

Official Rules for the 2026 Frederick County Spelling Bee

PREFACE

The Scripps National Spelling Bee has no authority over the conduct of the Frederick County Spelling Bee (FCSB). Consequently, the national office will not render judgments relating to the conduct of the FCSB. Individuals bearing complaints about the conduct of the FCSB should register their concerns with the FCSB committee. DECISIONS OF THE FCSB COMMITTEE ARE FINAL.

These Rules for the 2026 Frederick County Spelling Bee are not the rules in effect at the Scripps National Spelling Bee. The Scripps National Spelling Bee, held near Washington, D.C., operates under a significantly different set of rules called the *Contest Rules of the 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee*. These rules contain provisions that are specific to unique conditions at the event near Washington, D.C.

1. ELIGIBILITY: A speller qualifying for the 2026 Frederick County Spelling Bee must meet these requirements:

- (A) The speller must **not** have won a previous Scripps National Spelling Bee.
- (B) The speller must attend a school or belong to a homeschool association that is officially enrolled with the Scripps National Spelling Bee. Homeschool students who do not belong to a homeschool association may enroll individually with the Scripps National Spelling Bee.
- (C) If a student is enrolled in a public, private, parochial, or charter school, the school's address must be within Frederick County. If a student is homeschooled, the student's residential address must be within Frederick County.
- (D) 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 Scripps National Spelling Bee of the circumstances of grade repetition by March 31, 2026; and the Scripps National Spelling Bee will, at its sole discretion, determine the speller's eligibility status on or before April 30, 2026.
- (E) The speller must not have passed beyond the eighth grade on or before February 1, 2026.
- (F) 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.
- (G) The speller must not have earned the legal equivalent of a high school diploma.

- (H) The speller must not eschew normal school activity to study for spelling bees. The Scripps National Spelling Bee 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 19, 2025, and May 24, 2026.
- (I) The speller must not have completed or have been enrolled in more than six high school-level courses or two college-level courses on or before April 30, 2026.
- (J) The speller must not have reached his/her 15th birthday on or before August 31, 2025.
- (K) 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.
- (L) The speller may not have parents or siblings who are employees of Frederick County Public Libraries or The Frederick News-Post or Hood College or Educational Systems Federal Credit Union.
- (M) Once having been disqualified at any level of the Frederick County Spelling Bee between August 2025 and April 2026, the speller remains disqualified for the 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee and may not seek advancement in the 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee program through another sponsor and/or enrollment in another school.

The Scripps National 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 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee and April 30, 2027 – 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 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee.

2. **FORMAT:** The 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. The round will be conducted orally, and a speller may not demand any other format except under the conditions of Rule 4. A speller must be present at the bee to participate and be able to participate in the bee on his/her own.
3. **WORD LIST:** The Scripps National Spelling Bee will provide the word lists for use at the Frederick County Spelling Bee. These lists include many words that appear in the current edition of the School Spelling Bee Study List as well as some “end-of-bee” words. All words on Scripps National Spelling Bee word lists are entries in Merriam-Webster Unabridged, the

official dictionary of the Scripps National Spelling Bee, available at <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/>.

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.
5. **PRONOUNCER'S ROLE:** The pronouncer strives to pronounce words according to the diacritical markings in Scripps National Spelling Bee word lists.

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). When presented with requests for alternate pronunciations, the pronouncer or an aide to the pronouncer checks for alternate pronunciations in either Merriam-Webster Unabridged or *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, eleventh edition. The pronouncer does not entertain root word questions, requests for alternate definitions, or requests for markedly 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 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee word list.

In Oral Vocabulary Rounds:

- (A) Procedure: The pronouncer reads aloud the vocabulary question and ANSWER options but does not indicate which answer is correct. The speller will be provided with a written copy of the vocabulary question and answer options.
 - (B) 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. 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.

- (A) 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.
- (B) Notice of rules: 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.
- (C) Misunderstandings: 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 will 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 a spelling error has been made. The judges are not responsible for the speller's misunderstanding.
- (D) 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.
- (E) Disqualification for reasons other than clear misspelling: The judges will disqualify a speller:
 - (i) who refuses a request to start spelling or to provide an answer to a vocabulary question;
 - (ii) who will not approach the microphone when it is time to receive the word or question;
 - (iii) who does not comply with the eligibility requirements;
 - (iv) who engages in unsportsmanlike conduct;
 - (v) who, in the process of retracing a spelling, alters the letters or sequence of letters from those first uttered;
 - (vi) who, in the process of spelling, utters unintelligible or nonsense sounds; or
 - (vii) 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”).

(E) Speller activities that do not merit disqualification: The judges may not disqualify a speller:

(i) for failing to pronounce the word either before or after spelling it;

(ii) for asking a question; or

(iii) 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:

(A) 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 utter each letter distinctly and with sufficient volume to be understood by the judges.

(B) 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) or origin, and/or provide an alternate pronunciation or pronunciations.

(C) Misunderstanding: The speller is responsible for any misunderstanding of the word unless:

(i) the pronouncer never provided a correct pronunciation;

(ii) the pronouncer provided incorrect information regarding the definition, part of speech, or language of origin; or

(iii) the speller correctly spelled a homonym of the word and the pronouncer failed to either offer a definition or distinguish the homonyms.

(D) In an oral vocabulary round, a speller may answer the question 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.

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 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 question, the speller immediately drops out of the competition, except as provided in Rule 10.

10. END-OF-BEE PROCEDURE:

- (A) 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 or answers a vocabulary question correctly during that round, all remain in the competition and a new round begins.
- (B) 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.
- (C) If only one speller in a round spells or answers a vocabulary question correctly: If only one speller spells or answers a vocabulary question 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 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.

Example: Two spellers spell in Round 16. Speller 3 spells correctly. Speller 9 misspells. Speller 3 begins Round 17—a one-word round—and is offered the anticipated championship word. Speller 3 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** round begins with ALL the spellers who spelled 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.

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

A written appeal must be hand delivered to the designated official (usually the spelling bee coordinator/director). The deadline for delivering an 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. 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 his/her next word had he/she stayed in the spelling bee. A written appeal must provide the speller's name, the word in question, and the reason the speller should be reinstated.

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 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 Merriam-Webster Unabridged, 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 *substand*, *nonstand*), 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 Merriam-Webster Unabridged: An appeal claiming that the speller spelled the word correctly according to a dictionary other than Merriam-Webster Unabridged, 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.

Homonym in an oral vocabulary 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 spell the word *and* the speller identified an answer matching the definition of 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.

12. PRIZE

In order to participate in the Scripps National Spelling Bee, the champion speller of the Frederick County Spelling Bee:

- (A) must comply with the *Contest Rules of the 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee*
- (B) 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 2026 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. FCPL will assist in acquiring access to the necessary forms.

If the FCSB champion speller complies with all the rules as stated above, they will represent Frederick County at the 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee in the Washington, D.C. area and receive the following:

- (A) lodging in the Washington, D.C. area for the 2026 Scripps National Spelling Bee
- (B) money to defray the cost of meals, travel, and other trip expenses