Release Form, and a photo. The speller will notify the SNSB — at least 24 hours prior to the first day of the SNSB national finals — if any of the statements made on the Certification of Eligibility Form are no longer true or require updating. The speller’s sponsor will provide access to the necessary forms.
- (11) The speller must not have any first-, second- or third-degree relatives (i.e., sibling, parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, half-sibling, first cousin or great-grandparent) who are current employees of The E. W. Scripps Company.

The SNSB may disqualify prior to or during competition any speller who is not in compliance with any of its eligibility requirements; and it may — at any time between the conclusion of the 2020 SNSB national finals and April 30, 2021 — require any speller who is found to have not been in compliance with any of the eligibility requirements to forfeit the prizes, rank and other benefits accorded to the speller as a result of participation in the 2020 SNSB national finals.

2. Format: A local spelling bee is conducted in rounds. Each speller remaining in the spelling bee at the start of a round spells one word or answers one vocabulary item in each round — except in the case of a written, multiple choice or online test. The spelling bee may be conducted orally or in writing or in a manner that is a combination of the two. If, however, the spelling bee officials specify an oral format, the speller may request a written format only as specified in the term of Rule 4: Special needs.

3. Word list: Local spelling bee officials are responsible for selecting the word lists for use in their spelling bees and are encouraged to select word lists generated by the SNSB that are dated 2020. These word lists include many words that appear in the current edition of two study resources — the School Spelling Bee Study List and Words of the Champions. Also, these word lists end with a section of words that do not appear in the aforementioned study resources and are for use near the end of a local spelling bee, if the local bee officials determine that their use in the spelling bee is warranted. All words appearing on 2020 SNSB word lists are entries in Merriam-Webster Unabridged, the official dictionary of the SNSB, available at <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/>. Merriam-Webster Unabridged 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 SNSB word lists; and the only authority to be consulted by spelling bee officials, as well as the sole source used during the spelling bee to verify the information in 2020 SNSB word lists. Some alternate pronunciations appearing in 2020 SNSB word lists may have been drawn from Merriam-Webster print publications because the SNSB deemed the information helpful to the speller.

4. Special needs: Local spelling bee officials will strive to provide accommodation for spellers who have physical challenges. All requests for spelling bee officials to accommodate special needs involving sight, hearing, speech or movement should be directed to spelling bee officials well in advance of the spelling bee date. The spelling bee judges have discretionary power to amend oral and/or written spelling requirements on a case-by-case basis for spellers with diagnosed medical conditions involving sight, hearing, speech or movement.

5. Pronouncer's role: The pronouncer strives to pronounce words according to the diacritical markings in 2020 SNSB word lists.

In Oral Spelling Rounds:

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: The pronouncer responds to the speller's requests for a definition, sentence, part of speech, language(s) of origin and alternate pronunciation(s) as listed in the competition word list produced by the SNSB. The pronouncer does not entertain root word questions, requests for alternate definitions or requests for slower pronunciation.

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 is presented in the entry for the word in a 2020 SNSB word list.

In Oral Vocabulary Rounds:

Procedure: The pronouncer reads aloud the vocabulary item and both options (A) and (B), but does not indicate which is correct.

Homonyms: If a word has one or more homonyms, the pronouncer indicates which word is in question by spelling the word aloud.

Speller's requests: The pronouncer responds to the speller's requests for the question and/or answer options to be repeated. The pronouncer may also provide the spelling of the word in question.

6. Judges' role: The judges uphold the rules and determine whether or not words are spelled correctly or vocabulary items are answered correctly. They also render final decisions on appeals in accordance with Rule 11. They are in complete control of the competition and their decision is final on all questions.

Interaction with the speller: Because seeing the speller's lip movements may be critical in detecting misunderstandings or misspellings, the judges encourage spellers to face them when pronouncing and spelling the word.

Notice of rules: The judges ensure that all spellers and audience members are given an opportunity to receive a complete copy of the rules prior to the start of the spelling bee.

