



Organizing A Contest

For more details on organizing a contest, download the [POL Teachers Guide](#).

Lead Teachers

We recommend that each school identify 1 or 2 teachers to serve as the Poetry Out Loud coordinators. Some duties for Lead Teachers:

- Getting and keeping in touch with the state POL coordinator
- Enlisting fellow teachers
- Distributing materials
- Organizing school events

Promotional Ideas and Social Media Publicity

Begin organizing your school contest as early as possible in order to ensure greater attendance. 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.



Staffing the Competition:

- 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.

Contest Venue

Classroom contests can be held during class periods. 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.

Poem Selection

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 contest.

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.

Number of Poems Required at Each Contest Level

Classroom Level

Students must prepare at least 1 poem to recite.

School Finals Level

Students must prepare 2 poems to recite.

State and National Levels

Students must prepare 3 poems to recite.*

*At the state and national finals, students must have 3 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.

Introducing and Reciting the 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, "Mysticism for Beginners, by Adam Zagajewski, translated by Clare Cavanagh."). 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.

Contest Resources

- [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)
- [Scoring Rubric](#) (PDF)
- [Student Participation Certificate](#) (PDF)