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WELCOME

...to the English-Speaking Union's Performing Shakespeare Competition!

Dear Volunteer Judge,

Thank you so much for offering your time and expertise to adjudicate this event. The ESU Performing Shakespeare Competition is a unique national competition for students in Years 7-9 which encourages young people to improve their oracy skills whilst developing their passion and excitement for performance. Now in its sixteenth year, it is the ESU's fastest-growing competition and, over the years, has enabled countless young people to discover their voice and find a love for Shakespeare. This handbook outlines the format of the competition and gives guidance on judging, marking and giving feedback.

It is vital that all judges, no matter how experienced, read this handbook, as well as the [ESU Volunteer Agreement](#), and complete the online training. The ESU and all of our volunteers have a duty of care to the young people who take part in our programmes and our online training covers vital safeguarding practices to which all volunteers must adhere.

We want every young person to come away from the event feeling they have gained something from the experience, whether they win or not, and we want to ensure that the competition is positive, constructive and enjoyable for both the young people involved and our volunteers.

Thank you once more for giving your time to support young people!

Best wishes,

Anna Mitchell and Harry Hodges

ESU Supporter Services and Engagement team



AT A GLANCE

Competition Overview

The ESU Performing Shakespeare Competition encourages students to get involved in the world of Shakespeare and to develop their oracy and performance skills in tandem.

Students prepare either a monologue or duologue from one of Shakespeare's 37 plays. Music, costumes and props (except one chair per performer) are not permitted; students are encouraged to wear black clothing (or their school uniform) to keep the focus on their performance.

Before performing their extract, students have two minutes for their **oracy component**. This is the time for them to explain why they chose their piece and share any relevant historical context or comments on their personal interpretation of it. This is followed by the three-minute **performance** of the piece.

Your Role as a Volunteer Judge

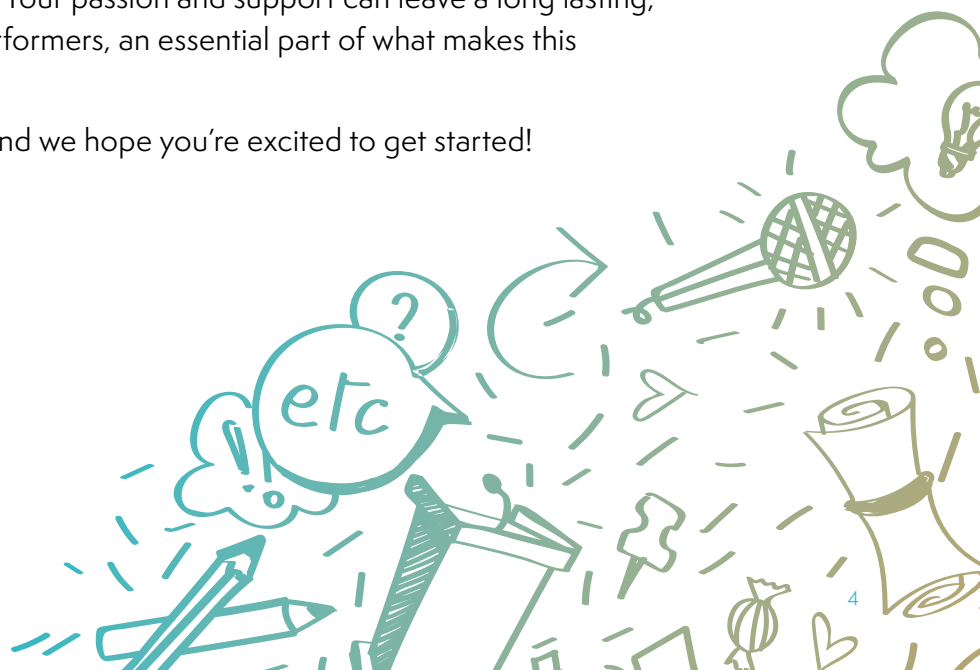
As a volunteer judge, your role is vital in making this competition an inspiring and memorable experience for the students. We ask that you bring impartiality, kindness and enthusiasm to your judging.

