



NSW Public Speaking

The Plain English Speaking Award

PESA

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. In 2025 the competition will continue to run as a series of face-to-face local and regional finals, although there will be an option to compete online if the nearest event is too far away.

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 between 15 and 18 years of age (inclusive) on 1 January 2025.

How do schools enter the competition?

The online entry form for the competition is available at www.artsunit.nsw.edu.au. Entries should be submitted before close of business on Friday 7 March 2025. All teachers must provide a direct email address (your departmental address for government school teachers) to assist with organisation.

How much does entry cost?

The entry fee for the award is \$30.00 per government school student and \$60.00 (including GST) per non-government school student. Government schools will automatically be debited for this amount once the local finals are completed (please advise your school's finance department that this will occur). Non-government schools will be invoiced after the local finals are completed. 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 8 ½ minutes. There are no restrictions on the subject matter for the prepared speech, so speakers can choose any issue that they care about. 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 3 ½ minutes.

Additional support for students

The Plain English Speaking Award is an inclusive competition. If for whatever reason your students will require support to enable them to participate, please contact the Speaking Competitions Officer so that we can assist.



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. In the impromptu section, all contestants in a final will receive the same impromptu topic. Finally, note that speakers are expected to finish at or just beyond the official speaking time. It will be considered poor timing to reach the continuous bell.

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, adjudicators will give equal consideration to the prepared and impromptu speeches in making their decision.

How does the competition run?

Schools may need to conduct their own internal competition to select two representatives. The Speaking Competitions Officer will then advise all contestants of the date and details of their local final which will be held between Thursday 1 May and Friday 16 May (Weeks 1 to 3 of Term 2). The winners of all local finals across the state will proceed to regional finals. Metropolitan regional finals will be held in the Wilkins Gallery of the Department of Education at 105 Phillip Street, Parramatta or online between Monday 2 June and Monday 9 June. Regional winners will proceed to the state semi-finals which will be held at the Holding Redlich Offices, Martin Place, Sydney on Friday 20 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 Wednesday 30 July. The state champion will proceed to a national final to be held later in the year.

What are the prizes?

The NSW winner will represent the state at the national final and will 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 6 state finalists will receive medallions and prizes from our sponsors. All students involved in the competition will receive a certificate acknowledging their participation, with champion certificates also awarded to local and regional winners.

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.