Misunderstandings: The judges participate in the exchange of information between the speller and pronouncer if they feel that clarification is needed. Also, the judges listen carefully to the speller's pronunciation of the word; and, if they sense that the speller has misunderstood the word, the judges work with the speller and pronouncer until they are satisfied that reasonable attempts have been made to assist the speller in understanding the word. While the judges are responsible for attempting to detect a speller's misunderstanding, it is sometimes impossible to detect a misunderstanding until an error has been made. 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 direct the pronouncer to correct the error as soon as it is detected.

Disqualifications for reasons other than error: The judges will disqualify a speller (1) who refuses a request to start spelling or to provide an answer to a vocabulary item; (2) who does not approach the microphone when it is time to receive the word or question; (3) who does not comply with the eligibility requirements; (4) who engages in unsportsmanlike conduct; (5) who, in the process of retracing a spelling, alters the letters or sequence of letters from those first uttered; (6) who, in the process of spelling, utters unintelligible or nonsense sounds; or (7) who, in the process of providing an answer in an oral vocabulary round, provides a blend of correct and incorrect information. (For example: If in answering the question, "What is porridge made from? A. fur, or B. grain," the speller provides as an answer either "A. grain" or "B. fur.")

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, the presence of a hyphen or other form of punctuation, or spacing between words in an open compound.

7. Speller's role: In a spelling round, 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 as listed on the pronouncer's competition word list produced by the SNSB.

In an oral vocabulary round, a speller may answer the item by providing (1) the letter associated with the chosen answer, (2) the chosen answer or (3) both. If the correct answer is identified by (1) associated letter alone *or* (2) by answer alone *or* (3) by both correct letter and correct answer, the speller is correct.

For example: If the speller is offered the question, "What is porridge made from? A. fur, or B. grain," each of the following methods of answering is correct: "B," "grain," or "B. grain."

8. Correction of a misspelling: The pronouncer and judges will not ask the speller to correct another speller's misspelling, even in end-of-bee circumstances.

9. Errors: Upon providing an incorrect spelling of a word or an incorrect answer to a vocabulary item, the speller immediately drops out of the competition, except as provided in Rule 10.

10. End-of-bee procedure:

If all spellers in a round misspell or answer vocabulary items incorrectly: If none of the spellers remaining in the spelling bee at the start of a round spells a word correctly or answers a vocabulary item correctly during that round, all remain in the competition and a new spelling round begins.

Ties: All spellers eliminated in the same round are tied for the same place. After the champion has been determined, spelling bee officials may opt to conduct tiebreakers (of their own design) if tiebreakers are necessary for the awarding of prizes or the determination of qualifying spellers for the next level of competition.

If only one speller in a round spells correctly or answers a vocabulary item correctly: If only one speller spells correctly in a round, a new one-word spelling round begins and the speller is given an opportunity to spell a word on the list (anticipated championship word). If the speller succeeds in correctly spelling the anticipated championship word in this one-word round, the speller is declared the champion.

Example: In Round 12 there are four spellers. Spellers 6 and 21 misspell. Speller 30 spells correctly. Speller 42 misspells. So, Speller 30 is the only speller in the round to spell correctly. Speller 30 begins Round 13 — a one-word round — and is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 30 correctly spells the anticipated championship word and is declared champion.

Example: Two spellers spell in Round 10. Speller 14 misspells. Speller 25 spells correctly. Speller 25 begins Round 11 — a one-word round — and is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 25 correctly spells the anticipated championship word and is declared champion.

Example: Two spellers spell in Round 16. Speller 3 spells correctly. Speller 9 misspells. Speller 3 begins Round 17 — a one-word round — and is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 3 correctly spells the anticipated championship word and is declared champion.

VERY IMPORTANT: If a speller misspells the anticipated championship word in a one-word round: A *new* spelling round begins with ALL the spellers who participated in the previous round. These spellers spell in their original order.