Although being a competition judge inevitably involves subjective opinions, your responsibility is to adhere to the ESU marking guidelines, ensuring objectivity and consistency throughout. If you have any affiliations with a participating school, student or teacher, please inform the supporter services team immediately. Early disclosure helps us maintain the integrity of the competition.

Each panel includes up to three judges, with one serving as chair. The chair judge leads deliberations and has the final deciding vote if a consensus can't be reached. If no-one volunteers as chair judge, the competition lead will take on this role. Please let us know if you'd like to be chair judge as soon as possible.

The students invest significant time and energy into their performances, and your role goes beyond judging scores. You have the responsibility to listen, engage and provide thoughtful, encouraging feedback. Your passion and support can leave a long lasting, positive impact on these young performers, an essential part of what makes this competition truly special.

We're thrilled to have you join us, and we hope you're excited to get started!





Competition Format

Round One: Internal competition organised by schools

- Each school runs its own internal competition
- Students perform the same monologue or duologue throughout all rounds including a two-minute oracy component and three-minute performance

Round Two: Local school heats

- Several local schools come together for a friendly competition, hosted at one of the participating schools
- A panel of up to three volunteer judges decide which schools progress to the regional final

Round Three: Regional finals

- There are 12 regional finals, each featuring up to 8 schools
- The competition format remains the same: a two-minute oracy component and a three-minute performance
- A panel of up to three volunteer judges select one regional champion to advance to the grand final, as well as two runners-up who are celebrated alongside all participants

Round Four: The grand final at Shakespeare's Globe

- The grand final brings together the 12 regional champions from across England and Wales
- In the morning, students participate in a one-hour workshop and enjoy a tour of Shakespeare's Globe
- In the afternoon, the 12 performances follow the familiar format
- A panel of five volunteer judges selects the final winner, as well as a runner-up
- An additional award, chosen by the audience in memory of dedicated ESU volunteer Don Miller, is also presented





COMPETITION COMPONENTS AND GUIDELINES

Oracy in the Competition

The ESU Performing Shakespeare Competition has two elements:

- Oracy component (two minutes)
- Performance (three minutes)

The oracy component acts as a two-minute introduction which the actors give to their piece. It should include:

- Details of scene they will be performing and context to help the audience understand its position within the play. For example; which play (and act) the scene is from, where and when the scene is set (e.g. day/night can be useful to know), and any other necessary context which will help to provide a brief description (not synopsis) of the scene
- Details of the character(s) they are playing. For example, who they are, how they are feeling during the scene, what other key characters appear in the scene (for example characters they are talking to or about), what happened to them just before the monologue/duologue begins
- An explanation of why they chose the scene. For example, what they enjoy or find interesting about the scene, perhaps how they relate to the character and their situation
- What they aim to show/achieve in their performance. For example, a message they are trying to convey or feeling they hope to embody



Performance, Presentation and Inclusion Guidelines

Gender

The ESU does not focus on gender within the competition. Students may play a character of any gender, regardless of their own gender identity. Participants are not to be judged on their appearance, nor on the type of monologue or duologues they perform, but on how well they perform them. It is important that the panel removes any biases on how they believe the scene should be performed in regards to gender stereotypes, and understands that it is more important to focus on the emotion displayed.

Diversity

While adjudicating the competition, judges will not, under any circumstances, take into account or comment on the race, religion, ethnicity, gender or socio-economic background of any participant, or likewise on clothing, hairstyles, accents or physical qualities as they are not relevant to the performances. The participant, however, may wish to raise these issues themselves when they talk about the reasons behind their choice of piece.

Clothing

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

Props

One chair is allowed per performer. No other scenery, props or furniture are permitted. The competition is about oracy and acting and not the use of external factors to support the performance.

Timing

The pupil(s) should start by introducing the piece; this section is the oracy component and should be no longer than two minutes. The subsequent performance component should be no longer than three minutes in duration, making the overall timing of each entry no longer than five minutes in total.

Performance

Each student must only perform their piece in full once. They may be allowed to restart the extract if they make a mistake, and we recommend 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 be given feedback and then repeat the performance again in its entirety.



