



..... A RECITATION CONTEST
FOR CANADIAN HIGH
SCHOOLS

Recitation Contest

Judge's Guide

poetryinvoice.com lesvoixdelapoesie.com

 PIV_LVP  Poetry In Voice | Les voix de la poésie

SIXTH EDITION



“Nothing is better than the memorizing and reciting of poems to help students understand structure and emotional force. And the poems they memorize will be with them all their lives.”

— MARGARET ATWOOD

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Judging a Contest

Competition Overview

Introduction

Judging poetry recitations is one of the most important — and difficult — roles in Poetry In Voice.

At every level of the competition, students receive an accuracy score and a cumulative performance score for each recitation.

Accuracy is a vital factor in recitation. Without an accuracy judge's careful, clear assessment of a student's accuracy, the idea of reciting a poem "by heart" is compromised.

Performance judges often find themselves weighing very different recitations. They must decide how well students represent poems that lend themselves to more than one interpretation.

All judges must work quickly and score many performances of a wide variety of poems. Students dedicate many hours to practising their recitations, and judges must be both fair and firm in their assessments of those recitations.

If you have questions at any point in the judging process, feel free to speak to the event organizer.

Conflict of Interest

If you feel you may have a conflict of interest, please let the event organizers know — the earlier the better. Disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest (or the appearance of conflicts of interest) will help organizers to preserve the integrity of the contest and make it fair for all students.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST INCLUDE:

- ▶ Being the relative of one of the contestants
- ▶ Being the teacher of one of the contestants (in the case of the Online Semifinals or the National Finals)
- ▶ Being an alumni of the represented school (in the case of the Online Semifinals or the National Finals)

Structure

The Poetry In Voice/Les voix de la poésie Recitation Contest is a competition that encourages high school and CEGEP students to engage with poetry.

Students find, learn, memorize, and recite poems from our anthology. Their recitations are scored using our evaluation materials, and the top-scoring students will advance through the four stages of the competition:

THE CLASSROOM CONTEST:

Students memorize and recite one poem in the classroom.

THE SCHOOL CONTEST:

The winning students from participating classes advance to a school's contest. A school can name one champion in each prize stream: English, Bilingual, and French.

THE ONLINE SEMIFINALS:

School champion(s) film their recitations and upload the videos to our website by our deadline. Judges evaluate them, and the top-scoring students win a trip to the National Finals. Poetry In Voice pays for travel and accommodations for the student and a teacher.

THE NATIONAL FINALS:

The National Finals are held over two days and include cultural events and the last stage of the competition. Judges may include poets, writers, and performers.

At the National Finals, a first, second, and third prize is awarded in each prize stream:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1ST | \$5,000 for the student champion
\$1,000 for the student champion's school library
(\$500 reserved for the purchase of poetry books) |
| 2ND | \$1,000 for the student champion
\$500 for the student champion's school library
(reserved for the purchase of poetry books) |
| 3RD | \$500 for the student champion
\$250 for the student champion's school library
(reserved for the purchase of poetry books) |

The Contest

Here's how a typical live contest unfolds:

An MC welcomes the audience and introduces the students, the performance judges, and the accuracy judge.

The first student recites their first poem and only asks for the prompter's help if needed. After the recitation is complete, there is a pause of about a minute so that the performance judges and the accuracy judge can finish their evaluations and give their completed forms to the tabulator. The tabulator tracks each student's total score as the contest proceeds.

The second student recites their first poem, and so on until every student has recited their first poem. There may be an intermission at this point.

The second round of the contest begins, and judges evaluate each recitation and the tabulator tallies scores as before. There are only two rounds of competition at school contests; at the National Finals, there is a third round of recitations for students in the English stream and those competing in the French stream.

The tabulator compiles the final scores, and the MC announces the winner(s). Prizes may be awarded.

An in-person contest doesn't usually exceed two hours. Speak to the organizer about what you can expect from the contest you'll be judging.

Rules

No matter what level of the contest you're judging, it's helpful to know the rules that apply to your work:

- ▶ Students' recitations must be assessed according to the Poetry In Voice evaluation criteria, and students must be assigned an accuracy score at every level of the contest.
- ▶ Poems must be memorized and recited as they appear in the Poetry In Voice/Les voix de la poésie online anthology, including any epigraphs.
- ▶ Accuracy judges must evaluate students' recitations against the poems as they appear on our website (as you may be aware, several versions of a given poem may have been published).
- ▶ A student must start their recitation by saying the title of the poem and the poet's name. A student's editorial comments before or after a poem are not allowed.
- ▶ Judges should not convene to discuss performances. Rankings will be based solely on the judges' submitted evaluation sheets.
- ▶ Judges may not reconsider their scores after submitting them.
- ▶ Scoring is cumulative. The scores from all rounds should be added together to determine the winner.
- ▶ In the event of a tie, the tied student with the highest overall performance score will win; if that also results in a tie, then the organizer will award the title to the student with the highest accuracy score.