Example: In Round 8 there are three spellers. Speller 12 spells correctly and Spellers 23 and 37 misspell. Round 9 — a one-word round — begins, and Speller 12 is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 12 misspells the anticipated championship word. Round 10 begins and includes Spellers 12, 23 and 37. The rules prescribe that spellers 12, 23 and 37 spell in their original order; so Speller 12 gets the next word on the list even though Speller 12 misspelled the previous word on the list. Round 10 is not complete until all three spellers have spelled.

Tip: Spelling bee officials are encouraged to designate a record keeper or judge to track the progress of spellers throughout the rounds. The record keeper's information will be helpful in preventing end-of-bee confusion. Teachers may access a recordkeeping sheet by logging into spellingbee.com and selecting Classroom or School Spelling Bee, then Competition Guides.

11. Appeals: Provided that the appellant adheres to the Time and Manner Requirements specified herein, the judges will review appeals and render decisions on the following five grounds:

A. The speller correctly spelled the word but was eliminated for misspelling it; failing to say the word before or after spelling it; failing to indicate capitalization, hyphen, spaces or diacritical marks; or incorrectly indicating capitalization, hyphen, spaces or diacritical marks.

Judges: Do your records or an audio or video recording indicate that the speller offered the correct letters in the correct order and never changed the order of letters?

If yes, reinstate the speller even if the speller failed to say the word before or after spelling, or failed to indicate or incorrectly indicated capitalization, hyphen, spaces or diacritical marks.

If no, deny the appeal.

B. The speller correctly spelled a homonym of the word in question.

Judges: Did the pronouncer provide a definition?

Refer to Rule 5.

If no, reinstate the speller.

If yes, deny the appeal.

C. In an oral vocabulary round, the speller correctly identified an answer matching the definition of a homonym of the word.

Judges: Did the pronouncer fail to spell the word?

Refer to Rule 5.

If yes, reinstate the speller.

If no, deny the appeal.

D. The speller correctly spelled an alternate spelling of the word as listed in Merriam-Webster Unabridged (1) whose pronunciation is identical to the word in question, (2) whose definition is identical to the word in question, and (3) that is clearly identified as a standard variant of the word in question.

Judges: Check Merriam-Webster Unabridged online.

If all three criteria are met, reinstate the speller.

If fewer than three criteria are met, deny the appeal.

Also, note that spellings having temporal labels (such as archaic, obsolete), stylistic labels (such as substandard, nonstandard), or regional labels (such as North, Midland, Irish) will not be accepted as correct.

E. The officials did not adhere to Rule 10, the End-of-Bee procedure, or Rule 8.

Judges: Carefully examine Rules 8 and 10.

If you erred and the competition is still under way, reinstate the speller.

If you erred and the competition has concluded, contact the spelling bee coordinator for the next level of spelling bee for authorization to send both your declared champion and the speller (or spellers) affected by the error to the next level of competition.

If you did not err, deny the appeal.

Invalid grounds for reinstatement: The judges will not entertain appeals on the following grounds:

- 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.
- One or all Bee 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 Bee 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.

Time and Manner Requirements: A written appeal must be hand-delivered to the designated official (usually the spelling bee coordinator/director) indicating the speller's name, the name and contact information of the person filing the appeal, the relationship of the person filing the appeal to the speller (must be a parent, guardian, teacher or principal of the speller), the word in question, and the grounds for reinstatement. (See Grounds A-E herein.) The deadline for delivering an appeal is before the speller affected would have received their next word had they stayed in the spelling bee. To minimize disruptions, however, effort should be made to deliver an appeal by the end of the round in which the speller was eliminated. When five or fewer spellers remain, the written appeal requirement is suspended, and an oral appeal must be made before the speller would have received their next word had they stayed in the spelling bee. While the competition is in session, individuals who have filed appeals may not directly approach the judges unless explicit permission to approach the judges has been given. The judges will contact the speller if they decide to reinstate the speller. To minimize disruption to the pace of the spelling bee and the concentration of the spellers, the judges are under no obligation to stop the spelling bee to discuss with the speller's parent(s), legal guardian or teacher a denied appeal.