YES

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ENGLISH SPEAKING UNION
Performing Shakespeare
Grand Finalist Runner-Up
2023 - 24

ENGLISH SPEAKING UNION
Performing Shakespeare
Grand Finalist Winner
2023 - 24

MARKING CRITERIA

The marking criteria was developed collaboratively by drama teachers, actors and our experienced judges. They consider the Arts Council Level Descriptors for Key Stage 3 Drama, as well as GCSE marking schemes.

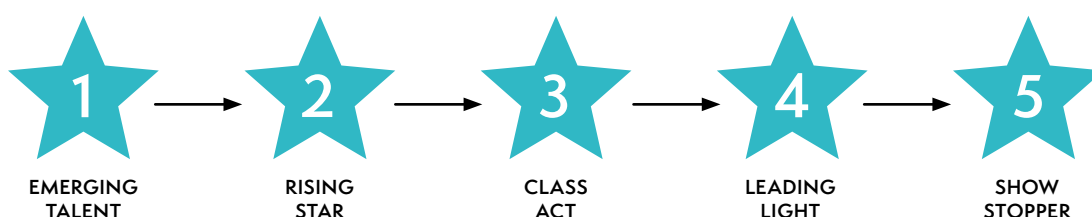
Marking Categories

Performances are marked based on the following categories:

Vocal skills	Physical and technical skills
The performer modifies their use of pace (rhythm, pauses), accent, inflection, intonation, pitch, projection etc.	The performer modifies their use of movement (pace, stillness), body language, facial expression, gesture, space etc.
Interpretation of text	Success in realising artistic intention
The performer is inventive in their performance choices and demonstrates understanding of the text and their character's emotions and story.	The performer successfully delivers their intentions as described in the oracy component of their performance.

Performance Grading

The four categories are graded from 1 - 5 (5 being the highest). The grades are:



To help you judge the performances you see, the [judge summary sheets](#) that follow provide more detail on grades one, three and five for each marking category. Grades two and four are not described in detail, but should be used for performances that fall between the other levels.

ESU PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE JUDGE SUMMARY SHEET

Scores are to be used as a guide during competitions. Scores should not be shared with others.

This rubric is designed to help judges evaluate student performances, with a focus on both oracy (speaking skills) and performance (acting and stage presence).

Timings

- **Oracy component:** Two minutes (name and details of play, scene and characters portrayed, reason piece was chosen, highlighted themes and what the students aim to show/achieve in their delivery)
- **Performance:** Three minutes (vocal, physical and technical skills)

Criteria is laid out for gradings 1, 3 and 5. 2 and 4 are not described but fall in between the grades on either side.

ORACY

Category	1 (Emerging Talent)	2	3 (Class Act)	4	5 (Show Stopping)
Interpretation of Text How well the performer understands and presents the text. <i>themes, personalisation, time management</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic understanding of the text with little creativity. They interpret the text with limited inventiveness and analysis. No connection of the piece to outside sources (i.e. art, history, current/personal events, etc.) or explanation of its relevance. Short and basic introduction of the piece. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative and thoughtful understanding and interpretation. They interpret the text with a degree of inventiveness and some analysis. Moderate connection of the piece to outside sources (i.e. art, history, current/personal events, etc.) and brief explanation of its relevance. Thorough introduction that sets up the performance well. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exceptionally creative and deeply thoughtful understanding and interpretation. They interpret the text with great inventiveness and in-depth analysis. Seamless connection of the piece to outside sources (i.e. art, history, current/personal events, etc.) and clear explanation of its relevance. Compelling introduction that grabs attention and sets the stage perfectly.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judging Tip: Focus on how well the performer understands the text and if they can relate it to broader themes or personal experiences. A strong introduction and clear connection to other ideas are key. 					
Success in Realising Artistic Intention How well the performer expresses the intended message and emotions of the piece. <i>continuity, connection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited connection between what they say and how they act. Rarely display /connect/ relate to the intention and analysis outlined in the oracy element when delivering the piece. Basic performance and understanding that displays an incohesive piece of theatre. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear and frequent alignment between the performer's intentions and their actions. Occasionally display /connect/ relate to the intention and analysis outlined in the oracy element when delivering the piece. Well-connected performance and understanding that leaves a noticeable impact and displays a standard piece of theatre. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exceptional alignment between intentions and actions, with everything working together perfectly. Displays /connects/ relates to the intention and analysis outlined in the oracy element when delivering the piece. Advanced performance connected to thorough understanding that generates an impactful piece of theatre.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judging Tip: Look for how well the performer connects their words and actions. A strong performance will feel unified, with every element working together to convey the message. 					

