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Poetry Foundation

NOTE: The Poetry Out Loud National Finals will take place virtually in Spring 2021. We will provide more information regarding dates and the structure of the event as soon as possible.

Poetry Out Loud Virtual Competitions & Filming Requirements

Due to the Coronavirus, COVID-19 Pandemic, and current guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), we strongly encourage teachers and organizers at all contest levels to hold virtual competitions for the 2020-2021 Poetry Out Loud (POL) season. We make this suggestion for the safety and well-being of students, parents, teachers, and everyone involved with POL. For any organizer who declines to hold a virtual competition, and elects to hold an in-person contest, please follow any federal, state, and local guidelines in regard to slowing the spread of COVID-19. This may include wearing masks, enforcing social distancing measures, hand sanitizing, and ensuring participants and guardians are not displaying symptoms of COVID-19 prior to attending, and while participating in, a POL event.

How to run a virtual POL competition

There are several avenues POL teachers and organizers may choose to administer their virtual POL competitions. This document provides multiple options on how to hold a virtual contest as well as filming requirements and tips for competitors. All virtual contests must abide by the evaluation criteria and rules specified in the Teacher's Guide. If you have any questions or concerns regarding administering your POL virtual contest, please know that we are here to help. Please contact your [state coordinator](#) and/or poetryoutloud@arts.gov for additional guidance.

- Video submission contest: Each student records and saves each recitation as a separate video file. Students send video(s) via email or a file sharing platform (i.e. Dropbox, We Transfer, etc.) to the POL organizer. The organizer reviews submissions to ensure the videos meet film requirements and then forwards to the judges for their review. Contest judges and the accuracy judge must provide scores for each criterion and review independently—the same as live competitions. Organizers set a deadline for judges to submit scores and then tally the scores. For video submission contests, videos must not be edited, but students may record their recitations more than once and send their best recording for each recitation.
- Recording one-on-one on video platform: The organizer meets with each student competitor individually over a video platform (i.e. Zoom, Skype, etc.) with the accuracy judge and prompter. The student recites their poem(s) live for the organizer while each recitation is being recorded. Recordings of recitations are sent to contest judges to review and provide scores. Judges must provide scores for each criterion and review independently.
- Live contest on video platform: The organizer holds a live POL contest over a video platform (i.e. Zoom, Skype, etc.). The contest follows as an in-person contest would. Judges submit scores for each criterion to contest organizer to be tallied; winners and runners-up announced at the end of show.



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How to film a POL recitation

Filming requirements:

- Film with a horizontal orientation.
- Face the camera so it captures your head to mid-torso (medium shot).
- Each recitation should be filmed in one single shot from one static angle.
- The sound and picture must be clear.
- Videos cannot be edited. Do not add music, graphics, titles, virtual backgrounds, or computer animation.
- Use of professional recording studios is prohibited.
- For video submission contests, each recitation requires its own separate video.

Tips:

- Stand in front of a neutral background, if possible. Try to avoid wearing clothing in similar colors to the background.
- Do not place light sources behind you to avoid being backlit.
- Students may look directly into the camera, at a fixed spot, or at an imagined audience.
- Make sure you are the only visible and audible person in the video.
- Use a microphone, if possible. If the microphone is on the camera, position the camera close to you.
- Start recording a few seconds before the recitation and stop recording a few seconds after the end.
- For video submission contests, check with the contest organizer if there are file size limits to videos and if there is a preferred naming convention to save your videos.
- Examples of student filmed POL recitations can be found on the [POL YouTube page](#).

Reminder – Recitation Requirements:

- Students must begin by stating the title of the poem and the poet's name, and the translator, if applicable.
- A student's own editorial comments before or after the poem are not allowed.
- Poems must be recited from memory.
- For more details regarding the evaluation criteria, please consult the Teacher's Guide.

Accessibility:

- Please refer to the National Endowment for the Arts' guide [Resources to Help Ensure Accessibility of Your Virtual Events for People with Disabilities](#).
- Review [POL Accessibility Checklist – Venue & Event Promotion](#) for planning recommendations for captioning and sign language interpreter vendors, alternate formats of materials, and communication of access accommodations. Reach out to participating schools for the Deaf and Blind prior to event planning to inquire about preferences.
- Check the compatibility of your virtual platform for screen-reading software and captioning capabilities (do not rely on auto-generated captions and plan to work with a third-party). Avoid using only the chat feature for essential information that will not be said aloud. Reach out to accessibility@arts.gov for guidance.



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- Set communication rules at the start, speak slowly, and introduce yourself before speaking, which is also helpful for captioners and interpreters.
- Research audio description vendors for live streamed competitions, in particular for participating schools for the Blind.
- If an access accommodation is requested by a judge or a teacher who will be in a breakout room, make sure the captioner or interpreter is directly assigned to the requester.

To request accommodations, please contact your contest organizer or [POL state coordinator](#).