

# ESU PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE COMPETITION

Handbook  
2023-24



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION  
discovering voices



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# WELCOME FROM THE ESU COMPETITIONS TEAM

The Performing Shakespeare Competition is the ESU's fastest-growing competition, involving in its latest iteration (2022-23), over 4500 pupils from almost 150 schools. Now entering its thirteenth year, more and more schools are adapting their Key Stage 3 curriculum to facilitate whole year group involvement in this programme as it clearly has an enormous impact on children's enjoyment and engagement with Shakespeare.

Educational institutions, drama groups and home-schooled groups of all kinds are welcome to enter the competition: further education colleges, comprehensive schools, independent schools, grammar schools, sixth form colleges and specialist status schools. Please note that this competition is not currently open to schools or students based outside of England and Wales.

The first round of the competition takes place in your school, and the best performers will then progress to in-person inter-school heats from the second round through to the Grand Final in June.

Following feedback, we have worked hard to provide dates for all rounds available at point of registration, to make planning easier for everyone involved.

The ESU provides training in public speaking and debating to both primary and secondary school students through our teaching programme, [Discover Your Voice](#). We also run an annual summer school, [Debate Academy](#), for students aged 14 – 18, which helps to improve their debating skills with expert, world-class teaching from ESU Oracy Leaders.

As well as the Performing Shakespeare competition, the ESU holds two other competitions each year: the [ESU-Churchill Public Speaking Competition](#) and the [Schools' Mace](#) debating competition. This handbook sets out the rules of the Performing Shakespeare competition, together with guidelines and tips for students, teachers, adjudicators and organisers. Should you need any further assistance, please contact a member of the ESU Competitions Team. We'd be happy to help!

## ESU Competitions Team



# ESU COMPETITIONS EQUITY POLICY

We believe that all young people deserve equal access to high-quality oracy programmes, including friendly, welcoming yet challenging competitions. All young people, regardless of their background, deserve the opportunity to make their voice heard.

Across our competitions, the ESU aims to set challenging and current motions and topics for you to debate or discuss, as well as providing the opportunity to perform Shakespearean texts in new and innovative ways. Participants often feel passionately about their side of a debate or presentation, but we expect all participants to treat each other, the judges, and the audience members with respect.

The ESU has a zero-tolerance policy towards any form of discrimination, including but not limited to race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, sexuality, or disability. Our Equity Policy seeks to ensure that our competitions are welcoming, inclusive and supportive events, where people feel that they are able to express themselves. Teachers should also consider if a students' argument or speech is likely to cause offence, especially if they are not suitably supported by credible evidence. While diverse views and opinions are always welcomed, generalisations or stereotyping without supporting evidence or stylistic intent is not.

In this safe space, you should feel that:

- You are given the same high level of respect due to all.
- You are never in a position where you feel under physical or psychological threat.
- You will never be judged on things you cannot change.
- Your opinions and beliefs can be challenged, but will always be respected.
- If your safety and well-being is threatened, others will listen and support you.





As is common in many education settings today, our competitions operate a pronoun introduction policy.

Our pronoun introduction policy means that when speakers are asked to introduce their name, they are welcome to share which pronouns they would like everyone to use when referring to them, eg., 'he', 'they' or 'she'. This is to ensure that no one is accidentally referred to incorrectly – for example, called 'he' when they should in fact be called 'she', a situation which can be awkward and upsetting, particularly in the relatively high-stress environment of a competition.

Students should feel able to tell the chairperson how they wish to be referred to. If they have no preference or prefer not to say, that is also a perfectly acceptable answer.

We expect our participants, judges and accompanying adults to behave supportively at all times towards each other, and we take any allegations of discrimination, harassment or intimidation very seriously. If at any point you feel like this policy hasn't been followed please speak to the ESU Competition Lead present at your heat and/or escalate the situation to the ESU Education head office via [competition@esu.org](mailto:competition@esu.org) or call us on **+44 (0)20 7529 1565**. If you have a safeguarding concern, please contact our Designated Safeguarding Lead Gavin Illsley on [gavin.illsley@esu.org](mailto:gavin.illsley@esu.org).



