

Contest Rules of the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee

Rule 1: Eligibility

A speller qualifying for the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee (“SNSB”) national finals must meet these requirements:

- (1) The speller must not previously 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, 2020.
- (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 April 30, 2021, and the SNSB will, in its sole discretion, determine the speller’s eligibility status on or before May 14, 2021.
- (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 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 24, 2020, and May 17, 2021.
- (8) The speller must not have reached the age of 15 on or before August 31, 2020.
- (9) The speller must have been declared a champion of an SNSB-sanctioned final local spelling bee on or after February 1, 2021, 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 must not have any first-, second- or third-degree relatives (i.e., sibling, parent, step-parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, half-sibling, step-sibling or first cousin) who are current employees of The E.W. Scripps Company.
- (11) The speller, upon qualifying for the 2021 SNSB national finals, must submit to the SNSB a completed online Champion Bio Form, a signed Appearance Consent and Release Agreement, a signed Certification of Eligibility Form, a signed liability waiver, and a photo. Required documents must also be signed by the speller’s parent or legal guardian. The speller shall 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 SNSB 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 2021 SNSB national finals and April 30, 2022 — 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 2021 SNSB national finals.

Rule 2: Preliminaries Format

The Preliminaries takes place virtually on Saturday, June 12, beginning at 10:00 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time and is the first of four distinct segments of the competition: Preliminaries, Quarterfinals, Semifinals and Finals.

The Preliminaries consists of three rounds of oral competition: Round One (spelling), Round Two (multiple-choice word meaning) and Round Three (spelling). Each speller will participate in up to three rounds consecutively during their participation in the Preliminaries, based on their performance and in accordance with rules for Preliminaries eliminations. If a speller spells correctly in Round One, the speller will compete immediately in Round Two; if a speller answers correctly in Round Two, the speller will compete immediately in Round Three.

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Eliminations: Upon incorrectly spelling a word in Round One or Three or upon providing an incorrect answer in Round Two, the speller is eliminated from the competition. If the speller is eliminated in any round, they will not participate in further rounds. All spellers eliminated during any single round are tied for the same place. All spellers remaining in the competition at the end of Round Three (end of Preliminaries) advance to the Quarterfinals.

Rule 3: Quarterfinals Format

The Quarterfinals takes place virtually on Tuesday, June 15, beginning at 12:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, and is the second of four distinct segments of the competition: Preliminaries, Quarterfinals, Semifinals and Finals.

The Quarterfinals continues from the conclusion of Round Three and the Preliminaries, and consists of three rounds of oral competition: Round Four (spelling), Round Five (multiple-choice word meaning) and Round Six (spelling).

All spellers who have not been eliminated from the competition spell one word or answer one question in each round, and all spellers must successfully complete each round before moving to the next round. Upon incorrectly spelling a word or answering a question during the Quarterfinals, the speller is eliminated from the competition. All spellers eliminated in the same round are tied for the same place, and all spellers remaining in the competition at the end of Round Six advance to the Semifinals.

Rule 4: Semifinals Format

The Semifinals takes place virtually on Sunday, June 27, beginning at 7:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, and is the third of four distinct segments of the competition: Preliminaries, Quarterfinals, Semifinals and Finals.

The Semifinals continues from the conclusion of Round Six and the Quarterfinals, and consists of rounds of oral competition beginning with Round Seven (spelling), followed by Round Eight (multiple-choice word meaning) and continuing with a round or rounds of spelling competition until the officials declare the end of the Semifinals.

All spellers who have not been eliminated from the competition spell one word or answer one question in each round, and all spellers must successfully complete each round before moving to the next round. Upon incorrectly spelling a word or answering a question during the Semifinals, the speller is eliminated from the competition. All spellers eliminated in the same round are tied for the same place, and all spellers remaining in the competition at the end of the Semifinals advance to the Finals.