❗ For a full list of the rules, refer to the Competitions section of our website.

Recitations

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In terms of the competition, our goal is for each student to choose poems, internalize their meaning, and then share them with an audience.

Recitation is neither acting, nor narration, but can be found somewhere between the two.

As they prepare their recitations, students are encouraged to keep our contest evaluation criteria in mind:

- ▶ Accuracy
- ▶ Physical presence
- ▶ Voice and articulation
- ▶ Evidence of understanding
- ▶ Interpretation
- ▶ Overall performance

Our Recitation Tips for Students can be found on **page 6**. This document is based on our Scoring Rubric (on **page 8**) and provides students with detailed information about each criterion.

OLIVIA PERRY FROM LARK
HARBOUR, NEWFOUNDLAND,
RECITES "THESE POEMS, SHE SAID"
BY **ROBERT BRINGHURST** (2014)



Recitation Tips for Students

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Starting and Finishing

Start your recitation with the title of the poem and the poet's name:

"Heat" by Archibald Lampman

« Clair de lune » de Victor Hugo

Then begin your recitation.

Once you've finished your recitation, pause to let the poem settle over the audience, then walk away.

As you practise your poem, keep the following aspects of your performance in mind:

Accuracy

A fundamental aspect of recitation (and often a deciding factor at the higher levels of the contest) is knowing every word of your poem.

Be sure to memorize your poem exactly as it appears in the Poetry In Voice/Les voix de la poésie online anthology, including any epigraph.

Making comments, such as saying your name, "thank you," or anything else before or after your recitation, will result in a lower accuracy score.

At every level of the contest, an accuracy judge will check your recitation against the version of the poem on the website and give you an accuracy score.

Physical Presence

Establish a strong stage presence by practising the following:

- + good posture
- + comfortable, steady eye contact with the audience
- + confident body language

AVOID:

- slouching
- timid eye contact
- nervous body language (fidgeting, shifting)

Evidence of Understanding

If you don't understand your poem, neither will your audience.

- + Be sure you're clear about the meaning of your poem. A great place to start is the poem's page on our website, where you'll find a list of the themes and poetic terms and forms used, as well as the poet's biography.
- + Double-check that you understand any words that are new to you.
- If you're unclear on the meaning of a poem, you can't recite it effectively. Research your poem and discuss it with your teacher. Once you understand your poem, you can craft your recitation accordingly.

Voice and Articulation

Use your voice to make the poem come alive for the audience. Make careful decisions about your volume and pacing:

- + ensure your voice reaches the whole audience
- + proceed at a natural pace and accelerate or decelerate as needed
- + let your voice rise and fall with the poem
- + decide how long a pause to use for each punctuation mark
- + play with the line breaks of the poem (N.B.: Not all line breaks call for a pause)

❗ Be sure to check your pronunciation with your teacher before you finalize your performance. When an older version of a word is used in a poem, both the modern and historic pronunciations of that word are acceptable (e.g., the word *belov'd* could be pronounced *be-loved* or *be-lov-ed*).

AVOID:

- mispronouncing words
- being too loud or too quiet
- reciting too quickly or too slowly for the poem
- reciting monotonously
- reciting in a sing-song manner (particularly if you're reciting a rhymed poem)
- singing your poem (some of the poems in our anthology are also known song lyrics; be sure that your pacing is based on your understanding of the poem and doesn't mimic the beats and measures of the song)

❗ You'll never be penalized for your natural accent; however, affected character accents are strongly discouraged.

Interpretation

When you recite, you're more like a narrator than an actor. You need to convey the meaning and enhance the audience's experience of the poem without acting it out.

- + Let the words of the poem do the emotional work during your recitation.
- + Depending on the poem, occasional gestures can be appropriate. If you're uncertain about whether or not to include them, leave them out.

AVOID:

- an overly emotional delivery style
- distracting, excessive gestures or facial expressions

Overall Performance

This category evaluates the overall success of your recitation, taking into account the above criteria, your poem choice, the poem's complexity, and how you've made the poem your own.

DEDE AKOLO FROM
VANCOUVER, BRITISH
COLUMBIA, RECITES "THE
LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE" BY
WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS
(2013)



Accuracy Judge

You are charged with ensuring that students have their poems correctly memorized.

As each student recites, you will silently read the poem, mark up any errors that the student makes on the hard copy of the poem, and use our Accuracy Score Sheet to assign the student an accuracy score.