# RULES



## Entry to the competition

The ESU Performing Shakespeare Competition is open to schools in England and Wales only. Schools wishing to enter the competition should register online at [www.esu.org/competitions/performing-shakespeare](http://www.esu.org/competitions/performing-shakespeare).

- Registration for the 2023-24 competition will open on Wednesday, 14 June and close on Wednesday, 27 September.
- If you have requested to pay by invoice, the entry fee for the competition is payable to the English-Speaking Union by Friday, 29 September. Should a school for any reason need to withdraw from the competition, they must do so by Friday, 7 October. In order to withdraw from the competition, teachers must contact the ESU Competitions Team by emailing [competition@esu.org](mailto:competition@esu.org), or they will still be charged an entry fee. Please see our [Terms & Conditions](#) for further information on fees.

Schools who enter the competition may include as many students as they wish in the intra-school Round 1 competition. They will then be invited to send their best two performances (either monologues or duologues) to their subsequent Round 2 heat.

All students taking part must be in years 7, 8 and 9 (Key Stage 3, ages 11-14)

- In specific circumstances, such as for home schooled students, exceptions may be made. Please contact the ESU Competitions Team if you wish to discuss this possibility further.



## SELECTED TEXTS

Teachers should work with pupils to select a Shakespearean monologue or duologue for the competition:

- The ESU provides some sample extracts, but these are not exhaustive; we welcome entries from any of Shakespeare's 37 plays
- A performance of a Shakespearean sonnet will not be accepted
- Monologues must be performed by a single entrant
- For those who wish to perform as a pair, a suitable duologue should be chosen
- Several students from the same school may perform the same monologue or duologue in any round of the competition
- Students may perform the same piece at each stage of the competition, or may choose to change text between rounds

## CONDUCT DURING PERFORMANCES

No costumes of any sort are permitted.

Participants are free to wear whatever they like provided that it is comfortable, neutral or dark clothing (ideally black) without slogans or anything that could be perceived as a costume. Smart clothing for the Regional and Grand Finals is not required and should play no part in judging decisions.

All performers, whatever their gender, should wear clothing that they feel confident in. Good examples include leggings, tracksuit trousers, t-shirts, hoodies and trainers. It is also sensible to ensure that hair, where possible, is tied back so that it does not fall across the face and blur the actor's interpretation of the piece.

No scenery, props or furniture are permitted with the exception of one chair per performer only.

The competition is about oracy and acting and not the use of external factors to support the performance.

## JUDGING

- The ESU Competitions Team will source judges for each heat. The judging panel will be led or supported by an employed ESU Competition Lead, alongside up to three volunteer judges. An employed ESU Competition Lead will be in attendance at every heat to ensure consistency and fairness

The ESU is always looking to add more volunteer judges to support our work. If you or anyone you know might be interested, please direct them to [esu.org/volunteer](https://esu.org/volunteer).

- Judges must not be connected with any school that is participating in the heat being adjudicated. This includes parents, relatives, teachers, coaches, students and other employees of the school.
- Where there is a tenuous connection which may give rise to bias or the perception of bias (e.g. an ex-student or an ex-teacher), the connection must be disclosed to all participating schools before the competition and all participating schools must agree to be judged by the person in question. It is the responsibility of the adjudicator and the host teacher (if they have knowledge of the connection) to ensure that this disclosure is made.
- Adjudicators must follow the judging guidelines available from the ESU and must make their decision in accordance with the mark scheme contained in this handbook.
- At all stages of the competition, the judges' decision is final.





