



# ISA

PUBLIC  
SPEAKING  
COMPETITION



Supported by



ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION  
discovering voices

Open to KS2 - KS5

Final: Wednesday 25 March 2026  
Gonville and Caius College, CB2 1TA

# DEADLINE

## Thursday 15 January 2026

Competition open to ISA Members' schools only  
Visit the ISA website for more information

[isaschools.org.uk](https://isaschools.org.uk) | [isaarts@isaschools.org.uk](mailto:isaarts@isaschools.org.uk)

ISA  
ARTS

This competition encourages pupils from Key Stages 2-5 to practice their presentation skills and build self-confidence by performing a reading or a speech in front of their peers, which will then be judged by public speaking experts.

### Eligibility

Only schools whose Head is a Member with ISA are eligible to enter ISA competitions. Any pupils competing must be on the main school's admissions register, on the date of the event.

Open to Year 3 to Year 13. Our year groups are based on the UK national curriculum, for more information and to check the correct year group for your students see [here](#). Please ensure you enter pupils according to the UK system, even if your own school's age group system differs.

At ISA, we are committed to making our opportunities accessible, we welcome applications from all pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities. If your pupil(s), those with an EHCP or on the school's SEND register, are working at a level that differs from their age group's key stage, or if your school or student focuses on development and skills rather than year groups, please contact us.

Alternative formats of these guidelines are available on request. Please notify us at the earliest opportunity so we can provide the document accordingly, if required.

### Year Groups

Schools can submit a maximum of three entries per year group. An entry can only include one individual, no groups allowed. (Please note that some year groups might be combined for the judging process).

- Year 3
- Year 4
- Year 5
- Year 6
- Year 7
- Year 8
- Year 9
- Year 10
- Year 11
- Year 12
- Year 13

### Topics for both rounds

- KS2 (Year 3 to 6): Poetry reading (by heart or from notes). A 1–3-minute reading of a poem of their choice either written by themselves or an existing one.
- KS3 (Year 7 to 9): Written speech. A 2–3-minute speech written by the student on the following topics: *My favourite part of the day/week...* OR *written speech of your choice on any topic*.
- KS4-5 (Year 10 to 13): Written speech. A 3–5-minute speech written by the student on the following topic: *If I could travel in time...* OR *written speech of your choice on any topic*.

### How to enter

Entries must be submitted via our online form [here](#) on the ISA website by at the latest.

- Pupils are invited to choose a reading or write your speech and rehearse. A recorded video of their entry in front of an audience should be submitted via the online form on the ISA website, following the guidelines below. (speeches that aren't performed in front of an audience will not be accepted).
- A working URL link must be given for the video (e.g., to YouTube or Vimeo). ISA won't accept any file to download, WeTransfer links, or broken links.
- Please make sure that your videos are accessible to view by anyone with the link. YouTube videos will need to be unlisted, Vimeo videos will need to be unlisted and age rated, Google Drive will need to be set to 'Anyone with the link' and OneDrive needs to be set with 'share link' to 'anyone'.
- ISA suggests running a competition in-house and submitting your best entries.
- While we recognise the potential benefit of AI, we kindly request that participants are using it for inspiration and support and in line with their schools policies on its use, rather than using it to generate their speeches. Please include details about the process of using AI under "any special circumstances" box if applicable, so judges are aware.

### Competition Format

#### **1. Online Qualification Round**

The first stage of this competition consists of an online qualification round.

Late cancellations cause considerable inconvenience to the organisers and prevent other schools from taking part. All entries received will be regarded as a definite commitment to attend the final.

#### **2. The Final**

Finalists will be invited to perform on **Wednesday 25 March 2026 at the Gonville and Caius College, CB2 1TA**. Schools will be asked to email the following information before the event:

- Name of performance and copy of sheet for judges if requested
- Total number of attendees, including staff and audience.

### Rules and General Information

- Judging will stop after the time limit has been reached. Competitors are responsible for keeping track of their time limit.
- Speeches can be read from notes or performed from memory.
- Speeches must not contain offensive or discriminatory language.
- Speeches can be in any language with a translation provided.
- Image and sound quality for the first round must be clear enough for adjudication.