Our accuracy scoring system distinguishes between small errors (saying “a” instead of “the,” for example), big errors (like skipping a line or a stanza), and using the prompter for help. Deductions are made for each kind of error.

A perfect accuracy score is 8, and no matter how many accuracy errors a student makes, the lowest possible accuracy score is 1.

Review the Accuracy Score Sheet on **page 9** so you’re clear on how to score for accuracy.

Before the Contest

The contest organizer will provide you with a copy of the poems that will be recited. It’s helpful to read through the poems and become familiar with them.

It’s also useful to devise a system for marking up each kind of error. For example:

T = transposed words

X = a dropped word

P = help from the prompter

XX = a dropped line

During the Contest

When you arrive, the organizer will provide you with the full set of poems in the order of recitation and the appropriate number of Accuracy Score Sheets.

As each student recites, follow along, mark any errors, and fill out one Accuracy Score Sheet accordingly. Keep in mind that it’s not unusual for most students to have perfect accuracy scores.

As soon as you’re done, give the sheet to the tabulator.

Performance Judge

You are responsible for assessing how well a student has met our performance criteria.

As each student recites, you will closely watch their performance and evaluate for physical presence, voice and articulation, evidence of understanding, interpretation, and overall performance. You will use our Evaluation Sheet to assign a student a score for each of these criteria.

Our performance scoring system ranges from poor to outstanding.

Review the Scoring Rubric on **page 8** and the Evaluation Sheet on **page 10** so you can feel confident in your assessments.

Before the Contest

The contest organizer will provide you with a copy of the poems that will be recited. It’s helpful to read through the poems and become familiar with them.

You may want to practise judging by watching a few recitation videos in the Videos section of our website using the Evaluation Sheet.

During the Contest

When you arrive, the organizer will provide you with the full set of Evaluation Sheets (with each student’s name and recited poem indicated) in the order of recitation.

As each student recites, fill out the Evaluation Sheet.

For each criterion, a solid performance earns a 4 (or 5 for overall performance); please keep this in mind as you are scoring the early recitations. You would not want to score higher or lower than the student deserves, and the early scores will set the standard for the rest of the competition.

Be sure you score each category separately and carefully — you should not find yourself circling all 3s, for instance.

A score of 9 for overall performance is generally very rare. Save this for truly exceptional recitations.

When the recitation is over, take a few seconds to review the sheet and ensure you've assigned a score for each criterion.

As soon as you're done, hand the sheet to the tabulator.

- After you judge the contest, share your impressions on social media.
- Depending on where the National Finals take place, let people in your network know where they can buy tickets.

Thank you

On behalf of the students and teachers who have worked hard to make this contest happen and the Poetry In Voice team, thank you for sharing your time and skill with us.

Spread the Word

Our goal is to get as many Canadian students as possible to read and learn poetry by heart.

Recruitment

In the fall and early winter, we ask Canadian high school teachers (grades 9–12) to sign up on our website for the contest. When they do, we send them our Teacher's Guide and posters, and we assign them a staff member who can answer their questions as they run the contest.

There's no charge to enter the contest and our materials are available on our website for free.

The National Finals

Every spring, we try to ensure a full house for the students reciting at the National Finals, which takes place in a different Canadian city each year.

We would be grateful if you could help us get the word out about what we're doing:

- If you know any high school teachers, librarians, or debate coaches, tell them about us, especially before summer vacation or in the early fall so they have enough time to incorporate Poetry In Voice into their curriculum.
- Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.
- Share, like, or retweet our social media updates.

ALEXANDER GAGLIANO
FROM TORONTO, ONTARIO,
RECITES "FROM CHAPTER I" BY
CHRISTIAN BÖK (2012)



Evaluation Materials

Scoring Rubric

Accuracy: Students should be assigned an accuracy score for each recitation. Please refer to our Accuracy Score Sheet.