## KEY DATES



Wednesday, 14 June:

Registration opens

Wednesday, 27 September:

Registration closes

Monday, 20 November to  
Wednesday, 17 January:

Round 1 - internal school selection  
processes take place

Friday, 19 January:

Deadline to submit Round 1 results to  
the ESU Competitions team

Friday, 9 February:

Round 2 draw, containing date and  
venue sent to lead school contact

Monday, 4 March to  
Thursday, 21 March:

Round 2 heats take place

Wednesday, 17 April:

Regional Final draw sent to lead  
school contact

Wednesday, 8 May to  
Friday, 17 May:

Regional Finals take place



## Performing Shakespeare Competition Regional Final Dates 2023-24

East	Wednesday, 8 May 2024
East Midlands	Wednesday, 15 May 2024
London A	Monday, 13 May 2024
London B	Thursday, 16 May 2024
Mid-South	Wednesday, 8 May 2024
North-East	Thursday, 16 May 2024
South	Wednesday, 15 May 2024
South-East	Tuesday, 14 May 2024
South-West	Monday, 13 May 2024
West Midlands	Thursday, 9 May 2024
North Wales & North-West England	Thursday, 9 May 2024
South Wales & West England	Tuesday, 14 May 2024

Thursday, 23 May: Grand Final draw sent to lead school contact  
Friday, 14 June: Performing Shakespeare Grand Final takes place

As we will issue all important information, including draw details, to the team lead contact, please ensure that the email address used during registration is the primary contact for your team(s) for the duration of the competition. If the team lead contact changes during the school year please contact the ESU Competitions Team at [competition@esu.org](mailto:competition@esu.org) as soon as possible.



# FORMAT

Students are encouraged to explore Shakespeare's plays themselves and select a speech which calls out to them and seems to connect with their own experiences or, indeed, from a play being studied in class.

## Timings

- The pupil(s) should start by introducing the piece; this section should be no longer than two minutes and is the oracy component
- The fourth marking criteria – Success in Realising Artistic Intention – is used to assess this
- The subsequent acting should be no longer than three minutes in duration
- The acting is assessed using all four of the marking criteria
- The overall timing of each entry will, therefore, be of no longer than five minutes in total
- Each student must only perform their extract in full once. They may be allowed to restart the extract if they make a mistake (the ESU recommends that the student is allowed to restart twice, before being encouraged to take a break to steady any nerves and come back to try again later in the running order). They must not, however, be given feedback and then repeat the performance again in its entirety.



# CONDUCT OF HEATS

Round 1 takes place in your school or educational institution. You are free to run this round as you see fit (we provide guidance to support you), however we recommend following the same marking criteria and following our Equity Policy throughout. Not only does this increase the robustness of your decision, but it fully prepares the students for latter stages of the competition.

From Round 2 onwards heats will be held in person. Schools will receive the draw for Round 2, including the date and location of their heat on Friday, 9 February.

## ARRIVING EARLY

The order of the performances will normally be announced in advance, but ESU may change this order without notice at their discretion. This will usually be the case if one or more schools arrive late to the round. Please try to arrive to your heats as early as possible to avoid this happening.

## RESULTS AND FEEDBACK

The number of regions, the number of heats in each region, the number of schools competing in each heat and the number of schools progressing from each heat will change from year to year depending on the overall number of schools that have entered the competition.

Judges do not disclose the individual scores awarded to any performance, but should endeavour to give some constructive feedback to all schools and make themselves available to give individual feedback.

At all stages of the competition, the judges' decision is final.





# MARKING CRITERIA

The marking criteria has been developed with the help of an advisory group made up of drama teachers and actors, as well as advice from ESU colleagues.

It takes into account the Arts Council Level Descriptors for Key Stage 3 Drama, as well as GCSE marking schemes.

There are four categories:

- Vocal skills
- Physical and technical skills
- Interpretation of text
- Success in realising artistic intention



