

**Omaha World-Herald  
Midwest Spelling Bee  
Official Rules**

**Please read and understand these rules prior to the day of the Bee, and ask the local official any questions you might have prior to the Bee.**

The Scripps National Spelling Bee has no authority over the conduct of local spelling bees (namely, spelling bees other than the Scripps National Spelling Bee near Washington, D.C.) Consequently, the national office will not render judgments relating to the conduct of local spelling bees. Individuals having complaints about the conduct of local spelling bees should register their concerns with local spelling bee officials.

**DECISIONS OF LOCAL SPELLING BEE OFFICIALS ARE FINAL.**

**RULE 1 – ELIGIBILITY**

A speller eligible for participation in the 2021 Omaha World-Herald Midwest Spelling Bee and the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee must meet these requirements:

1. The speller must not have won a Scripps National Spelling Bee championship.
2. The speller must attend a school that is officially enrolled with the Scripps National Spelling Bee.
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 Omaha World-Herald Midwest Spelling Bee coordinator of the circumstances of grade repetition by March 31, 2021: the Omaha World-Herald Midwest Spelling Bee will, at its sole discretion, determine the speller's eligibility status.
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. Normal school activity is defined 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 27, 2020, and May 22, 2021.
8. The speller must not have reached his/her 15<sup>th</sup> birthday on or before August 31, 2020.
9. The speller must have been declared a champion of a final local spelling bee or be a spelling champion of a school whose application for participation in the Scripps National Spelling Bee's school self-sponsorship program has received final approval by the Scripps National Spelling Bee.
10. The speller, upon qualifying for the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee near Washington, D.C., must submit a completed Champion Bio Form, a Certification of Eligibility Form, a signed Appearance Consent and Release Form and a photo to the Scripps National Spelling Bee. The speller will notify the Bee – at least 24 hours prior to the first day of competition in the Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C. – 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 Omaha World-Herald Midwest Spelling Bee 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 2021 Bee and April 30, 2022– 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 Omaha World-Herald Midwest Spelling Bee.

## **RULE 2 – FORMAT**

The Omaha World-Herald Midwest Spelling Bee is conducted in rounds both written and oral. Each speller remaining in the spelling bee at the start of a round spells one word – 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; however, if the spelling bee officials specify an oral format, the speller may not demand a written format except under the conditions of Rule 4.

### **Procedures for the written rounds**

1. Spellers will be seated according to the number given to them at registration.
2. Talking will not be permitted.
3. Spellers will not be allowed to leave their seats for any reason once the written rounds have begun.
4. The enunciator will say the word, give the part of speech, use it in a sentence, and then repeat the word.
5. Spellers will be advised to listen to the word pronounced, the part of speech, the sentence and the final pronunciation before beginning to write.
6. Spellers will not be able to ask the enunciator or judges about language of origin, alternate pronunciations, etc.
7. One practice round will be held in order to familiarize the speller with the rules and procedures of the written rounds.
8. Monitors will pass out one sheet of paper at the beginning of each written round.
9. Spellers will write their seat number at the top of each sheet of paper, not their name.
10. Spellers will write with pens that are provided.
11. In the event that a speller’s pen causes an error, the speller is to notify his or her monitor immediately. The error should not be corrected until instructed.
12. Spellers may not “practice write” the words on their hands or other body parts, the table or their spelling paper.
13. No corrections can be made once a word has been written on the paper. (These rules are implemented in order to be consistent with the oral spelling rounds, in which the contestant does not get to correct spelling errors.)  
Examples of unacceptable written answers:
  - o Changing the form of a letter, an "o" to an "a"
  - o Over-writes (darkening of a letter to make it more visible)
  - o Crossing out words or letters
14. At the end of each written round the monitors will pick up the papers and check for errors and other reasons for disqualification. The judges will review the papers as a final check. Monitors will then return to the spellers that have made errors and excuse them from the bee.
15. Written spelling rounds will continue until 10 or fewer spellers remain. The remaining spellers will be the finalists for the oral spelling rounds.

## **RULE 3 - WORD LIST**

Local spelling bee officials are responsible for selecting the word lists for use at each local spelling bee. Local spelling bee officials use word lists generated by the Scripps National Spelling Bee. These lists include many words that appear in the current edition of *Spell It!* as well as some “end-of-bee” words. All words on Scripps National Spelling Bee word lists are entries in *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Online*, the official dictionary of the Scripps National Spelling Bee.

## **RULE 4 - SPECIAL NEEDS**

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 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.

## **RULE 5 - ENUNCIATOR’S ROLE**

The enunciator strives to pronounce words according to the diacritical markings in Scripps National Spelling Bee word lists.

## In Oral Spelling Rounds:

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

Speller's requests: The enunciator will respond to the speller's requests for a definition, sentence, part of speech, language(s) of origin, and alternate pronunciation(s). The enunciator does not entertain root word questions, requests for alternate definitions, or requests for markedly slower pronunciation.

