



Public Speaking

Plain English Speaking Award

2021 Guide

The Plain English Speaking Award aims to encourage the use of clear and effective spoken English. Since its inception in 1978, the competition has provided an invaluable opportunity for NSW senior students to improve their confidence and to develop their speech-writing and public speaking skills. After the success of the virtual format in 2020, we look forward to offering a more traditional structure for the Award in 2021, that includes both prepared and impromptu speeches delivered live at every stage of the competition. Please note we are always aware of and will respond quickly to health advice, so the following information may be subject to change if required, to protect all participants and their schools.

What are the prizes?

The NSW winner will represent the state at the national final in Sydney in August, receive a medallion along with a prize from our sponsors. The NSW winner's school will also receive the Australia-Britain Shield for Plain English Speaking and the Westminster Stone. The six state finalists will receive medallions and prizes from our sponsors. All students involved in the competition will receive a certificate acknowledging their participation, with certificates of congratulations awarded to all local and regional winners.

Who is eligible to compete?

The Plain English Speaking Award is open to NSW government and non-government secondary schools. Each school can enter a maximum of two contestants. Contestants must be either Australian citizens or permanent residents of Australia. Contestants must be between 15 and 18 years of age (inclusive) on 1 January 2021.

How do schools enter the Plain English Speaking Award?

The online entry form for the competition is available at www.artsunit.nsw.edu.au. Entries should be submitted before close of business on Thursday 25 March 2021. Please ensure that you include contact details for the teacher who will be looking after the entry. All teachers must provide a direct email address (preferably your departmental address for government school teachers) to assist with our organisation.

How much does entry cost?

The entry fee for the award is \$28.00 per government school student and \$56.00 (including GST) per non-government school student. Government schools will automatically be debited for this amount once they submit their entry form (please advise your school's finance department that this will occur). Non-government schools will be invoiced after their entries have been received. Please note that fees are due on entry and cannot be refunded even where students might subsequently withdraw.

What are the speaking requirements?

At each stage of the competition students present both a prepared speech and an impromptu speech. The prepared speech can be on any subject chosen by the contestant. The speaking time for the prepared speech is 8 minutes with a warning bell at 6 minutes, two bells at 8 minutes and a continuous bell at 9 minutes. The impromptu speech is on a subject chosen by the adjudicator. Contestants receive 3 minutes of preparation time to write their impromptu speech. The speaking time for the impromptu speech is 3 minutes with a warning bell at 2 minutes, two bells at 3 minutes and a continuous bell at 4 minutes. Note that speakers are expected to finish at or just beyond the official speaking time, and it will be considered poor timing to reach the continuous bell.

What are the rules of the competition?

Other than the eligibility criteria and speaking times detailed above, it should also be noted that contestants are not allowed to use any props or external aids such as Powerpoint presentations during their speeches. They are encouraged to speak from palm cards and must present without the use of a lectern or microphone. As mentioned above, there are no restrictions on the subject of the prepared speech, though speakers are of course encouraged to choose entertaining and thought-provoking topics to address. In the impromptu section, all contestants in a final will receive the same impromptu topic.

What are the adjudicators looking for?

The adjudicators will make their decision based on the matter, manner and method the contestants employ in presenting their speeches. They will expect contestants to be confident and engaging speakers. The speeches themselves should be developed logically to a convincing conclusion in the time allowed. The adjudicators will in particular be looking for knowledge of the subject matter, skilful development of the theme and the effective use of plain English. Successful contestants are also expected to demonstrate a balance of personal opinion and information in their speeches, as well as a balance of humour and sincerity. Finally, it should be noted that adjudicators are required to give equal consideration to the prepared and impromptu speeches in making their decision.

How does the competition run?

Schools may conduct their own internal competition to select two representatives. The Speaking Competitions Officer will then advise all contestants of the date and venue of their local final which will be held between Tuesday 20 April and Friday 7 May 2021 (Weeks 1 to 3 of Term 2). Every attempt will be made to hold face-to-face local finals with online finals facilitated if necessary. The winners of local finals from both metropolitan and regional areas will proceed to regional finals which will be held at or hosted online at The Arts Unit, Lewisham from Monday 24 May to Monday 31 May. Regional winners will proceed to the state semi-finals which will be held in the Wilkins Gallery of the NSW Department of Education's Parramatta Offices on Friday 11 June. Three contestants from each semi-final will then be chosen to proceed to the state final at the NSW Teachers Federation Conference Centre on Friday 16 July. More information on the national final to be held in Sydney in August will be forthcoming.

Organisation and sponsorship

The competition is organised by The Arts Unit of the NSW Department of Education, and is proudly supported by the Australia-Britain Society and the NSW English-Speaking Union.

Contact details

If you have any questions about the Plain English Speaking Award, please contact Justine Clarke, Speaking Competitions Officer on (02) 8512 1172 or email: justine.clarke@det.nsw.edu.au. You can also check our website at www.artsunit.nsw.edu.au.

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