



2020 OUSD Spelling Bee Rules & FAQ

1. The Oakland Unified School District competition is open to school site winners from elementary and middle schools, including charter schools.
2. This is an oral competition. Scratch paper and pencil will be available for the speller to write the word, but the speller must spell the word out loud for competition. Paper and pencil are not allowed except as provided on the table. A reasonable amount of time is given (approximately one minute). Spellers will be warned when they have exceeded a reasonable amount.
3. A study word list was compiled to aid students in preparing for the competition. However, actual words used throughout the competition will not be limited to this list or any other list. Rather, words may be chosen from any source deemed appropriate by the judges and the Spell Mistress/Master.
4. In competition, spellers may pronounce words before spelling, after spelling, or not at all. However, spellers are *encouraged* to pronounce the word BEFORE spelling to ensure that they heard the word correctly. For example, if a speller is given the word *flower* and spells *flowers*, the spelling will be considered incorrect. Or, if a speller is given *absence* and spells *absent*, the spelling will be considered incorrect.
5. Once a speller begins to spell a word, he/she will **not** have a chance to change letters once pronounced. For example, if you begin spelling the word “school” and spell, “S-H-” you will **not** be able to backtrack to “S-C-H-O-O-L.” A speller may repeat the word orally, provided letters and their sequence are not changed. The speller must indicate words with apostrophes, capitals, other punctuation marks, and any accent marks either over the letter or at the end of the word.
6. At any time, a speller may request that a word be re-pronounced, defined, or used in a sentence. The Spell Mistress/Master shall grant the request(s) until the judges agree that the word has been made reasonably clear to the speller.
7. Judges may disqualify any speller who ignores a request to start spelling the word within a reasonable time period.



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8. If no definition of a homonym is given, the correct spelling of either word shall be accepted as correct. When a speller is given the definition of a homonym, he or she must spell the word defined.
9. There is an element of chance in this competition. Spellers will be eliminated in the order in which they misspell words. That is, when a speller fails to spell a word correctly, he/she must leave the competition. The Spell Mistress/Master will announce the correct spelling of the word and a greeter will escort the student back to the audience at the appropriate time. Another word shall be given to the next speller in line.
10. The decision of the judges and Spell Mistress/Master will be final in all cases. Any problem relating to the spelling of a word must be referred to the judges immediately (before the beginning of the next round). No protest will be entertained after the contest has ended.
11. In the event of a protest or dispute, decisions will be based on *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, the official contest dictionary. No other source will be allowed.
12. Once the competition begins, spellers must remain in the competition area. A stage assistant will be available to escort spellers to restrooms.
13. To minimize disruptions during this competition, observers need to silence phones and keep young children as quiet as possible.

These rules also apply to the Alameda County competition. Oakland will be able to send both winners and runners-up the Alameda County Bee.

Elimination Round

14. When only two spellers remain, the elimination procedure changes. At that point, when a speller misspells a word, the other speller will be given the opportunity to spell the same word.
 - a. If the second speller spells that word and the next word correctly, the second speller will be declared the champion.
 - b. If one of the last two spellers misses a word and the other speller, after correcting the error, misspells the new word, both will continue in the contest with a new word.
 - c. If both spellers misspell the same word, both will continue in the contest and a new word will be given.



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: *Should I read the rules?*

A: Yes. You and your family should read the rules so everyone understands how the competition is conducted. The rules will be read out loud prior to the start of the competition.

Q: *What should I wear?*

A: Comfortable clothing. No hats or hoodies, please.

Q: *What information can I request from the Spell Master regarding the word?*

A: You can ask for the definition of the word and a sentence in which the word is used. The Spell Mistress/Master will **not** divide the word into syllables, provide the part of speech, or the language of origin.

Q: *Can I write the word down before spelling?*

A: Yes, a pencil and paper will be provided on the table. You can write the word down and read it to the Spell Mistress/Master and judges. Remember, it's not what you write, but what you say out loud that counts. (See Rule #2)

Q: *Will all the words given come from the study word list?*

A: Actual words used throughout the competition will not be limited to the study word list or any other list. Rather, words may be chosen from any source deemed appropriate by the Spell Mistress/Master and judges. (See Rule #3)

Q: *Should I pronounce the word before spelling?*

A: Yes. You are encouraged to pronounce the word before spelling so that the Spell Mistress/Master and judges know that you heard the word correctly. After you pronounce your word, **pause** before spelling so the Spell Master and judges can correct you if necessary. (See Rule #4)

Q: *How shall I spell a word that is capitalized – like Monday?*

A: There are two ways. You could say, "capital M" and then spell the rest of the word. Or, you could spell the entire word, then say "the M is capitalized". Use this same method for words requiring punctuation (e.g. hyphens, apostrophes) or accent marks. (See Rule #5)



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Q: Once I begin, can I stop spelling and start over?

A: Yes, but you **cannot** change the letters or their sequence. (See Rule #5)

Q: Is there a time limit before I must begin spelling?

A: The Spell Mistress/Master and judges will allow you a reasonable time period of approximately one minute, then give you a warning if you are taking too long. (See Rule #7)

Q: Can there be a tie?

A: No, the competition continues until we have one first place winner. (See Rule #9)

Q: What if I know the word I am given is a homonym?

A: You should ask for a definition, or if no definition of a homonym is given, the correct spelling of either word shall be accepted as correct. When a speller is given the definition of a homonym, he or she must spell the word defined. (See Rule #8)

Q: How many words can I miss before I am eliminated from the competition?

A: One. When you misspell one word, you will be eliminated from the competition. (See Rule #9)

Q: How are places determined?

A: Placement is determined by the order in which spellers misspell words. A round does not determine your place. In other words, you do not tie with other spellers that missed a word in the same round you did. (See Rule #9)

Q: What do I do if I misspell a word?

A: The Spell Master will provide you with the correct spelling, congratulate you on your effort, and ask that you follow the event procedure for dismissal from the competition.

Q: I have special needs. Who should I tell?

A: If you have any hearing, speech or medical needs, please notify Nancy.Lai@ousd.org as soon as possible so the proper action can be taken. Please do not wait until the evening before, or the day of the competition to communicate your special needs. Only our team of judges and greeters will be notified if necessary, and it will not be printed or shared with anyone else.

Q: What if I have to use the restroom?

A: It is preferred that you wait until after you spell your word. Assistants will be on stage to escort you to a nearby restroom (see Rule 13)



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Q: What can be protested?

A: The spelling of a word. (See Rule #12)

Q: How do I/we protest?

A: Any problem relating to the spelling of a word must be referred to the judges immediately (before the beginning of the next round). A dictionary and protest form will be available on a table behind the audience. Complete the protest form and hand it to the closest judge. The form must include the speller's number, the word you are protesting, and your concern. The Spell Master and judges will pause briefly to discuss the protest and announce their decision. The decision of the Spell Master and judges will be final. (See Rule #12)

Q: Can we use our video camera to aid in our protest?

A: No. (See Rule #12)

Q: How long will the competition last?

A: Approximately 1 hour per grade level grouping.

Q: Can guests attend the competition?

A: Guests can attend. The competition is open to family and other observers. In consideration of others, we request that small children who become restless or noisy be taken outside of the auditorium. Noises are distracting to competitors, other spectators, and make it difficult for the Spell Mistress/Master and judges to hear the speller.

Q: Is there a word source for me to study?

A: A study word list was provided in the packet sent to your school. A dictionary may be used for additional study.

Q: If I win, will I advance to the Scripps National Spelling Bee?

A: No. The California State Elementary Spelling Championship is not affiliated with the Scripps National Spelling Bee.