## MARKING CRITERIA

Performance	1 (Emerging Talent)	2	3 (Class Act)	4	5 (Show Stopping)
Vocal Skills	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; project their voice so that it fills most of the space</li> <li>&gt; use pauses in a way which may seem at odds with the context of the piece</li> <li>&gt; deliver the text acknowledging the metre of the piece in places</li> </ul>	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; project their voice so that it fills the entire space at moments throughout the performance</li> <li>&gt; use pauses at one or more significant moments</li> <li>&gt; deliver the text structuring their performance in accordance with the metre of the piece</li> </ul>	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; project their voice so that it fills the entire space throughout the performance</li> <li>&gt; use pauses to structure their performance</li> <li>&gt; deliver the text drawing upon the metre of the piece to communicate a coherent sense of character and situation</li> </ul>	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; apply an extensive range of performance choices to bring nuance, purpose and add resonance to the interpretation of character and situation</li> <li>&gt; use stillness to structure their performance</li> <li>&gt; orientate their entire performance 'audience out' and using space in an inventive way</li> </ul> <p>(Duologue only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The performers will collaborate in an inventive way to bring energy and definition to the interpretation of characters and situation</li> </ul>	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; project their voice so that it fills the entire space throughout the performance</li> <li>&gt; use pauses to structure their performance</li> <li>&gt; deliver the text drawing upon the metre of the piece to communicate a coherent sense of character and situation</li> </ul>
Physical and Technical Skills	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; apply a narrow range of performance choices</li> <li>&gt; use stillness in a way which may seem at odds with the context of the piece</li> <li>&gt; orientate most of their performance 'audience out'</li> </ul> <p>(Duologue only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The performers will demonstrate the ability to support each other at moments throughout the performance</li> </ul>	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; apply a wide range of performance choices with purpose to affect a clear, confident and consistent interpretation of character and situation</li> <li>&gt; use stillness at one or more significant moments</li> <li>&gt; orientate their entire performance 'audience out'</li> </ul> <p>(Duologue only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The performers will support each other throughout the performance</li> </ul>	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; apply a wide range of performance choices with purpose to affect a clear, confident and consistent interpretation of character and situation</li> <li>&gt; use stillness at one or more significant moments</li> <li>&gt; orientate their entire performance 'audience out'</li> </ul> <p>(Duologue only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The performers will support each other throughout the performance</li> </ul>	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; apply an extensive range of performance choices to bring nuance, purpose and add resonance to the interpretation of character and situation</li> <li>&gt; use stillness to structure their performance</li> <li>&gt; orientate their entire performance 'audience out' and using space in an inventive way</li> </ul> <p>(Duologue only)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; The performers will collaborate in an inventive way to bring energy and definition to the interpretation of characters and situation</li> </ul>	<p>The performer will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; project their voice so that it fills the entire space throughout the performance</li> <li>&gt; use pauses to structure their performance</li> <li>&gt; deliver the text drawing upon the metre of the piece to communicate a coherent sense of character and situation</li> </ul>
Interpretation of Text	<p>The performer interprets the text with limited inventiveness to demonstrate some understanding</p>	<p>The performer interprets the text with a degree of inventiveness to demonstrate a reasonable understanding</p>	<p>The performer interprets the text with a degree of inventiveness to demonstrate a reasonable understanding</p>	<p>The performer interprets the text with great inventiveness to demonstrate a thorough understanding and generate an impactful piece of theatre.</p>	<p>The performer interprets the text with great inventiveness to demonstrate a thorough understanding and generate an impactful piece of theatre.</p>
Success in Realising Artistic Intention	<p>The performer enjoys limited success in realising his/her artistic intention as stated in their introduction</p>	<p>Throughout the performance, the performer realises his/her intention frequently</p>	<p>Throughout the performance, the performer realises his/her intention frequently</p>	<p>In terms of his/her artistic intention, the performer enjoys a high level of success</p>	<p>In terms of his/her artistic intention, the performer enjoys a high level of success</p>

# COMPETITION TIMELINE

The competition has four stages:

## Round 1:

An internal school selection process in which each school selects two entries to proceed to the second round

- Schools run their own internal competitions using the ESU's judging criteria, but without the specific involvement of ESU staff and volunteers
- Schools must have completed this by mid January
- There is no limit to the number of entries per school
- This internal school competition can be as large or as small as the school wants it to be

Before the extract is performed, pupils should introduce their piece with their oracy component, explaining why they have chosen their piece as well as any relevant historical context and information about their interpretation thereof.