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Category	1 (Emerging Talent)	2	3 (Class Act)	4	5 (Show Stopping)
Vocal Skills How effectively the performer uses their voice to enhance the performance. <i>pace, inflection, intonation, pitch, projection</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of vocal projection throughout the space and no use of volume for artistic effect. Little to no variation in tone, pitch, or inflection. Use of pauses in a way which is at odds with the piece; no variation of rhythm. Creation and demonstration of a basic vocal response to character mood and developing situation. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good vocal projection that adds to the performance and effective use volume for artistic effect. Occasional variation in tone, pitch, and inflection. Use of pauses at one or more significant moments; slight variation of rhythm. Creation and demonstration of a secure vocal response to character mood and developing situation. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outstanding vocal control that fully commands the space. Successful vocal projection that fills the space and astute use of volume for artistic effect. Masterful variation in tone, pitch, and inflection, creating a dynamic and engaging performance. Use of pauses to structure the performance; noticeable change of rhythm. Creation and demonstration of a confident and imaginative vocal response to character mood and developing situation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judging Tip: Pay attention to how the performer uses their voice. Effective vocal skills can make the performance more engaging and help convey the emotions of the piece. Oracy and Performance Connection: Oracy is just as crucial in this section as it is in the oracy-specific section. The way a performer speaks, projects and uses vocal techniques must enhance their physical performance. Judges should look for how well the performer’s voice complements their movements, facial expressions and use of space. 					
Physical & Technical Skills How the performer uses their body and the space to enhance their performance. <i>movement, body language, facial expression, gesture, space</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited movement and physical expression, often awkward or mismatched with the piece. Use of stillness in a way which is at odds with the piece. Use of space in a static way, orienting most of the performance ‘audience out.’ <p><i>Duologue only:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal support for each other. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wide range of performance choices with purpose to affect a clear, confident and consistent interpretation of character and situation. Stillness and movement are used to structure the performance effectively. Use of space in a dynamic way, orienting entire performance ‘audience out.’ <p><i>Duologue only:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong collaboration that enhances both performances. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exceptional physicality that transforms the performance space, fully immersing the audience. An extensive range of performance choices to bring nuance, purpose and add resonance to the interpretation of character and situation. Stillness and movement are integral features that structure the performance. Use of space in a compelling and inventive way, orientating the entire performance ‘audience out.’ <p><i>Duologue only:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creative, seamless collaboration, with each performer enhancing the other’s strengths.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judging Tip: Observe how the performer uses their body and space. Effective physical expression should enhance the emotional and narrative impact of the performance. Oracy and Performance Connection: In this section, oracy continues to play a vital role. The way a performer speaks should align with their body language and movements. Judges should observe whether the vocal delivery complements physical actions, creating a unified and powerful performance. 					

JUDGES' FEEDBACK

It is imperative that feedback is delivered in a constructive manner. Judges are to be professional, courteous and focus on the positive aspects of each student's performance. Judges should remember that the majority of competitors do not progress beyond the regional final. It is therefore essential that judging is of as high a quality as possible at all stages in the competition to give all participants a sense of achievement and the awareness that they have learned valuable skills from their experience. The students and their teachers will want to know what criteria were applied to decide the best performance.

The Sandwich Method

Before you provide feedback, try to have a clear idea of what you would like to convey to the students; be positive and critically encouraging. Start by illustrating positive aspects of the performance, then mix in a couple of things that were more challenging and suggest ways to improve, without giving the feeling that you are telling anybody off. Finish by praising other positive aspects of the performance and highlighting the significance of what they have achieved.

