2027 Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees

Preface

The Scripps National Spelling Bee ("SNSB") provides the following rules as guidance for local spelling bees and for informational purposes only. Local officials have the authority to customize and adapt their local competitions as they see fit, including end-of-bee procedures, ensuring that the structure and format align with their specific community needs and preferences. These guidelines are intended to serve as a resource, but local jurisdictions retain the full discretion to establish their own rules and procedures. The SNSB defines a local spelling bee as any spelling bee other than its 2027 National Competition.

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 may include the pronouncer, judges, coordinator and regional partner.

The SNSB has no authority over the conduct of local spelling bees (spelling bees other than the National Competition) and will not render any judgment or opinion relating to their conduct or outcomes. Individuals with complaints related to a local spelling bee should register their concerns with the applicable local spelling bee officials.

These *Suggested Rules for Spelling Bees* are not the rules in effect at the National Competition. The National Competition operates under a different set of rules called the *Contest Rules of the 2027 Scripps National Spelling Bee,* which contain provisions specific to unique conditions at the National Competition. The implementation of National Competition rules at any other level is not recommended.

Eligibility

A speller qualifying for the 2027 Scripps National Spelling Bee (SNSB) National Competition must meet these requirements. SNSB does not control eligibility for competitions other than the National Competition.

Who they are:

1. The speller is eligible to participate in a regional partner's program only if they have <u>not</u> completed the eighth grade (or international equivalent) and have <u>not</u> reached their 15th birthday on or before August 31st of the year prior to the applicable National Competition (by way of example, August 31, 2026, for the 2027 National Competition).
2. The speller must not have any first-, second- or third-degree relatives (i.e., sibling, parent, stepparent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, half-sibling, step-sibling or first cousin) who are current employees of The E.W. Scripps Company as of February 1, 2027.

What they do:

3. The speller must not previously have won an SNSB National Competition.
4. The speller must represent a school that is enrolled in an SNSB program for the applicable year.
5. 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, 2027, and the SNSB will, in its sole discretion, determine the speller's eligibility status on or before April 30, 2027.
6. 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.
7. The speller must not have earned the legal equivalent of a high school diploma.
8. 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 weeks between August 17, 2026, and May 28, 2027.

9. Single Program Participation: A speller may participate in only one SNSB-affiliated competition pathway during the 2026-2027 program year. Once a speller competes in and is eliminated from any SNSB-affiliated program, they may not seek advancement to the 2027 National Competition through another regional partner, school, or competition pathway.
10. The speller must have been declared a champion of an SNSB-sanctioned regional spelling bee on or after February 1, 2027, or be named by a regional partner as a national competitor by competing in an official SNSB program or by an SNSB regional partner.
11. Additionally, the speller may not be a first-, second- or third-degree relative of any person directly involved in administering the regional partner's program.

The speller, upon qualifying for the 2027 SNSB National Competition, must submit to the SNSB a completed Champion Registration, an Appearance Consent and Release Agreement signed by speller and speller's parent/legal guardian, a signed Certification of Eligibility Form, a liability waiver signed by speller and speller's parent/legal guardian, and a photo meeting requirements laid out by the SNSB. The speller will notify the SNSB, at least 24 hours prior to the first day of the SNSB National Competition, if any of the statements made on the Certification of Eligibility Form are no longer true or require updating. The speller's regional partner will provide access to all necessary items.

The SNSB may disqualify any speller prior to or during the National Competition who is not in compliance with any of the above eligibility requirements. Further, the SNSB may, at any time between the conclusion of the 2027 SNSB National Competition and April 30, 2028, require any speller who is found to have not been in compliance with any of the above eligibility requirements to forfeit and/or return any prizes, rank and other benefits accorded to the speller as a result of participation in the 2027 SNSB National Competition. All eligibility decisions are in the sole discretion of SNSB. Eligibility decisions are not subject to appeal.

Rules

1. Format: A 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 question in each round — except in the case of a written, multiple choice or online test. The spelling bee may be conducted orally, in writing, online or in a manner that is a combination of the three. 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 3: Speller Accommodations.

2. Competition List: Spelling bee officials are responsible for selecting the competition lists for use in their spelling bees and are encouraged to use the appropriate level of competition list generated annually by the SNSB. These competition lists include words that appear in the current edition of two study resources — the School Spelling Bee Study List and *Words of the Champions*. Also, these competition 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 spelling bee, if spelling bee officials determine that their use in the spelling bee is warranted. All words appearing on annual SNSB competition lists are entries in Merriam-Webster Unabridged, the official dictionary of the SNSB, available at https://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 competition lists; and the only authority to be consulted by spelling bee officials. Some word information appearing in the

annual SNSB competition lists may have been drawn from the most recent copyrights of Merriam-Webster publications because the SNSB deemed the information helpful to the speller; however, the SNSB is not obligated to draw supplemental material from other publications.