Enunciator's sense of helpfulness: The enunciator may offer word information – without the speller having requested the information – if the enunciator senses that the information is helpful, and the information is presented in the entry for the word in a 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee word list.

## **RULE 6 – JUDGES' ROLE**

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

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.

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.

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; 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.

Enunciator errors: The judges compare the enunciator's pronunciation with the diacritical markings in the word list. If the judges feel that the enunciator's pronunciation does not match the pronunciation specified in the diacritical markings, the judges direct the enunciator 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 question; (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; or (6) who, in the process of spelling, utters unintelligible or nonsense sounds.

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

## **RULE 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. While facing the judges, the speller makes an effort to pronounce each letter distinctly and with sufficient volume to be understood by the judges. The speller may ask the enunciator 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 other pronunciations.

Misunderstandings: The speller is responsible for any misunderstanding of the word unless (1) the enunciator never provided a correct pronunciation; (2) the enunciator 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 to distinguish the homonyms.

### **RULE 8 - CORRECTION OF A MISSPELLING**

The enunciator and judges will not ask any speller to correct another speller's misspelling, even in the end-of-bee circumstances.

### **RULE 9 – ERRORS**

Upon providing an incorrect spelling of a word, the speller immediately drops out of the competition, except as provided in Rule 10.

### **RULE 10 - END-OF-BEE PROCEDURES**

If all spellers in a round misspell: If none of the spellers remaining in the spelling bee at the start of a round spells a word during that round, all remain in the competition and a new spelling round begins.

If only one speller in a round spells correctly: If only one speller spells correctly in a round, a new one-word spelling round begins and that 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.

**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.

### **RULE 11 – APPEALS**

The speller's parent(s), legal guardian, or teacher may appeal to the judges for the speller's reinstatement provided that the appeal is in compliance with the appeal protocol. The judges render a final decision on the appeal in accordance with the reinstatement protocol.

#### Appeal protocol

Any appeal must be made to the designated official (usually the spelling bee coordinator/director). The deadline for delivering the appeal is before the speller affected would have received his/her next word had he/she stayed in the spelling bee: however, to minimize disruptions to the spelling bee, every effort should be made to deliver an appeal by the end of the round in which the speller was eliminated.

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 in order to discuss with the speller's parent(s), legal guardian, or teacher a denied appeal. The local judges' decisions are final and are subject neither to review nor to reversal by the Scripps National Spelling Bee's headquarters office.

#### Reinstatement protocol

**Pronouncer mispronunciation:** An appeal claiming that a speller's elimination from the spelling bee was due to pronunciation error should be denied unless there is agreement that the pronouncer never offered a correct pronunciation.

**Alternate pronunciations:** an appeal claiming that the pronouncer did not offer alternate pronunciations should be denied unless it is determined that the speller requested alternate pronunciations and the pronouncer did not accommodate the speller's request for alternate pronunciations and it appears that the speller's spelling almost matches the correct spelling.

**Speller's misunderstanding:** An appeal claiming that the speller's elimination from the spelling bee was due to the speller's not understanding the word (its pronunciation(s) and/or other information about the word) should be denied. It is the speller's responsibility to understand the word.

**Speller offered correct spelling for a word in this guide:** An appeal claiming that the speller correctly spelled the word should be denied unless an audio recording of the bee's proceedings or bee officials' recollections clearly indicate that the word was indeed spelled correctly.

**Exception:** if the speller's spelling is listed in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* and its addenda section, Merriam-Webster, copyright 2002, the speller should be reinstated if all of the following three criteria are met: (1) The pronunciations of the words are identical, (2) the definitions of the words are identical, and (3) the words are clearly identified as being standard variants of each other. Spellings at other locations having temporal labels (such as archaic, obsolete), stylistic labels (such as substandard, nonstandard), or regional labels (such as North, Midland, Irish) which differ from main entry spellings not having these status labels will not be accepted as correct.

**Speller offered correct spelling, as indicated in a dictionary other than *Webster's Third*:** An appeal claiming that the speller spelled the word correctly according to a dictionary other than *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Online*, should be denied.

**Homonym in a spelling round:** An appeal claiming that the speller's elimination was unfair because the speller's word is a homonym should be denied unless the pronouncer failed to define the word and the speller correctly spelled a homonym of the word.

**Incorrect or unsolicited information:** An appeal claiming that the speller's elimination was unfair because the pronouncer offered incorrect or unsolicited information about the word should be denied unless it is determined that the pronouncer indeed gave factually incorrect information and it appears that the speller's spelling would have been correct if not for the incorrect or unsolicited information provided by the pronouncer.

**Bee officials failed to correct a misunderstanding:** An appeal claiming that the speller misspelled or incorrectly answered because the judges and/or pronouncer failed to correct the speller's mispronunciation of the word should be denied. It is sometimes impossible to detect a speller's mispronunciation or misunderstanding, and ultimately it is the responsibility of the speller to understand and correctly pronounce the word.

**Disqualification request:** An appeal seeking to dislodge another speller from the spelling bee should be denied.