For example: *I like the way that you effectively used the space to display the emotions your character felt. Going forward, if you utilised a couple of longer pauses, it could really add weight to the display of these emotions. However, the way that you identified and described the feelings of the character in the opening really showed your wider understanding of the play and its context effectively. Well done.*

Giving Feedback

The judging panel will first give general feedback to all participants, after deliberations and before announcing the winner. Then individual feedback will be given personally to each student (with their parent/guardian or teacher present).

When providing feedback, consider:

- How well has this student fulfilled the role?
- In which areas did they do well?
- What other techniques could they have used to make their performance stronger?
- What is a real-life example of how the skills they demonstrated could be helpful in future careers or education?





General Feedback

General feedback is your chance to offer constructive feedback and advice to all the participants. The ESU competition lead will select one volunteer to act as chair judge, who will deliver general feedback. If selected to be chair judge, you must not make specific references to the competencies or difficulties encountered by particular participants, nor should you use specific examples of strong performances to illustrate a point. As this feedback is given publicly before announcing the winner, it is important that it is entirely general and non-specific so that it doesn't hint at the results.

Individual Feedback

Individual feedback is given after the results and presentation of awards. Many performers regard this as the most valuable moment of the heat, so please make sure each student receives useful and constructive personalised feedback. For safeguarding reasons, there must be a teacher or parent present when you give individual feedback. The vast majority of students – qualifying for the next round or not – are just keen to find out how they can do better. However, be aware that on occasion you may encounter students who are upset or frustrated that they are not progressing through to the next round. Having a familiar adult present can ease this and provide support as you give feedback.

The students, teachers and parents must accept the panel's decision and you should refer to your mark sheets for detailed comments, but you are under no obligation to allow others outside of the judging panel or your competition lead to see them. If you have a queue, move swiftly and remember the young people often have a long journey home.

Written Feedback

Written feedback is given only when students are unable to stay and hear verbal feedback, for example due to travel logistics or if they are particularly emotional. If this occurs, please share your notes or comments with the ESU competition lead at the heat so they can add your feedback to their heat report. This will be sent to the ESU competitions team, who will pass on your feedback to the relevant schools.

FEEDBACK TEMPLATE



Use this page to jot down notes to support you when delivering individual feedback:

MY FEEDBACK: student/role...

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What I was looking for; how my expectations were fulfilled:

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What other techniques could have made the performance even better:

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Conclusion

How can the skills they have learned doing this competition benefit them in their future lives? If you have relevant experience in your job/career/life where public speaking has been a useful/important skill to you, do say so.

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ESU COMPETITION LEADS

Competition leads are designated ESU members of staff who attend and oversee the running of each competition heat, whether online or in person. It is an important role as we look to further safeguard our volunteers, ensuring that no volunteers judge on their own and that all volunteers always have support.

What they do...

Every ESU competition heat will be attended by one competition lead to support our volunteer judges, provide administrative and logistical support on the day, deal with any queries or complaints from participating students or teachers, provide advice to newer or nervous volunteers, oversee safeguarding requirements, and step in to judge, be Zoom host, MC or any other role as required. They will also complete a heat report with the results of the heat and any comments about how it went, and send this back to the ESU competitions team. In short, the competition lead is there to enable our volunteers to focus on what is most important: the young people.

Who will provide feedback?

ESU staff will select one volunteer to act as chair judge, whose role it is to deliver general feedback. If time permits, all judges (including the competition lead if they were on the judging panel) will participate in providing individual feedback to students.



SAFEGUARDING

The wellbeing of volunteers and young people alike is taken very seriously by the ESU. Safeguarding is key to this and therefore we require all staff and volunteers to follow the expectations outlined below. The full safeguarding policy can be found [on our website](#).

Principles of Safeguarding

The English-Speaking Union's safeguarding principles are applicable to all staff, volunteers, members and individuals representing the ESU in any personal or professional capacity online and in-person.

