



Stellenbosch

UNIVERSITY
IYUNIVESITHI
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WOW

Words Open Worlds
Amagama aVula iHlabathi
Woorde Open Wêrelde

**SANLAM WOW
SPELLING FESTIVAL**

Format and rules

2026



Sanlam

Foundation

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SANLAM WOW SPELLING FESTIVAL 2026

1. Purpose

- To promote educational fun through play and language skills.
- To improve learners' vocabulary, spelling, and language literacy.
- To cultivate a love for words and language.
- To strengthen learners' confidence in oral and written language use.

2. Categories in the Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival

The **Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival** is presented in the following grades:

No.	Categories	Brief description
1	Grade 1-10	Afrikaans
2	Grade 4-9	English
3	Grade 5-8	IsiXhosa

3. Schematic representation of participation

Participation	Brief Description	Type of WOW Spelling Festival	Dates
Level 1	Internal school competition	School Spelling Festival	Schools decide for themselves
Level 2	Schools in the same circuit participate	Circuit Spelling Festival	Term 3
Level 3	Winners of circuits compete	District Spelling Festival	Term 3
Level 4	District winners participate	Provincial Spelling Festival	Term 3 & 4
Level 5	Provincial winners compete	National Spelling Festival	Term 4

4. Brief description of the levels of participation

4.1 Participation: Level 1 (internal Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival at the school)

The coordinator of each participating school determines the format according to which the best learner in each grade is identified. Some schools, for example, hold an internal WOW Spelling Festival, and those who achieve above 80% are chosen as finalists. Competition then continues until the winner of each grade can be determined. Some schools present their WOW Spelling Festival as a major gala event, with a WOW Spelling Festival in a hall or area where the other learners act as the audience. It nevertheless remains the school's choice how the winners in each grade are determined. (These are merely ideas being shared; schools decide for themselves how participants are chosen.)

The grade winners of each school proceed to the Circuit WOW Spelling Festival. The regions into which schools are divided are determined geographically, depending on the number of participating schools per region, as well as the classification according to the relevant Education Department.

4.2 Participation: Level 2 (circuits / geographical areas)

The grade winners of each school, as determined by the Education Department according to geographical areas, qualify to participate in the *Circuit WOW Spelling Festival*. This phase brings together the strongest learners from different schools within a region for further competition and recognition. The regions into which schools are divided are determined geographically based on the number of participating schools per region, as well as the official classification of the relevant education department. This structure ensures an organised and fair flow of participants to the next level of the WOW Spelling Festival.

4.3 Participation: Level 3 (districts / geographical areas)

The grade winners of each *Circuit WOW Spelling Festival* qualify to participate in the *District WOW Spelling Festival*. This phase brings together the top achievers from various circuits within an education district for further competition at a higher level. The education districts into which schools are divided are determined geographically according to the structures and guidelines of the relevant education department, which ensures that participation takes place in an organised and region-based manner.

4.4 Participation: Level 4 (provincial / national provinces)

The grade winners of each *District WOW Spelling Festival* qualify to participate in the *Provincial WOW Spelling Festival*. This phase brings together the most outstanding learners from different

districts within a province to compete at a higher and more competitive level. The provinces into which schools are divided are determined nationally according to the structures of the education department, which ensures a standardised and consistent framework for participation.

All WOW Spelling Festivals are judged and conducted according to the **official guidelines and criteria** of the WOW Spelling Festival, to guarantee uniformity and fairness across all levels.

5. Time and place

- WOW Spelling Festivals are presented in parallel sessions at the same venue, to save time and to ensure consistency and fairness between the different grades. This structure also allows for a smooth and well-organised course of the programme.
- 90-120 minutes is allocated to each grade WOW Spelling Festival, which provides sufficient time for thorough participation, judging and the celebration of each learner's achievement.
- This duration per session may vary, depending on the number of participants and the dynamics of the specific group, to ensure that each session is optimally adapted for quality participation and a fair judging process.