Rule 5: Finals Format

The Finals takes place via in-person competition on Thursday, July 8, beginning at 8:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time, and is the fourth of four distinct segments of the competition: Preliminaries, Quarterfinals, Semifinals and Finals.

The Finals continues from the conclusion of the Semifinals and consists of rounds of oral competition beginning with one round of spelling, followed by one round of multiple-choice word meaning, and continuing with rounds of oral spelling until a champion is declared, or co-champions are declared, except as provided under “Time Limit and Provision for Declaration of Co-Champions” herein.

All spellers who have not been eliminated from the competition spell one word or answer one question in each round. Upon incorrectly spelling a word or answering a question 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 a round misspell or answer incorrectly, all remain in the competition and a new round begins with the spellers competing in their original order. If only one speller spells or answers 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). The anticipated winning word will always be a spelling word, not a word meaning question. 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 spellers from the previous round: These spellers compete in their original order.

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Time Limit and Provision for Declaration of Co-Champions: At the 1 hour 50 minute mark in the Finals broadcast, if no champion has been declared *and* a championship (one-speller, one-word) round is not about to begin, the officials will announce a Spell-off. Each speller remaining in the competition will have a total of 90 seconds to spell words from a Spell-off word list prepared in advance by the SNSB. Time will begin after the pronouncer first pronounces the first word on the list. Words will be delivered in the same order to each speller in the Spell-off. Spellers will spell in speller number order, and any speller(s) not currently spelling will be sequestered while the active speller competes.

The speller will have the benefit of viewing a monitor featuring each word's part of speech, language of origin and definition. The speller may ask questions of the pronouncer; time used asking questions and receiving answers will be part of the 90-second time limit. Any spelling not completed within the 90-second time limit will not count toward total score.

After all spellers remaining in the competition have competed in the Spell-off, the speller who spelled the most words correctly during their 90-second turn will be declared champion. If a single champion does not emerge in the course of administering the Spell-off, the spellers tied for the top score will be declared co-champions.

Rule 6: 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 on the word list. The study list and source of words for Round One (spelling) and Round Two (multiple-choice word meaning) is *2021 Words of the Champions*, copyright 2020, Scripps National Spelling Bee. The source of words for all other rounds of competition is Merriam-Webster Unabridged.

Merriam-Webster Unabridged and the most recent copyrighted versions of Merriam-Webster dictionaries are the sources used to craft the pronunciations. The SNSB crafts word entries on the word list according to the following:

1. The SNSB takes words on the word list and therefore those words given in competition only from Merriam-Webster Unabridged.
2. The SNSB takes the definitive spellings of words only from Merriam-Webster Unabridged.
3. The SNSB crafts the pronunciations of words from Merriam-Webster Unabridged and from the most recent copyrighted Merriam-Webster dictionaries.
4. The SNSB crafts the remainder of the proprietary word list content, including content referenced or interpreted in crafting multiple-choice word meaning questions, from Merriam-Webster Unabridged.
5. The SNSB crafts illustrative data in-house and with external consultants.
6. The SNSB reserves the right to correct errors if needed at any point during competition or in the word list.

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.

Rule 7: Time and Schedule

Constraints: During oral spelling rounds, the speller's time limit per turn is 2 minutes. Time begins after 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).

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During oral multiple-choice word meaning rounds, the speller's time limit per turn is 30 seconds. Time begins after the pronouncer first reads the question. The speller will have the benefit of viewing a monitor displaying a 30-second countdown clock. The judges and pronouncer may communicate with the speller during the full 30 seconds at the speller's request.

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

Rule 8: Special Needs

The SNSB strives to provide accommodation for spellers who have diagnosed and documented medical conditions. All requests for accommodation of special needs should be directed in writing to the executive director of the SNSB before May 14, 2021. The judges have discretionary power to amend spelling requirements on a case-by-case basis for spellers with diagnosed and documented medical conditions.

Rule 9: Pronouncer's Role

The pronouncer strives to pronounce words according to the diacritical markings in the word list.