These principles are:

- Promote the wellbeing of children and adults through a culture of shared responsibility for safeguarding
- Prevent harm through full compliance with our safeguarding policy and procedures and the creation of a culture of informed vigilance
- Protect through responding effectively when safeguarding concerns arise

All staff and volunteers have a role to play. We must all be proactive in developing our understanding of safe practice and our personal safeguarding responsibilities. This includes safeguarding the beneficiaries of the charity (our young people) and each other. The ESU acknowledges its responsibility to protect staff and volunteers from harm and to create a positive and safe working environment in which every individual is respected for their contribution.

Safeguarding at ESU events

Children and young people from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances engage with ESU activities. During competition heats, the young people are away from their usual context and are encouraged to express themselves, and they may share disclosures or concerns about personal situations unrelated to the event. A disclosure is when a young person expresses or implies that they are experiencing (or are at risk of experiencing) harm, abuse, neglect or exploitation. As a volunteer representing the ESU, it is important that you recognise this and are aware that a period of heightened stress, emotion and excitement such as a competition heat could increase the possibility of a young person making a disclosure or behaving in such a way which may raise a safeguarding concern. In all circumstances, the staff and volunteers of the ESU will listen with empathy and provide support, guidance and assistance to young people. Children and young people should never be made to feel ashamed or that they are creating a problem by reporting concerns.



Raising a Safeguarding Concern

It is everyone's responsibility to raise a safeguarding concern if any person's actions, behaviour or words create any kind of concern that harm to a child(ren) or an adult(s) at risk has occurred, may occur or will occur. If you have concerns about a child or adult at a competition heat, tell the competition lead immediately. Depending on the nature of your concern it may also be appropriate to alert one or more teachers at the competition heat, the ESU competitions or supporter services team, the Local Authority Children's Social Care Centre, NSPCC or even the police. All concerns must be raised with an appropriate person, and all volunteers must feel comfortable to do so. If you have any questions about raising a concern please get in touch with the supporter services team before you attend your first heat.

Our Code of Conduct

The ESU expects all volunteers to maintain a professional and honest approach in their dealings with young people, fellow volunteers, ESU members, staff, supporters and any individuals that they come into contact with in the course of their time with the ESU. As representatives of the ESU, you are expected to act in accordance with the ESU's [safeguarding policy](#) and [equity policy](#); any failure to do so may result in disciplinary action or a discontinuation of your services.

Social Media and Photography

The names of children in ESU programmes along with the school they attend should not be put on social media. Furthermore, volunteers should not take photos of children at ESU events. The only circumstances where photography is permitted is when a designated member of ESU staff is permitted to do so, on an ESU registered device and with a signed photo permission form from the child's parents/guardians.

Confidentiality

While you are volunteering for the ESU you may have access to confidential information about the ESU, its plans, programmes, policies, procedures, finances, members, supporters and beneficiaries. Where such information is confidential it must not be divulged to any unauthorised person either inside or outside of the organisation, during or after your time with us. If you are in any doubt about the confidentiality of information, or the correct course of action in relation to divulging information, you must seek guidance from an ESU staff member.

External Communications

The ESU encourages and welcomes use of external media and social media to celebrate your participation and engagement with our work. We ask that you consider the sensitivity and professionalism of your communications e.g. in dealings with the press, media and potential supporters. The supporter services and engagement team are more than happy to support if you have any questions about external communication, wording, phrases to use or access to accompanying photographs.



PRACTICAL INFORMATION

What you will need on the day

Please bring printed copies of your judge mark sheet – some host schools may print out mark sheets for judges but this is not guaranteed and other venues may not have the capacity to do so. If you are unable to print mark sheets please let us know. Some venues may provide refreshments but again this is not guaranteed so we encourage you to bring a bottle of water and a snack.

Punctuality

We ask you to maintain high standards of punctuality and professionalism at all times when representing the ESU. The young people get the most out of the competitions and experience when it runs smoothly and efficiently, therefore please arrive 30 minutes before the event. Arriving on time and prepared are the two most important things you can do to help our events run smoothly and our young people to have the best possible experience.

