

Organizing A Competition

Poetry Out Loud may be conducted in-person or virtually. The guidance below includes information on how to hold public Poetry Out Loud events. For guidance on how to run a virtual competition, please reference the [How to Administer a Poetry Out Loud Virtual Competition](#) and [How to Film a POL Recitation for a Virtual Competition](#) documents.

We recommend that each school or organization identify one or two teachers or other identified leaders to serve as the Poetry Out Loud coordinators. Lead organizers will recruit needed participants and staff, distribute materials, organize events, and keep in touch with the state Poetry Out Loud coordinator.

Begin organizing your school competition as early as possible in order to ensure greater attendance, whether in-person or online. Please see the [POL PR Toolkit](#) for information on promoting the event within your school and community, sample press releases and media advisories, and a social media guide.



- Emcee: Since there may be a lull during scoring, you may want the emcee to provide info about the poets or the students. (Music is also a good filler)
- 3–5 Judges and 1 Accuracy Judge: See [Judging a Contest](#) for advice on judge selection
- Prompter: This is someone who will have a notebook with each poem, whom the students can look to if they forget a word or line.
- Score Tabulator: This person will input the scores into a database during the competition. A template is available [here](#). Remember to test your tabulation system before the event.

Classroom competitions can be held during class periods; organizational competitions can be held during a regular meeting time. If holding a competition in-person, reserve a school theater, auditorium, or other appropriate venue for your schoolwide competition. The ideal setting will have a stage and theater-style seating. Depending on the size of the venue, amplification may be appropriate. If holding a virtual contest, competition the [How to Administer a Poetry Out Loud Virtual Competition](#) document.

All poems must be selected from the Poetry Out Loud [print](#) or [online](#) anthology, which is updated every summer. Check the website after September 1st to view the official POL anthology for the current school year. Only versions of poems from the official anthology may be used in the competition.

Students must provide the titles and authors of their poems and the order in which they will be recited to the coordinator. Students may not change their poems or their order once submitted. This will enable the coordinator to have poems for the accuracy judge and prompter and evaluation sheets prepared.


Competition Rounds

State and national finals consist of three rounds of competition.* Competitions at lower levels may have fewer rounds, but students must recite only one poem in each round. For instance, we recommend classroom and smaller organization competitions have students recite at least one poem; for schoolwide and larger organization competitions, we recommend students recite at least two poems.

*At the state and national finals, students must have three poems prepared. One must be 25 lines or fewer, and one must be written before the 20th century. One poem may be used to meet both criteria, and may be the student's third poem.

Competitors recite individually. The emcee should introduce students as they come to the stage to recite. It is the student's job to identify the poem title and author, and, if necessary, the translator. (For example, "Brother, I've seen some" by Kabir, translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra). A few other notes:

- A student's own editorial comments before or after the poem are not allowed.
- Epigraphs should be recited and their omission will affect the accuracy score.
- Footnotes should not be recited and their inclusion will affect the accuracy score.
- Stanza numbers and dedications are optional, and their inclusion or omission should not affect the accuracy score.
- Students must include the name of the translator, if applicable.
- The poem must be delivered from memory.

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- [List of Poems in the Print Anthology \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Accessibility Checklist – Venue and Event Promotion](#)
 - [Accuracy Score Sheet \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Contest Evaluation Sheet \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Evaluation Criteria and Tips \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Judge’s Guide \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Teacher Certificate \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Sample Tally Sheet \(Excel File\)](#)
 - [POL Zoom Background](#)
 - [Digital Competition Evaluation Sheet \(Excel File\)](#)
 - [Digital Accuracy Score Sheet \(Excel File\)](#)
 - [Digital Score Sheet Instructions \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Scoring Rubric \(PDF\)](#)
 - [Student Participation Certificate \(PDF\)](#)