

# Youth Speaks

## **Unified Slam 2019 Guidelines**

## Unified Slam Eligibility & Registration

Up to 30 teams will represent schools and community sites from the Bay Area (and beyond) in this year's Unified Slam. Each school/community team will participate in two Quarter-Final Bouts. The top scoring four teams will make it to Finals on Saturday, April 27, 2019.

### Eligibility Requirements

- Only 1 team per site may compete in the Unified Slam
- Each team must consist of 4 - 6 team members
- All team members must be 13 - 19 years of age. If there are special circumstances, please contact us.
- One adult coach and all team members must register your team and attend a mandatory orientation on Saturday, April 13th from 10am - 1pm at the Youth Speaks Office in San Francisco.

**REGISTRATION BEGINS JANUARY 25TH:**

<https://youthspeaks.org/district-poetry-slam/>

## HOW THE SLAM WORKS

A poetry slam is a competition in which poets share their work in front of an audience and are scored on a scale of 1 to 10 by a panel of judges from an array of backgrounds. The point of a poetry slam is to defy mediums and platforms that are traditionally given to spoken word artists in an effort to create an interactive experience for both the poets and the audience.

Each registered team is guaranteed to compete in two preliminary bouts. A 'bout' is essentially a team slam that consists of four rounds.

## BOUT SCHEDULE

### Format for Preliminary and Final Bouts:

- Preliminary Bouts will be on either Thursday, April 25th OR Friday, April 26th (see *bout schedule below*). Therefore, each team is guaranteed TWO bouts.
- There will be four rounds at each preliminary bout. Therefore, teams should prepare 4 poems for each of their bouts.
- The third round of the bout will require a Lightning Round poem from each team (90 seconds or less). See more information about the "Lightning Round" below.
- At least 1 poem must be a group poem per bout. Group poems are loosely defined as: team pieces that require a minimum of 2, and a maximum of 5 poets; who participate in a single group performance.
- The team with the highest score from each preliminary bout will advance to Finals.

### Thursday, April 25, 2019

10:00am - 11:30am: Preliminary Bouts  
11:30am - 12:30pm - Lunch  
12:30pm - 1:30pm: MC Olympics  
1:30pm - 3:00pm: Preliminary Bouts

### Friday, April 26, 2019

4:00pm - 5:30pm - Preliminary Bouts  
5:30pm - 6:00pm - Dinner  
6:00pm - 7:00pm: MC Olympics  
7:00pm - 8:30pm - Preliminary Bouts

### Saturday, April 27, 2019

6:00pm - 9:00pm: Finals  
9:30pm - 12:00am: Afterparty

Locations will be in various Oakland venues. Find more information @ [youthspeaks.org](http://youthspeaks.org)

## Additional Slam Rules & Guidelines

While the core purpose of the slam is not competition, the following guidelines allow us to emphasize the fun and expansive nature of poetry and the slam. Please abide by these rules and help us ensure a healthy and supportive environment for the poets and audience alike.

- **Every member of the team must be physically present and checked in with Youth Speaks staff at least 45 minutes before their bout begins.** Teams may be penalized for tardiness as follows:
  - Tardiness to check-in could result in being put in earliest slots to compete.
  - Tardiness to showtime could result in 0.5 score deduction in the 1st round.
  - Tardiness after the 1<sup>st</sup> round could result in disqualification from competing (although the team are still able to perform on stage).
- Coaches and adults accompanying their youth will sign a code of conduct upon registration and will be responsible for prioritizing the safety of their youth participants.
- **Bring Original Work:** Poems must be original writing by the competing poet(s). Teams may be penalized or disqualified if work is plagiarized.
- **Group Poems aka Group Pieces:** Each team must present at least one group piece (constructed and performed as duets, trios, or quartets) per bout. Each performing member of a group piece must have participated in the writing of the group piece. No more than 5 poets may participate in the performance of any one poem.
- **Standard Length Poems:** must be under 3 minutes, 30 seconds long. The poet will also have a 10 second grace period, after which scores will be penalized 0.5 for each 10 seconds beyond, starting at 3 minutes 40 seconds (e.g. up to 3:39 – no penalty; 3:40 to 3:49 - .5 point penalty; 3:50 to 3:59 – 1 point penalty, etc). Standard length poems will be implementd for rounds: 1, 2, and 4.
- **Lighting Round Poems:** every bout will have a Lightning Round. Poems performed during the Lightning Round can be either an individual or group poem but they must be under 1 minute, 30 seconds in length. We will also have a 10 second grace period, after which scores will be penalized 0.5 for each 10 seconds beyond, starting at 1 minute 40 seconds (e.g. up to 1:39 – no penalty; 1:40 to 1:49 - .5 point penalty; 1:50 to 1:59 – 1 point penalty, etc.).
- **Tie Breakers:** In the event of a tie at the end of any of the bouts, an additional round will be added in order to break the tie.
  - NOTE: Tie Breakers DO NOT count against the Primary Authorship rule (see below).