3. Speller Accommodations: Spelling bee officials will strive to provide accommodation for spellers who have diagnosed and documented conditions. All requests for spelling bee officials to provide accommodations should be directed to spelling bee officials well in advance of the spelling bee date. Spelling bee officials have discretionary power to amend oral and/or written spelling requirements on a case-by-case basis.

4. Pronouncer's Role: The pronouncer pronounces words or reads vocabulary questions and answer choices, and provides word information as listed in SNSB competition lists. The pronouncer strives to pronounce words according to the diacritical markings in SNSB competition 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. The SNSB makes every effort to identify words with homonyms within the competition list; however, there is no guarantee that all homonyms have been identified. The ultimate responsibility for understanding the word to be spelled rests with the speller.

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 list. 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 from the competition list without the speller having requested the information.

In Oral Vocabulary Rounds:

Procedure: The pronouncer reads aloud the vocabulary question 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. The ultimate responsibility for understanding the word in question rests with the speller.

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.

5. Judges' Role: The judges uphold the rules and determine whether words are spelled correctly or vocabulary questions are answered correctly. They also render final decisions on appeals in accordance with Rule 9. 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 a word or answering a vocabulary question.

Notice of rules: Spelling bee officials 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 in spelling rounds. 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. Although the judges are responsible for attempting to detect a speller's misunderstanding, it is sometimes impossible to detect a misunderstanding until a spelling 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 competition 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 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, or whose family, engages in conduct that does not promote fair honest rivalry, courteous relations and graceful acceptance of competition results; (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.

6. 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 makes an effort to pronounce 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 list. The speller does not need to note capitalization of a word, presence of diacritical marks, presence of hyphens or other forms of punctuation, or spacing between words in an open compound. To be judged as correct and move on to the next round, the speller must provide the correct letters in the correct order.

In an oral vocabulary round, the correct answer is the answer that most closely reflects the definition of the word. A speller may answer the item by providing (1) the letter associated with the chosen answer along with the chosen answer, or (2) the chosen answer alone. If the answer is identified by the associated letter alone, officials should prompt the speller to provide the text of their answer.

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

7. Errors: Upon providing an incorrect spelling of a word or an incorrect answer to a vocabulary question, the speller is immediately eliminated from the competition, except as provided in Rule 8.

8. End-of-Bee Procedure:

If all spellers in a round misspell or answer vocabulary questions 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 question 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 question correctly:
If only one speller spells correctly or answers a vocabulary question correctly in a round, and every other speller in that round misspells or answers incorrectly, that sole remaining speller is immediately declared the champion.

Example: In Round 12, an oral spelling round, there are four spellers. Spellers A and B misspell. Speller C spells correctly. Speller D misspells. So, Speller C is the only speller in the round to spell correctly and is therefore declared the champion.

Example: Two spellers compete in Round 10, an oral vocabulary round. Speller A answers correctly. Speller B answers incorrectly. Speller A is declared the champion.

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 and regional partners may access a recordkeeping sheet by logging in to spellingbee.com. It is best practice for the record keeper, or a separate audio record keeper, to use a device to record each speller's turn. These recordings can be accessed by the judges in case of any confusion or in the event of an appeal.

9. Appeals: Provided that the appellant adheres to the Time and Manner Requirements specified herein, the judges will review appeals and render decisions only 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 and was not given the definition of the word.

Judges: Did the pronouncer provide a definition? Refer to Rule 4.

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 spell the word aloud? Refer to Rule 4.

If yes, deny the appeal.

If no, reinstate the speller.

D. The speller correctly spelled an alternate spelling of the word as listed in 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.

Judges: Check official dictionary.
If all three criteria are met, reinstate the speller.
If fewer than three criteria are met, deny the appeal.
Also, note that variant spellings having temporal labels (such as archaic, obsolete), stylistic labels (such as substandard, nonstandard), or most regional labels (such as North, Midland, Irish) will not be accepted as correct. If a word has an alternate spelling labeled "British," "chiefly British," or "less commonly" and that alternate spelling is listed on the same page as the headword, the alternate spelling will be listed in SNSB lists and should be accepted by judges as correct. For example, both "color" and "colour" should be accepted as correct, but "tyre" should not be accepted as correct if a speller is asked to spell "tire," since the British spelling is not found under the headword entry for "tire."

E. The officials did not adhere to Rule 8, the End-of-Bee Procedure.
Judges: Carefully examine Rule 8.
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 the 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 any of 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. Educators and regional partners may access a sample Appeal Form by logging in to spellingbee.com.) The deadline for delivering an appeal is before the speller affected would have received their next word or vocabulary question 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 make an announcement 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, speller's parent(s), legal guardian, teacher or principal a denied appeal. No appeals shall be heard or considered after conclusion of the competition.