

# 2024-2025 HCLS SPELLING BEE COORDINATOR HANDBOOK



Presented by Howard County Library System

Sponsored by

Educational Systems Federal Credit Union, Friends & Foundation of Howard County Library System, and Howard County Public School System



**HOWARD COUNTY  
LIBRARY SYSTEM**  
Public Education for All

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## **General Information**

An exciting and challenging academic contest awaits...  
the Howard County Library System Spelling Bee!

All public and private schools, as well as homeschool associations, in Howard County are invited to participate in this annual event. The following is the sequence of events, which leads to the National Spelling Bee.

- Classroom Spelling Bee
- School/Association Spelling Bee
- Howard County Library (HCLS) System Spelling Bee
- Scripps National Spelling Bee

**Each school/association contest determines the champion speller to be sent to the HCLS Spelling Bee. Each contest will send one winner plus an alternate.**

Please note: Since it is impossible to monitor home or hospital-bound contestants participating in the bee via telephone or cable, a child must be present at the contest in order to compete.

## Important Dates

October 2, 2024	Intent to Participate form due to Howard County Library System ( <i>found in August letter to principals and online at <a href="http://hclibrary.org/spellingbee">hclibrary.org/spellingbee</a></i> ) - extended to Oct 10, 2024.
February 3, 2025	School/Association Spelling Bees must be completed
February 10, 2025	School Participation Data and School/Association Winner & Alternate info due to Howard County Library System (upload complete School Winner (Champion #1) and Alternate (Champion #2) contact info in Scripps portal.)
March 22, 2025 March 23, 2025	HCLS Spelling Bee at Reservoir High School Snow date – Scripps OTP test – decision by March 19
May 25-31, 2025	Scripps National Spelling Bee takes place the week of Memorial Day in National Harbor, MD. Visit <a href="http://spellingbee.com">spellingbee.com</a> beginning May 1, 2025 for full schedule.



## **Sequence of Events**

### **Classroom Spelldown**

Each teacher may conduct a classroom spelldown. The contest may be written, oral, or a combination of the two using the teacher portal in the Scripps Online Testing Platform. The teacher selects the words. At the completion of the classroom spelldown, one classroom representative will be sent to the grade level spelling bee.

### **School/Association Spelling Bee**

The School/Association Spelling Bee coordinator directs the School/Association Spelling Bee. This Bee may be held during school hours or in the evening. An area with a stage and good lighting is best. You may not livestream the bee.

Ask your principal or other dignitary to give a congratulatory speech to the students. Your school may want to provide refreshments.

Forward the name, address, grade level, and school name of your champion(s) to HCLS' Bee Coordinator, as they need this information to make final arrangements for the HCLS Spelling Bee.

A word of caution: if your school has many classes, you may want to hold a preliminary spelldown before your School Spelling Bee. A spelling bee with 20 to 25 contestants lasts about an hour.

*Home school associations:* Students who reside in Howard County and participate in a local bee with a minimum of 15 contestants, conducted by a Howard County home school association, are eligible to advance to the HCLS Spelling Bee.

### **HCLS Spelling Bee**

Each participating school/association may send their champion speller, plus one alternate, to the HCLS Spelling Bee.

# **Information for Those Involved in a Bee**

## **Pronouncer Information**

1. Read carefully the Judges, Recorders, Spellers, and Audience information that is included in the Scripps pronouncers' guide.
2. Familiarize yourself with all words on the confidential word list. Pronunciation is important. A meeting with the judges to ensure pronunciation of words and procedures will be scheduled prior to the Bee.
3. Speak clearly. Grant all requests to repeat a word until the judges agree that the word has been made reasonably clear to the speller. You may request the speller to speak more clearly or louder.
4. Pace yourself. You need time to focus attention on the pronunciation of the new word, and the judges need a few moments between each contestant to do their tasks.

## **Speller's Information**

1. Each speller needs to focus on the Pronouncer, to aid his or her hearing and understanding of the context of the word. A speller may ask for the word to be repeated, for its use in a sentence, for a definition, for the part of speech, and for the language of origin.
2. Each speller should pronounce the word before and after spelling it. If the speller fails to pronounce the word after spelling it, the judge may ask if s/he is finished. If s/he says yes, the judge will remind the speller to remember to repeat the word the next time. (No speller will be eliminated for failing to pronounce a word.)
3. When a speller is at the podium spelling, the next speller should be standing at a marked location ready to proceed to the podium.

## **Recorder's Information**

Make an audio recording of the spelling bee. As words are pronounced, the number on the recorder dial should be written beside the word on the recorder's spelling list. In case there is a request by the Head Judge to re-listen to a word's pronunciation or spelling, the recorder will be able to identify the word by reversing the recorder to the appropriate number.

## **Judges' Information**

1. Read carefully the Contest Rules with special attention to rules related to change of procedures when the number of contestants is down to two.
2. Read the Pronouncers, Spellers, and Audience information.

### 3. Responsibilities:

#### **HEAD JUDGE**

- Read aloud the rules of the spelling bee to the spellers and audience.
- Read aloud the procedures when the number of spellers is down to the final five to the speller and audience.
- Make the final decision as to the correct or incorrect spelling of a word.
  - State “correct” or “incorrect” after each speller's spelling of a word.
  - If “incorrect,” spell the word aloud for the speller and audience.
  - Make the final decision as to any procedure in question. These decisions will be made in consultation with other judges.