### Judging Criteria

The English-Speaking Union (ESU) will be judging our competition this year. The ESU evaluates oracy across four key skill sets: Reasoning & Evidence, Expression & Delivery; Organisation & Prioritisation; and where oracy is interactive [Listening](#) & [Response](#).

These skill sets translate speech and debate into targeted and tangible learning journeys. The skill sets make it simple to imagine, plan, teach, track, and assess speaking and listening by breaking oracy down at each ability level.

The ESU explains how their activities promote such skills, they offer a language that teachers AND learners can use to describe oracy. The ESU in collaboration with the ISA have used their skill sets to create rubrics for the 2025-26 public speaking competition.

Please see below, and page 5 for more details, which will help you to prepare your speech and understand what the judges will be looking at.

#### For poetry – (KS2)

- Stance, gesture, & eye contact
- Pace, volume, pauses.
- Emotional content & emphasis

#### For Prepared Speeches – (KS3-5)

- Reasoning and Evidence
- Expression and Delivery
- Organisation and Prioritisation

If you have any questions, please contact [isaarts@isaschools.org.uk](mailto:isaarts@isaschools.org.uk)



The English-Speaking Union is an educational charity and international membership organisation providing oracy, debate, public speaking and cultural exchange programmes help young people to engage with the world, to speak more confidently and to listen to and understand different points of view.

We believe every child should be able to make their voice heard. The ability to progress and to thrive in life relies on oracy – speaking and listening – skills, which are not currently a prominent part of the school curriculum. These skills improve young people's attainment, emotional intelligence and social skills, helping them to live their lives to the fullest.

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The ESU in collaboration with the ISA have used our skill sets to create rubrics for the 2025-26 public speaking competitions.

### For poetry – (KS2)

Expression and Delivery focuses on the clarity of communication of a speaker, as well as their ability to obtain and sustain the interest of the audience through their manner of speech and use of language. Expression and delivery should be suitable for the content of the poem. This means that there is no single 'correct' way to deliver a poem, just like there is no 'right' accent to deploy. The mark scheme rewards demonstrating a variety of techniques, and so the selection of a poem to perform should allow the speaker to show off such a variety.

#### **Stance, gesture, & eye contact (20)**

How they hold themselves (posture, stance etc)

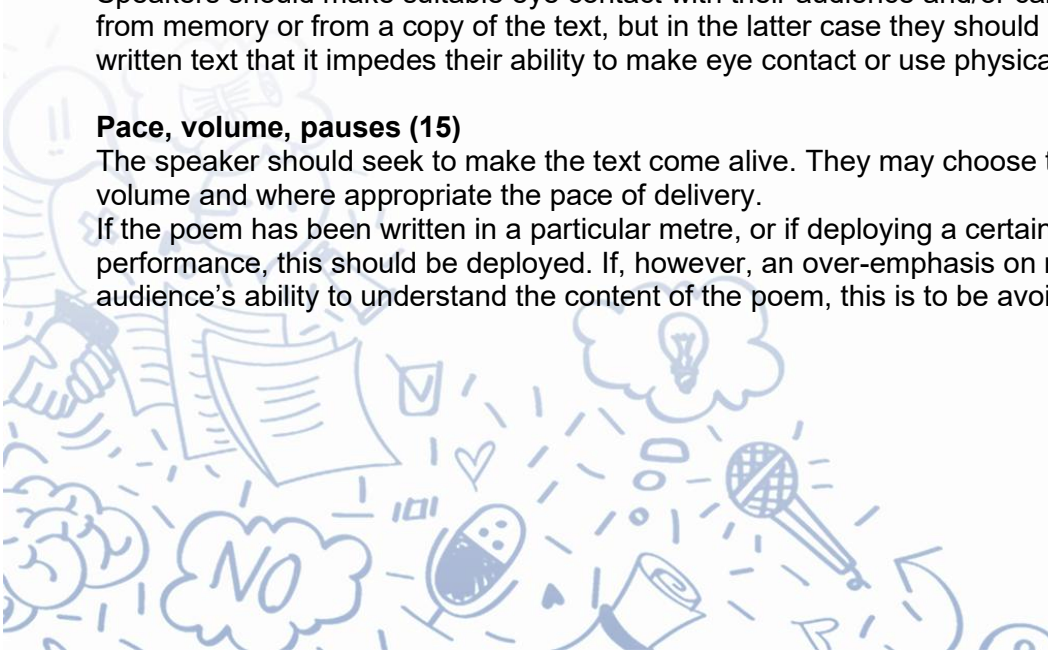
Use of gestures and other body language to support the text

Speakers should make suitable eye contact with their audience and/or camera. Poems can be delivered from memory or from a copy of the text, but in the latter case they should not be so dependent on the written text that it impedes their ability to make eye contact or use physicality fluidly.