- The acting should be no longer than three minutes in duration
- The overall timing of each entry will, therefore, be a maximum of five minutes in total
- Schools rank their monologues and duologues in place order and select the two which can proceed to the second round

Teachers should work with pupils to select a Shakespearean monologue or duologue for the competition:

- The ESU provides some sample extracts, but these are not exhaustive; we welcome entries from any of Shakespeare's 37 plays





## Round 2:

Schools will be drawn against other schools in the same competition region

Participating schools will be asked if they can provide a venue for this round

Dates and venues will be announced on Friday, 9 February

Heats will take place from late February to March

The format of the competition, with a two-minute oracy component and three minutes for acting, will be the same as Round 1

The number of performers advancing from each heat will depend on the overall numbers in the competition region

## Regional Finals:

There are 12 Regional finals throughout England and Wales

The dates for each Regional Final can be found on page [10](#)

Participating schools will be asked to host

The winner of each Regional Final proceeds to the Grand Final





# ESU PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE COMPETITION

Teacher  
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## WHY ENTER?

Students who participate in this competition develop key skills for the future, such as:

- Confidence in their oracy skills by using Shakespearean texts as a starting point for analysis and development of expression and delivery skills
- An introduction to performance and the opportunity to develop their acting skills
- The confidence to proceed to take part in our other two competitions: the Schools' Mace and the ESU-Churchill Public Speaking Competition
- A chance to improve their public speaking skills in the oracy component (a 2-minute verbal introduction, contextualising your Shakespearean extract and explaining why it is important to you)

## WHAT NEXT?

Decide how you are going to run your Round 1 internal competition. Some schools invite students to enter if they are interested, others make it a curriculum feature with entire year-groups taking part.

Whatever you decide, advertise the event in school so students know about it.

Help pupils to select and rehearse their pieces:

- either use ones from the Resources Section of the ESU Performing Shakespeare webpage
- or choose any monologue or duologue from any of Shakespeare's 37 plays

Hold your internal competition to select your very best performances to advance to Round 2.



# FURTHER SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

Our aim is that your students not only improve their oracy skills but also have fun!

We will send all registered schools a resource pack in September with advice and exercises for getting going in the new school year and starting to prepare for the competition.

We will send you bulletins and helpful coaching resources throughout the year to help you to keep developing student oracy skills all year round.

We offer many teaching resources for free on our website at [www.esu.org/resources](http://www.esu.org/resources). Anyone can find, download, and print exercises that help train the four oracy skill sets which underpin all ESU activities: Reasoning & Evidence, Listening & Response, Organisation & Prioritisation, Expression & Delivery.

We also offer workshops for students in oracy, debating and public speaking, as well as CPD training that supports teachers in coaching their students, as well as a wide range of online webinars and video content.

Contact [education@esu.org](mailto:education@esu.org) for more information on workshops or CPD training in your school.

Students may also like to consider Debate Academy, our week-long summer residential taking place each August.

Should you need any further assistance, please contact a member of the ESU Competitions Team ([competition@esu.org](mailto:competition@esu.org)) and we'll be happy to help you.

Call the ESU Competitions Team on **020 7529 1565** if you are having any problems on the day of your heat, such as staff or student illness, or would like to speak to us for further support or advice.



# GOOD LUCK

We look forward to seeing your brilliant performances at your Round 2 Heat!

If you need any help or support, please do contact the [ESU Competitions Team](#). Keep in touch with us on social media (@theesu on Instagram or @ESUDebate on Twitter) and let us all about how your team is preparing.

## THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

The ESU is a unique global educational charity and membership organisation that brings together people of different languages and cultures. Through our programmes, we seek to develop confident communicators, critical thinkers and empowered citizens.

We believe that international dialogue and cultural exchange are essential to individual, community and global development and this is reflected in the diversity of work that our alumni and members engage in around the world.

Our aims, as laid out in our Royal Charter, are:

- To promote education across the English-Speaking world and beyond, respecting the traditions and heritage of those with whom we work, whilst acknowledging the current events and issues that affect them.
- To use English as a means of international communication of knowledge and understanding.

The ESU is a non-political organisation, working with people regardless of nationality and background, and from all walks of life.

For more information on our education programmes please visit [www.esu.org](http://www.esu.org)