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	AVERAGE	GOOD	EXCELLENT	OUTSTANDING
PHYSICAL PRESENCE	Stiff or agitated; lacks eye contact with audience; appears uncomfortable	Timid; unsure; eye contact and body language reflect nervousness	Body language and eye contact are at times unsure, at times confident	Comfortable; steady eye contact and confident body language	Poised; body language and eye contact reveal strong stage presence	Authoritative; body language and eye contact show compelling stage presence
VOICE AND ARTICULATION	Inaudible; slow; distracting rhythm; singsong; hurried; mispronunciations	Audible, but quiet; too loud; monotone; unevenly paced; affected tone	Clear; adequate intonation; even pacing	Clear; appropriate intonation and pacing	Very clear; crisp; effective use of volume, intonation, rhythm, and pacing	Very clear; crisp; mastery of rhythm and pace; skilful use of volume and intonation
EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING	Obscures meaning of poem	Doesn't sufficiently communicate meaning of poem	Satisfactorily communicates meaning of poem	Conveys meaning of poem well	Interprets poem very well for audience; nuanced	Masterfully interprets poem for audience, deftly revealing poem's meaning
INTERPRETATION	Poem is overshadowed by significant distracting gestures, facial expressions, inflections, or accents; acting out of poem; singing; overemoting; inappropriate tone	Poem is secondary to style of delivery; includes instances of distracting gestures, facial expressions, and vocal inflections; inappropriate tone	Poem is neither overwhelmed nor enhanced by style of delivery	Poem is enhanced by style of delivery; any gestures, facial expressions, and movements are appropriate to poem	Style of delivery reflects precedence of poem; poem's voice is well conveyed	Style of delivery reflects internalization of poem; all gestures and movements feel essential to poem's success
OVERALL PERFORMANCE	Ineffective or inappropriate recitation; does disservice to poem	Inadequate recitation; does disservice to poem	Sufficient recitation; lacks meaningful impact on audience	Enjoyable recitation; successfully delivers poem	Inspired performance shows grasp of recitation skills and enhances audience's experience of the poem	Captivating performance that is more than the sum of its parts; shows mastery of recitation skills

Accuracy Score Sheet

NAME OF STUDENT _____

TITLE OF POEM _____

MAXIMUM SCORE

8 POINTS

INACCURACY DEDUCTION (SUBTRACT)

_____ **POINTS**

PROMPT DEDUCTION (SUBTRACT)

_____ **POINTS**

FINAL ACCURACY SCORE

_____ **POINTS***

*LOWEST POSSIBLE SCORE IS 1 POINT

MINOR INACCURACIES, RESULTING IN A 1 POINT DEDUCTION, INCLUDE:

- ▶ confusing a pronoun ("he" instead of "she")
- ▶ confusing an article ("a" instead of "the")
- ▶ pluralizing a word or vice versa ("horses" instead of "horse")
- ▶ replacing a word with a similar word ("jump" instead of "leap")
- ▶ confusing the order of words ("hops and skips" instead of "skips and hops")
- ▶ skipping a word
- ▶ repeating a word
- ▶ adding a word

MAJOR INACCURACIES, RESULTING IN LARGER DEDUCTIONS PER OCCURRENCE, INCLUDE:

- ▶ one line out of order **-2 POINTS**
- ▶ repeating a line **-2 POINTS**
- ▶ forgetting to say the title and author of the poem **-3 POINTS**
- ▶ skipping an epigraph **-3 POINTS**
- ▶ skipping one line/skipping three or more words in the same line **-3 POINTS**
- ▶ making any editorial comments before, during, or after the recitation **-3 POINTS**
- ▶ reversing two stanzas **-5 POINTS**
- ▶ skipping one stanza **-6 POINTS**

USE OF PROMPTER:

Each time a student uses the prompter, 3 POINTS will be deducted from the final accuracy score.

❗ ACCURACY JUDGE: Follow along with the text of the poem as the competitor recites. Mark the text each time there is an error in accuracy. You may want to mark all minor inaccuracies the same (since each is worth a 1 point deduction), and flag the bigger mistakes differently. After the recitation, use the guidelines above to assign a point deduction to each mistake. To get the final accuracy score, count up the point deductions and subtract them from the maximum score of 8 points.

Example: If the competitor repeated a word (-1 point), confused an article (-1 point), and skipped one line (-3 points), that would mean 5 points subtracted from the maximum score of 8. The final accuracy score would be 3 points.

Evaluation Sheet

NAME OF STUDENT

TITLE OF POEM

	VERY WEAK	WEAK	AVERAGE	GOOD	EXCELLENT	OUTSTANDING
PHYSICAL PRESENCE	1	2	3	4	5	6
VOICE AND ARTICULATION	1	2	3	4	5	6
EVIDENCE OF UNDERSTANDING	1	2	3	4	5	6
INTERPRETATION	1	2	3	4	5	6
OVERALL PERFORMANCE	1	2	3	5	7	9

TOTAL

(33 POINTS MAX)

+

ACCURACY JUDGE'S ADDITION

(8 POINTS MAX)

=

FINAL SCORE

(41 POINTS MAX)

Notes

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Credits and Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge that this guide has been adapted from the Poetry Out Loud Judge's Guide with permission from its publishers, the Poetry Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. **poetryoutloud.org, arts.gov.** All rights reserved.

We appreciate your feedback in improving this guide and the judging process.

Please send comments to **info@poetryinvoice.com**.

Poetry In Voice / Les voix de la poésie is a non-profit organization founded by Scott Griffin, chairman and founder of **The Griffin Trust For Excellence In Poetry**. Poetry In Voice / Les voix de la poésie aims to promote poetry in the classroom and the community.