

How to Prepare for an Adult Spelling Bee

Many of us have fond (and sometimes not so fond!) memories of involvement in a spelling bee. Whether as an organizer, contestant or spectator, the spelling bee has ‘stung’ thousands of school-aged children and young adults throughout the years. There is now, however, an increasing interest in adult spelling competitions. These competitions are usually held as team-building exercises, and in some cases fundraising efforts.

What is a Spelling Bee?

A spelling bee is a competition where participants are required to spell words, typically in front of an audience and event judges. Most contests involve a scoring and elimination system. For instance, if the participant spells a word incorrectly, they may not be immediately eliminated from the contest. However, frequent misspellings by the individual (or group) in later rounds may prompt removal from the competition.

Decades of Tradition

The spelling bee is thought to have originated in the United States. The first [National Spelling Bee](#) was held in 1925 in Washington, D.C. Since then, the events have become a popular activity for grade and high school-aged students. More recently, many adults have also embraced the competitions for fun and enjoyment, as well as for team and ‘brain building’ activities.

Preparation Tips and Tricks

It may be difficult to determine exactly what to expect at your competition, since each contest adopts varying rules and regulations. While you will not be able to review the actual word list that will be used in the bee, there are methods by which you can ‘prepare for the unexpected.’

➤ **Respect the Bee**

If you have been involved in a spelling bee before — as a participant or spectator — it may be helpful to recall that experience. If you have not been in a past bee, or if it has been a significant amount of time since your last participation, you may wish to attend a spelling bee (if possible) or watch a movie about them, to gain insight and experience. *Akeelah and the Bee* and *Spellbound* are two movie options.

➤ **Partnership**

Even if you are entering a spelling bee alone, it will be important for you to find a partner who can read aloud potential words. This will also provide you with practice spelling in front of an ‘audience.’ Though you may already be using preparation materials such as flash cards, seeing a word on paper is different than trying to spell it out loud from memory.

➤ **Create a Routine**

Compile a list of 20 to 30 medium-to-difficult words that you will make a daily commitment to recite and spell. The list should consist of words that you do not typically use in normal conversation.

➤ **Synonyms and Antonyms**

Many adult spelling bee teams will create a potential word list, and then search for and study synonyms and antonyms of these words. This will help you become familiar not only with the spelling of words, but also their meanings.

➤ **Common Misspellings & Homonyms**

Be aware of common misspellings and words that sound alike, but have different meanings. Most spelling bee judges will offer words in a sentence, if requested.

➤ **Play a Game**

Word games such as Boggle and Scrabble encourage increased thought about spelling. There are also many online games that can achieve this same result, including:

- [Visual Thesaurus Spelling Bee](#)
- [Interactive Spelling Bee](#)
- [Spelling Bee Video](#)

➤ **Review Existing Spelling Bee Word Lists**

The word lists for many spelling bees are released shortly following the end of each competition. While there is no guarantee that the exact words will be featured in your spelling bee, it is helpful to be aware of past and common contest words.

➤ **Host Practice Bees**

Practice sessions are a fun and productive method to prepare for the actual competition. If working with a group, these can also serve as a team-building exercise. In this scenario, each team member should take turns being the moderator, participant and spectator.

➤ **Keep Calm**

Though the tendency for many of us is to ‘cram’ before a presentation or competition, it is important to relax on the day of the contest. Provided you have done your very best to study and prepare for the spelling bee, it may be wise to spend these last moments to become ‘centered’ and composed. Many adult spelling bee participants who have been eliminated from the competition have later cited nerves as the reason they were not able to correctly spell words they had previously thought of as ‘easy.’ ■