In Spelling Rounds:

Homonyms: The SNSB has made every effort to identify words with one or more homonyms. If a word has one or more homonyms, the pronouncer indicates which word is to be spelled by providing the word's definition. It is ultimately the responsibility of the speller to understand which word they are being asked to spell.

Speller's requests: 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 the word list. 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 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee word list or Merriam-Webster Unabridged.

In Multiple-Choice Word Meaning Rounds:

Procedure: The pronouncer reads aloud the question and the three answer choices: (A), (B) and (C). The speller will have the benefit of viewing a monitor displaying the question, including the spelling of the word in question, and all answer choices.

Speller Requests: The pronouncer responds only to the speller's requests for the word, question and/or answer choices to be repeated. The pronouncer may also spell aloud the word in question. No other requests will be answered.

Rule 10: Judges' Role

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

Misunderstandings: In spelling rounds, the judges will not respond to the speller's question(s) about the word and its pronunciation but, if the judges sense in their sole discretion 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

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understanding the word within the time constraints outlined in Rule 7. 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: If the judges believe 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.

Disqualifications for reasons other than clear misspelling or incorrect answers: 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, or whose family, engages in conduct that does not promote fair honest rivalry, courteous relations and graceful acceptance of competition results; (3) who, in the process of retracing a spelling, alters the letters or sequence of letters from those first uttered; (4) who, in the process of spelling, utters unintelligible or nonsense sounds; or (5) who, in the process of answering a word meaning question, provides a blend of correct and incorrect information; i.e., a letter choice with the text of a choice that does not match the original letter uttered.

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 present in the word's entry in Merriam-Webster Unabridged.

Modifications: SNSB officials may, in their sole discretion, announce changes to these rules in response to unexpected circumstances, with fairness to all spellers and competition integrity as the guiding principles.

Rule 11: Speller's Role

The speller must face the judges in in-person spelling rounds and face the camera in virtual spelling rounds, and make an effort to pronounce the word for the judges before spelling it and after spelling it. The speller must make 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 9.

In multiple-choice word meaning rounds, the speller must answer the question by providing either (1) the text of the chosen answer or (2) the letter associated with the chosen answer along with answer's text. If the correct answer is identified by either the correct associated letter and correct answer or by the correct answer alone, the speller is correct. If a speller provides the letter alone, the judges will wait for the speller to read the text of the answer aloud before rendering a judgment.

Misunderstandings: In spelling rounds, 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.

In multiple-choice word meaning rounds, the speller is responsible for any misunderstanding of the word, question or answer choices.

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 8: 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 10: Judges' Role.

Virtual Competition: Before competing in any virtual competition segment, the speller shall take the Integrity Pledge. The speller shall compete using only devices provided by the SNSB for express use in competition, and shall comply with all provided Virtual Competition Guidelines, judge or pronouncer requests, technology partner requests, and proctor requests. The Preliminaries, Quarterfinals and Semifinals of the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee are expected to be completed virtually. SNSB officials

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may, at their sole discretion and based on pandemic circumstances and guidance, conduct the Finals virtually with advance notice to all participants.

Rule 12: Proctor's Role

In each virtual competition segment, the speller shall compete with an assigned proctor observing the speller within the same room for the entirety of the speller's participation within the competition segment. The proctor will be approved by SNSB and will be (1) a local spelling bee sponsor, (2) an individual appointed by the local spelling bee sponsor or (3) an individual appointed by the SNSB. The proctor shall certify that they are not a first-, second- or third-degree relative of the speller.

The proctor shall submit to SNSB by assigned deadlines the signed Proctor Agreement Form and a signed Proctor Certification Form for each segment of competition in which the speller competes. The proctor shall follow recommended protocols as provided by SNSB and provide a signed liability waiver to the SNSB.

Special accommodations: The SNSB recognizes the current global pandemic and will strive to work with proctors and speller families to accommodate special circumstances as deemed necessary, appropriate and fair.

Please direct any questions about the Contest Rules of the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee to spellingbee.com/contact.