### **Primary Authorship:**

- Each poem must have at least 1 "Primary Author." A Primary Author is the main writer of a poem.
- At the end of each bout, coaches must check in with the Host and identify 1 primary author for each poem their team performed.
- You cannot repeat a Primary Author in any one bout or else your team may be penalized or disqualified. This is to ensure the entire team participates in the writing of your team's poems.

- Group poems may have multiple primary authors.
- Each team member **MUST** perform on stage at least once during their Preliminary Bouts.
- *No Props*: No props may be used in the Slam. Props are defined as any non-body piece of equipment. Musical accompaniment (excluding mouth/body percussion) may not be used.
- *Be Responsible For Your Words*: There is no censorship whatsoever. However, we strongly discourage hate speech of any kind. We strive to create a safe and inclusive environment that challenges teams to speak with intention -- to share stories without degrading, mocking, or threatening groups of people. In regard to excessive profanity, violence, and sexually explicit content, we recommend teams consider how their work can impact this particular space and audience.
- *Judges*: The slam will be judged by a mixed panel of volunteer poets, adults and young people. Many judges are preselected, and some may come from the audience. We will aim for diversity of backgrounds, ages, and experience(s).
- *Silent Scoring*: We won't announce scores at this year's slam in order to keep focus on the poetry, not on the points. If you'd like, you can get your scores from the host at the end of each bout.

## Content / Trigger Warnings

- *What are Content/Trigger Warnings?*  
We believe that poetry is charged and can be therapeutic and healing. We also believe in emotional safety and disrupting retraumatization. A content/trigger warning is a statement that warns the audience that the content they are about to witness contains material that could cause distress. Some trauma survivors or people living with PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder) appreciate hearing a content/trigger warning before listening to a performance because it helps them prepare themselves to manage trauma responses while witnessing the piece. Content/trigger warnings are just one way we can help respond to the emotional and psychological wounds we constantly carry with us. We will strive to have a support table at each Bout with resources for poets and audience members.
- *How Will Content/Trigger Warnings Be Used In The Slam?*  
There will be a collective content/trigger warning issued by the MC at the top of each slam. Poets are invited (though not required) to do more specific content/trigger warnings at the beginning of their poems, if they so choose. Participants may also have the MC issue the more specific content/trigger warning for them. If participants are interested in having the MC issue a content/trigger warning, they can arrange this by talking to a SPOKES member at the SPOKES support table. Content/trigger warnings will NOT count against the poet's time (i.e. the Host will still start the stopwatch at the beginning of the participants' poem, not the content/trigger warning).
- *How Do I Give a Content/Trigger Warning?* Content/trigger warnings can take many forms but for first-timers, you should focus on being brief and letting the audience know what sensitive topic(s) will come up in your piece.

Here are a few examples (feel free to use them!):

- "Trigger warning: self harm...."
- "Content note: gun violence..."

## Round Order & Elimination of Teams

*Elimination of Teams:* Competing teams will participate in all 4 rounds. The cumulative score from the 4 rounds will determine each team's final score. The team with the highest score will advance to Finals.

Round 1: All teams perform one poem each

Round 2: All teams perform one poem each

Round 3: All teams perform one Lightning Round poem each (90-second poems)

Round 4: All teams perform one poem each

*\*NOTE: 4 Teams will advance to the Finals.*

Unified Slam Finals will consist of four rounds (similar to the structure of Preliminary Bouts).

*How to Determine Order:* the order in the first round will be determined by draw in the poet's circle. Each round thereafter will begin with the highest scoring team from the previous round and proceed successively until it ends with the team with the lowest score from the previous round.

*NOTE:* Each team member must perform on stage at least once during the preliminary bouts.

## Tips & Advice

- *Practice Your Poems:* We encourage you to become intimately familiar with the poems you will compete with. Memorization is not required (music stands will be available at all venues), but you want to really bust your piece. Rehearse! Know your poems.
- *Don't Worry 'Bout The Judges:* Judges will be given criteria for judging on both writing and performance quality, and will serve more as encouragers of young writers than judges. This will be as standardized as possible, but like each of us, judges come with their own biases for and against certain topics and styles. Remember, the standard is yourself. Be your own best "judge."
- *No Really, Don't Worry 'Bout The Judges:* Judges will be seated together at a table. Their scores will be passed down to the event host, who won't even announce them aloud this year. We do this because we want to keep the focus on the poetry, not on the points.
- *Do It For The Love:* Be respectful of yourself, the youth writing community, and the community you represent. Come to share your story *and* receive.
- *Have Fun:* If you don't get high scores, so what? It says nothing about your abilities and potential as a writer, thinker, and cultural leader. By getting on the mic and telling your story, you are already pushing this artform and your voice forward.
- *Where Can I Practice My Poems Before My Slam?* You and your team are encouraged to attend our Under 21 Open Mics & Teen Poetry Slam. Individual and group pieces are welcome during the open mics!

## Beyond the Slam

We are so excited that you are participating in this year's Unified Slam! We sincerely hope the slam is just one part of your experience with Youth Speaks. Please join us at some of our other FREE upcoming programs. **For more, please visit [YouthSpeaks.org](https://youthspeaks.org)**