#### **DICTIONARY JUDGE**

- Honor requests by spellers to have dictionary definitions, part of speech, and language of origin of the word. These are provided on the word list. Only refer to the dictionary in cases of questions.

#### **ROUNDS/RECORDS JUDGE**

- Check each word as it is properly spelled. Record the number of the speller by each word spelled on the word list margin.
- Circle any misspelled word and write the contestant's number or name beside it. Write the misspelled word on each speller's card as they miss a word.
- At the beginning of each round, draw a line over the top of the first word in that round. Label the line with the round number.

4. All judges are responsible for listening carefully to each word's spelling. If you cannot hear the spelling clearly, request that the contestant speak louder and more distinctly.
5. If any judge believes a speller has misspelled a word, the judge will:
  - Say “delay” to the Pronouncer. The Head Judge will then tell the contestant, “Please wait.”
  - Consult the official dictionary regarding the word in question.
  - If two of three judges concur with a misspelling, the judge who requested the delay will tell the Head Judge, “The word was spelled incorrectly.” The Head Judge will then state “incorrect” to the speller and that student is “down.” The Head Judge then correctly spells the word for the speller and the audience.
  - If only one judge of the three thinks a word was misspelled, or if it is agreed that the word actually was spelled correctly, the Head Judge tells the contestant “correct,” and the contest will continue.
6. Any judge may disqualify any contestant who ignores a request to start spelling.
7. At all times watch for an unconscious tendency to give non-verbal clues to the contestant (raised eyebrow, nod of head, etc.).



# Scripps Suggested Rules for Local Spelling Bees

## Preface

We encourage spellers, parents, teachers, and spelling bee officials to read these rules prior to any spelling bee.

**The Scripps National Spelling Bee (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 Scripps National Spelling Bee. When a local spelling bee official says, “We use the national rules,” s/he 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 2025 Scripps National Spelling Bee*. These rules—obtainable through [www.spellingbee.com](http://www.spellingbee.com)—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.

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## Rules

1. **Eligibility:** A speller qualifying for the 2025 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, 2024.
  - (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, 2025; and the SNSB will, at its sole discretion, determine the speller’s eligibility status on or before April 30, 2025.
  - (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 22, 2024, and May 15, 2025.
  - (8) The speller must not have reached his/her 15th birthday on or before August 31, 2024.

- (9) The speller must have been declared a champion of an SNSB-sanctioned final local spelling bee taking place on or after February 1, 2025, 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 2025 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 2025 SNSB national finals and April 30, 2026 — 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 2024a SNSB national finals.

Howard County Library System does not make participation in its local spelling bee program contingent upon any of the following: race, religion, creed, gender, the type of school one attends, membership in an organization, or subscription to a publication.

**Home schools:** Home school students are eligible under the same requirements that apply to students attending public, private, or parochial schools. Home school students who are not part of an association must participate in an association bee. Individual families cannot host their own bees and send their winner to the HCLS Spelling Bee.

Howard County Library System has complete autonomy to determine how home schools participate in its spelling bee program. Students who do not participate within Howard County Library System's designated qualification structure are not eligible.

- 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 accommodations.
- 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 2025. 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 2025 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 2025 SNSB word lists. Some alternate pronunciations appearing in 2025 SNSB word lists may have been drawn from Merriam-Webster print publications because the SNSB deemed the information helpful to the speller.

4. **Accommodations:** 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 2025 SNSB word lists.

(1) In Oral Spelling Rounds:

- a. Homonyms: If a word has one or more homonyms, the pronouncer indicates which word is to be spelled by defining the word.
- b. 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.
- c. 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 2024 SNSB word list.

(2) In Oral Vocabulary Rounds:

- a. Procedure: The pronouncer reads aloud the vocabulary item and both options (A) and (B), but does not indicate which is correct.
- b. Homonyms: If a word has one or more homonyms, the pronouncer indicates which word is in question by spelling the word aloud.
- c. 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.
- (1) 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.
  - (2) 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.
  - (3) 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.
  - (4) 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.
  - (5) 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
- (1) 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.

- (2) 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.
- (3) 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:**

- (1) When the number of spellers is reduced to two, the elimination procedure changes. At that point, when one speller misspells a word, the other speller shall be given an opportunity to spell that same word. If the second speller spells that word correctly, plus the next word on the pronouncer's list, then the second speller shall be declared the champion.
- (2) If one of the last two spellers misspells a word and the other speller, after correcting the error, misspells the new word, then the misspelled new word shall be referred to the other speller. If this other speller then succeeds in correcting the error and spells the next word on the list, then s/he shall be declared the champion.
- (3) If both spellers misspell the same word, both shall continue in the competition, and the one who first misspelled the word shall be given a new word to spell.

- 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:

- (1) 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.

- (2) 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.

- (3) 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.

- (4) 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.

- (5) 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.

- (6) Invalid grounds for reinstatement: The judges will not entertain appeals on the following grounds:

- a. The pronouncer allegedly mispronounced the word.
- b. The pronouncer offered pronunciations and/or word information that the speller did not request, and the unrequested information contributed to the misspelling.
- c. 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.
- d. 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.
- e. The speller offered a correct spelling as indicated in a dictionary other than Merriam-Webster Unabridged or other online or print sources.
- f. The pronouncer did not answer a root word question or provide the correct root word.
- g. 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.

**The judges are in complete control of the competition. Their decision shall be final on all questions.**