



Official 2025 IPA Poetry Slam Structure and Rules

This document shall serve as the official structure and rules for the 2025 Iowa Poetry Association (IPA) Poetry Slam. If there are any disparities between rules shared during the live poetry slam and this document, this document will take precedence. The purpose of the IPA Poetry Slam is to identify an Iowa poet who will receive a sponsored spot to compete in the annual BlackBerry Peach National Poetry Slam Competition.

Poet's Understanding and Agreement

Participation in this competition signals a poet's understanding and agreement of the commitment to attending each event if they progress forward (i.e., qualifying slam, final slam, and national slam). If a poet cannot commit to each stage of the competition, they should allow other poets the opportunity. If a poet makes the final stage but learns they're unable to attend the final stage or the national stage, they're required to notify the Slam Chair as soon as possible.

Poetry Slam Structure

Universally, poetry slams often function similarly. Each slam does have its own variances, and this section will govern the IPA Poetry Slam structure.

Number of Slams and Poets

There will be a total of four (4) qualifying slams held around the state of Iowa. Each qualifying slam will have a maximum of twelve (12) poets competing. The top three (3) poets of each qualifying slam will move on to the IPA Poetry Slam Finals.

The twelve (12) poets competing in the final slam will compete to determine the one (1) IPA Poetry Slam Champion who will earn registration into the BlackBerry Peach National Poetry Slam.

Rounds Per Slam

Each qualifying and final stage slam will have three (3) rounds and will use the following structure. Every slam will begin with a sacrificial poet, who will be scored as a calibration for the judges but is not part of the official competition.

The first round will consist of all poets.

The second round will take place after elimination and consist of the top seven (7) poets.



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The third and final round of each slam will take place after a final elimination and consist of the top three (3) poets competing for placement.

Poetry Slam Rules

Again, poetry slams universally follow similar rules. Each slam can have its own variances, and this section will govern the IPA Poetry Slam structure. Deviance from these rules could result in point deductions or disqualification. Disciplinary action will be determined by the IPA Poetry Slam Chair.

Eligibility to Compete

Poets must be 18 years of age or older (by July 23, 2025) and have an Iowa address.

Poets must be available to attend their qualifying slam and the final stage slam to compete.

Poets may not compete in more than one qualifying slam. This is in order to provide equal opportunity to all Iowa poets across the state.

Poems and Performance

1. Poems can be about any subject and in any style.
2. Each poet must perform original poetry. Sampling other work is allowed.
3. Poems are not required to be memorized. However, we cannot know what a judge may prefer. Ultimately, it's up to you and your comfort level with performing a poem memorized or not.
4. No poem may be repeated within one stage of the slam (e.g., A poet may not repeat a poem in subsequent rounds of a qualifying slam, but they may repeat a poem from a qualifying slam on the final slam stage.)
5. No props are allowed. The use of a prop can be applied under formal protest to the emcee, and action will be discussed and determined by the Slam Chair.
6. No musical instruments are allowed, though you can have the occasional line of singing within a poem.



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7. No costumes are allowed. The use of a costume can be applied under formal protest to the emcee, and action will be discussed and determined by the Slam Chair.
8. Poets may not protest if a microphone stops working on stage. Technical difficulties cannot be anticipated or immediately fixed. If a mic goes out during a poem, continue on in the performance.

Time Constraints

A poet's time begins at the first utterance made on stage. A poet is allowed several seconds to adjust the mic and get situated on stage. Once sound leaves the poet's mouth, their time begins.

If a poet wants to provide a content warning, those must be provided to the MC in advance of the round. Poets should avoid using their time to provide a content warning.

No poem should exceed three (3) minutes in length per round. There will be a ten (10) second grace period, and then there will be point deductions. Deductions are as follows:

- 3:10 and under, no penalty
 - 3:11 – 3:20, -0.5 points
 - 3:21 – 3:30, -1.0 points
 - 3:31 – 3:40, -1.5 points
 - 3:41 – 3:50, -2.0 points
- And so on (-0.5 points per 10 seconds)

Judging and Scoring

Selected judges are required to be fair and have no direct connection to any of the competing poets. Once selected, judges will be instructed on how to judge a poetry slam and have the opportunity to ask any questions of the emcee or Slam Chair. In the event that a judge needs to leave during the slam, a replacement judge will be identified.

Judges will give each poem a score on a scale of 0.0 to 10.0, with 10 being a "perfect" score. Judges can use up to one (1) decimal point in their scores. Emcee will require judges to hold their scores up at the same time and keep them up until all scores are read. Judges are not permitted to adjust their scores after it is revealed.

Each poem receives five (5) scores. The highest and lowest scores are dropped, and the remaining three scores are added together to determine the poet's score for that round.



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To determine the poets advancing to the third (3rd) round, scores from round one (1) and round two (2) will be added together. That cumulative score will identify the top poets for that qualifying slam.

If there is a tie at the end of a qualifying slam, the poets will share the ranking. If there is a tie for first place at the end of the final slam, the top two poets will compete in a tie-breaker round.