6. Language of presentation of spelling festivals

WOW Spelling Festivals are presented as follows:

- All WOW Spelling Festivals for Grades 1 to 10 in **Afrikaans** are presented in Afrikaans.
- **English** WOW Spelling Festivals for Grades 4 to 9 are presented in English.
- **isiXhosa** WOW Spelling Festivals for Grades 5 to 8 are presented in isiXhosa.

This language distribution is aimed at promoting inclusivity and giving learners the opportunity to perform optimally within their respective language levels, while consistency and fairness are maintained across all Sanlam WOW Spelling Festivals.

7. Role players involved in the Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival

- **Schools:** All registered schools participate in the Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival and serve as the primary structures within which preparation, organisation and participation take place.
- **Learners:** Participants from every grade who showcase their language skills, knowledge, and confidence, and form the core of the competition.

- **Educators:** Function as officials and judges and ensure that the Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival is conducted and evaluated fairly, consistently and according to the prescribed guidelines.
- **Organisers / Coordinators:** Responsible for the overall planning, logistics and smooth execution of the WOW Spelling Festival at all levels, as well as communication between schools, districts, and judges.

8. Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival: Documents

- **Registration forms** which are completed and stored electronically for administrative purposes and accurate participation management.
- **Format and rules** which clearly set out the structure, guidelines, and judging criteria of each WOW Spelling Festival.
- **Preparation packages** for *grades 4 to 9* which equip learners and educators with the necessary material to prepare optimally.
- **Programmes for each WOW Spelling Festival** which structure the course of the day, timing, and sessions.
- **Scorecards with participant information** which are managed by the WOW organiser for accurate scoring and administration.
- **Specific WOW Spelling Festival packages** for *all grades* which are compiled and distributed by the WOW organiser to ensure consistency.
- **Winners lists** which officially document and communicate the outcomes of each level.
- **Equipment for each WOW Spelling Festival** which is provided and managed by the WOW organiser to ensure smooth execution.
- **Packages for officials at each WOW Spelling Festival** which include all necessary guidelines, rubrics and administrative material and are managed by the WOW organiser.
- **Media and press statements** which are managed by the WOW organiser and content manager to ensure communication, visibility, and public relations.

9. Format

- Participants are divided into groups of 30 learners per grade to ensure a structured, fair, and well-managed competition environment where every learner gets sufficient opportunity to participate.
- Each participant receives a unique identification number according to the official scorecards drawn up during registration, so that accurate scoring and monitoring throughout the competition is ensured.
- Words are read out clearly, slowly, and consistently by an announcer (educator) to optimise understanding and prevent any misunderstanding.
- Participants must immediately spell the word aloud as their answer, which assesses their language skill, concentration, and confidence under time pressure.
- Answers must be given within 30 seconds, which creates a balance between speed, accuracy, and spontaneous language application under pressure.
- A **GREEN card** indicates a correct answer and is followed by scoring on the scorecard, while a **RED card** indicates an incorrect answer and means immediate elimination from the round, to maintain the standard and fairness of the competition.
- A **YELLOW card** is used in the event of disturbances, technical interruptions or when a question must be repeated, so that all participants receive equal and fair opportunities without prejudice.
- Top performers are determined based on the highest number of correct answers, consistent performance across rounds and the ability to perform accurately under time pressure, which ultimately leads to the identification of the strongest participants in each group.

10. Rules

1. Learners must spell each word clearly, correctly, and audibly, focusing on accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence.
2. Learners must first repeat the word to confirm understanding and then spell it systematically before giving their final answer.
3. Privileges include:
 - Learners may ask that the word be repeated if it was not heard clearly.
 - Learners may correct their answer themselves, provided this happens before the final answer is submitted.
 - Learners may request that another official read out the word if there is any uncertainty or communication interruption.

11. Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival: Timeline

February	Launch of the Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival	WOW
March to May	• Information and training sessions. • Registration opens. • Learning material available.	WOW
June to July	• Preparation packages for the various grades are made available and uploaded to the website. • Information and training sessions. • Registrations close. • Learner preparation as far as possible.	Organisers
July to October	WOW Spelling Festival: Respective levels. Provincial finals.	WOW organisers

12. Officials at the Sanlam WOW Spelling Festival

Coordinator

- Each participating school must identify a coordinator for the project.
- The contact details of the coordinator must be sent to the WOW project for further communication.
- Coordinators organise **WOW Spelling Festival** at schools and often also serve on the organising committees within the circuit, district, or provincial **WOW Spelling Festival** (see the Control List for Coordinators).

Judges

- Educators, who will serve as independent judges, are put forward by the schools and placed by the WOW organiser.
- Three judges per **WOW Spelling Festival** per grade must be appointed.
- Preferably specialists / experts within the grade being judged.
- Judges must be thoroughly aware of the format and rules.

Announcer

- One announcer per **WOW Spelling Festival** per grade must be appointed.
- Preferably experts, who can read the questions clearly in the language of presentation.
- Announcers must be able to work at the level of a child and speak clearly / pronounce words clearly.

- The announcer reads out each word once, after which participants must answer, within a set time and verbally.
- Pronunciation will be discussed with announcers beforehand, especially longer or less common words that must be read out.
- Announcers must be thoroughly aware of the format and rules.
- Obtain lists for the **WOW Spelling Festival** beforehand for preparation.

Manager

- One manager per **WOW Spelling Festival** per phase must be appointed.
- The coordinator per region is often the ideal person.
- Preferably experts since decisive judgement often must be made.
- Managers must be thoroughly aware of the format and rules.
- Oversee any queries / uncertainties / disputes / disciplinary matters.
- Must make sure that the participants, judges, and announcers are ready for everything.
- Make sure that the stage and front-row seats in the audience are reserved.
- The **WOW Spelling Festival** manager will always be available for any queries.

Timekeeper

- One timekeeper per **WOW Spelling Festival** per phase must be appointed.
- Must use an extremely reliable stopwatch (such as a cell phone).
- The timekeeper starts the stopwatch immediately after the announcer has finished pronouncing the word.
- Only the **manager** may indicate that the time should be stopped if a situation requires this, for example if there are disturbances in the venue, or if an official is not ready.
- The timekeeper rings the bell as soon as the participant exceeds their allotted time, and the participant is then eliminated.
- The timekeeper must be thoroughly aware of the format and rules.

Assistants

- One or more assistants may be appointed per **WOW Spelling Festival**, depending on the size of the group and the logistical needs of the relevant session.
- Assistants support the **WOW Spelling Festival** manager and other officials with administrative and practical tasks during the competition.
- Their responsibilities include the distribution and collection of scorecards, participation lists and other documentation as required.

- Assistants help with organising participants into their groups and ensure that they are seated correctly according to the predetermined arrangement.
- They provide support during technical or logistical interruptions to maintain the flow of the programme.
- Assistants also help with general venue management, such as setting up material, controlling movement in the venue, and supporting the timekeeper or recorder functions where necessary.
- They must be thoroughly familiar with the format and rules of the WOW Spelling Festival to provide effective support.

Recorder

- Makes observations within the venue.
- Takes notes, as complete as possible, of the mistakes made by participants.
- These notes are used to improve the process, but also to deal with queries.

Participants

- Participants must first repeat each word, spell it clearly and correctly, and conclude their answer by saying **"THE WORD"**.
- Participants may ask for the word to be repeated and may correct themselves, provided this happens before **"THE WORD IS FINAL"** is given.
- Participants must always remain in their seats, wait their turn, and show respect for fellow participants, officials, and the overall course of the WOW Spelling Festival.

13. Schematic representation – layout of the spelling festival venue