Logistics

ESU staff will share a briefing document with logistical details, including an arrival time, details of the location and facilities available. If you require any flexibility for personal reasons or think there is a risk you may be late to the competition, please email volunteering@esu.org to explain the circumstances as early as possible. The ESU will expense your travel to and from the heat in accordance with the [volunteering expenses policy](#)

Contact Us

If you have any issues on the day, please contact volunteering@esu.org or +44 (0) 207 529 1587.

For any safeguarding issues please contact an ESU member of staff at volunteering@esu.org or, on the day, contact the competition lead.

If you have any accessibility requirements or there are any reasonable adjustments we can make for you, please contact us at volunteering@esu.org.

Policies

[Volunteer agreement](#)

[Safeguarding policy](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

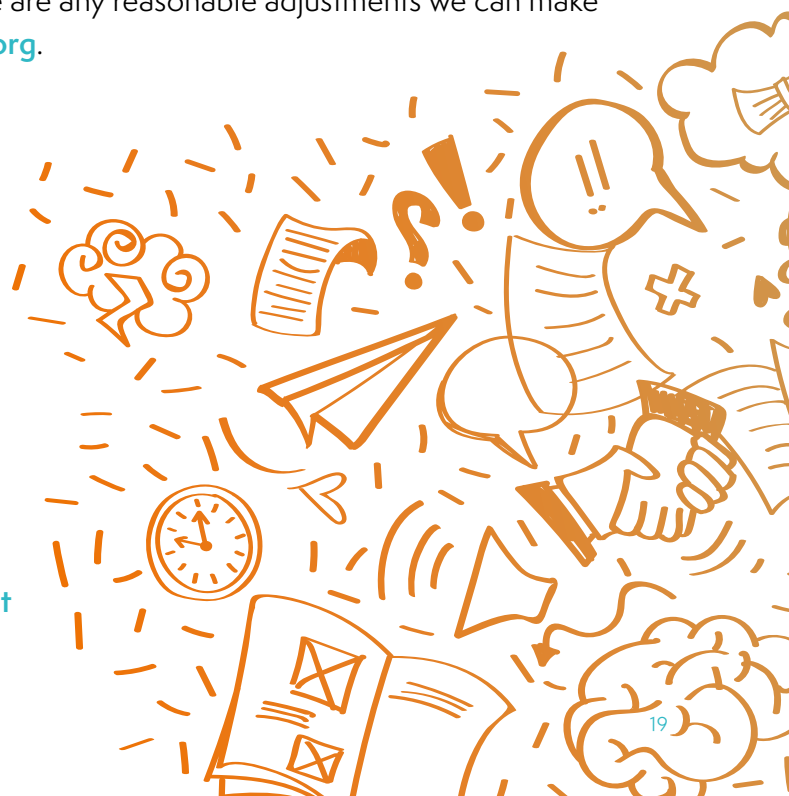
[Complaints policy](#)

[Whistleblowing policy](#)

Useful Documents

[Performing Shakespeare Marksheet](#)

[Performing Shakespeare Judge Summary Sheet](#)





ENJOY!

We hope you have a fantastic time as an ESU volunteer judge. Once again, thank you for your generosity in giving up your time to support students around the UK discover their voices.

Follow and tag us on [social media](#) and let us know how you enjoy the heats using the hashtag [#ESUShakespeare](#).

By taking part in the ESU Performing Shakespeare Competition, students are automatically part of the ESU's thriving alumni community. Please encourage the parents/carers who attend the heat to sign up to our [alumni mailing list](#) on their child's behalf to keep up to date with opportunities and events that they can be part of.

THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION

The ESU is a global educational charity that brings people together across languages and cultures. We aim to build confident communicators, critical thinkers, and active citizens. Our work promotes international dialogue and cultural exchange, reflected in the diverse activities of our alumni and members worldwide.

Our goals are:

- To promote education in the English-speaking world and beyond, respecting traditions while addressing current issues
- To use English as a tool for international communication and understanding

We are non-political and work with people from all backgrounds. For more on our education programmes, visit [esu.org](#).



English-Speaking Union,
Dartmouth House,
37 Charles Street,
London, W1J 5ED

020 7529 1550

[esu.org](#)

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