#### **Pace, volume, pauses (15)**

The speaker should seek to make the text come alive. They may choose to vary their pitch, tone of voice, volume and where appropriate the pace of delivery.

If the poem has been written in a particular metre, or if deploying a certain rhythm adds to the clarity of performance, this should be deployed. If, however, an over-emphasis on rhythm detracts from the audience's ability to understand the content of the poem, this is to be avoided.



Speakers should make an emotional connection with the text and to communicate this through their body language, vocal variation or overall performance.

### For Prepared Speeches – (KS3-5)

### ***Reasoning and Evidence (15)***

Features; Relevancy of arguments, relevant evidence to support ideas, analysis of arguments from premise to conclusions

Reasoning and evidence places the focus upon the ability of the participant to construct ideas and arguments, supported by logical chains of reasoning, and supporting evidence.

Speakers' key focus should be on providing analysis explaining why what they are saying is true, and why it supports the overall thesis of their speech.

Speakers should try to avoid making unsupported assertions, and each statement of fact or opinion should follow logically from the previous one.

Analysis and argumentation should be reinforced by evidence and analogies. This evidence can come in many forms, whether it is statistics from academic reports, newspaper or website articles, and quotations from academics or well-known figures. The focus should be on using relevant information that supports their overall thesis, and should not be example led. Adjudicators are not expected to be able to absorb large amounts of statistics, large excerpts from reports etc.

Particular credit should be given to speakers who take into account alternative approaches and evidence, and provide sufficient responses or take on board legitimate criticisms of their own point of view.

### **Expression and Delivery (15)**

Features; eye contact, hand gestures, stance, emotive language, rhetorical devices and questions, pacing

Expression and Delivery focuses on the clarity of communication of a speaker, as well as their ability to explain and sustain the interest of the audience through their manner of speech and use of language. Speakers are expected to bear in mind the four principle aims of public speaking; to persuade, inform, inspire and entertain the audience and adjudicators. This is not an English language exam, and speakers should not be penalised for grammatical errors or mispronunciations.

Speakers should make a strong first impression, grabbing the attention of the audience and judges. This can be done by means such as humour, shock or emotive language. They should then seek to maintain the attention of the audience through verbal and non-verbal skills.

Speakers should remember the importance of clarity and variation in order to successfully convey the message of their speech in an interesting and intriguing way. Speakers may choose to vary their pitch, tone of voice, and where appropriate the pace of their speech.

Much of a speaker's communication is non-verbal. Speakers must be conscious of their body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and movement. Speakers should try and make use of tools such as open body language and hand gestures. Speakers should not be overly dependent upon notes, although speeches should not feel learnt or recited, and should be rewarded for the appearance of spontaneity.

### ***Organisation and Prioritisation (10)***

Features; clearly demarcated arguments, internal structure, ranking of most relevant ideas, preference best ideas

Structure is of importance in that it helps maintain the audience's attention by telling the audience and adjudicators what they can expect to hear, presenting the arguments in order of importance, and providing emphasis and reiteration of arguments where required. A typical speech would be expected to have an introduction, main content, and a conclusion.

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The ESU runs competitions in debating, public speaking and performance which give students from all backgrounds the chance to have their voice heard. From debating the key topics of the day, or presenting a theme they are passionate about, to showcasing their Shakespearean talents, our challenges offer a new way to achieve. Not only do our competitions complement history, politics, English literature, PSHE and drama lessons, they provide a framework for high-quality extra- and co-curricular activities for students of all ages and abilities.

For more information visit [www.esu.org/competitions](http://www.esu.org/competitions)

