



## The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCHOOL WINNER

*Congratulations on winning your school competition! Now you must memorize and present one (1) sonnet (in addition to your monologue) at the local English-Speaking Union Branch Competition. Essential Competition rules and guidelines can be found online at [www.esuus.org](http://www.esuus.org) in the NSC/Rules & Eligibility section.*

### **STEP 1: SELECTING A SONNET**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Please be sure to check whether or not you are required to select a sonnet from a list of specific ones provided by your local ESU Branch. You can find this information in the Competition materials sent to your school by your local ESU Branch. If you are in doubt, please ask your local ESU Branch Shakespeare Coordinator.



*Your Aim: To select one of Shakespeare's sonnets that complements your monologue and demonstrates your interpretive range.*

**Look over the *Suggested Sonnets List*** and the accompanying ***Suggested Sonnets Packet*** (provided by your teacher and also available online at [www.shakespearecompetition.org](http://www.shakespearecompetition.org)). Focus on selections you have already studied/will study in class this year or be adventurous and discover Shakespeare's lesser-known sonnets.

**Select at least five sonnets** that interest you. **Read the sonnets**, paying particular attention to the couplet beginning and ending lines. Then **select one sonnet to present** at the ESU Branch competition.

Can't find the perfect fit for you in these documents? No problem; Shakespeare's entire 154 sonnet cycle is open to you (first see the note at the top of this page). All of the sonnets are available for free online at: [www.folgerdigitaltexts.org](http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org). Please note that you must perform the complete sonnet (i.e. no editing is allowed).

**REMEMBER:** Whichever sonnet you select should serve as a complement to your monologue. For example, if your monologue features a character in love, you might not want to pick one of Shakespeare's love poems. Instead select one that is more disenchanted (such as those about death or passage of time).

### **TASKS FOR YOU:**

*When selecting your sonnet, you should:*

- **Decide What's Missing**  
Look at your monologue and think about your character's emotions and situation in the play at that moment. Is your character light-hearted or bitter? Celebrating a victory or plotting revenge? Once you have these answers, gravitate towards sonnets that contain the opposite.
- **A Whole not a Half**  
Think of the sonnet and monologue *not* as two separate pieces, but as one complete presentation. Use the sonnet as an opportunity to expand upon and highlight your interpretive range.
- **Put In the Time**  
Your sonnet and monologue are equally weighted (i.e. your sonnet is worth 50% of your overall score). So put the same time and attention into selecting your sonnet as you did your monologue.



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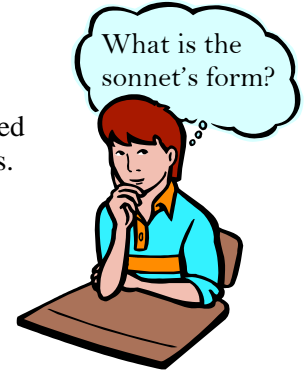
**STEP 2: UNDERSTANDING THE SONNET**

*Your Aim: To understand the sonnet's form, rhythm and content.*

A sonnet is a type of poem. **What is a poem?** A poem is a verbal composition designed to convey experiences, ideas or emotions by the use of language and literary techniques.

A sonnet contains the following elements:

- **Traditional form:** The sonnets are almost all fourteen-line poems written in iambic pentameter, made up of three quatrains and a couplet. A quatrain is four lines of verse. The couplet is the final two lines of verse. Your rhyme scheme is ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.
- **Rhythm of the verse:** Shakespearean sonnets are written in iambic pentameter, which is a line made up of ten syllables or five iambic feet – an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.
- **Theme:** In the sonnets, Shakespeare touches on the themes of love, death, morality, art, beauty and the passage of time.
- **Progression:** A sonnet explores and resolves a thought or an experience, and it frequently contains a “turn” or change of thought. Lines 1-12 often develop an argument or give accumulating examples. The couplet (lines 13 and 14) draws a conclusion (sometimes witty) or acts as a zinger (ironically pointing out a paradox or contradicting the preceding twelve lines).



**TASKS FOR YOU:**

*Once you select your sonnet, you should:*

- **Be a Textual Investigator**  
The text provides you with clues about the sonnet and its meaning.  
Using textual evidence, answer the following questions:
  1. What is the central idea of the sonnet?
  2. How do the lines break down into an introduction, development of the theme and conclusion?
  3. Is there a turning point in the sonnet?
  4. How do the meaning and delivery of these words differ from my monologue?
  5. Can I strengthen the contrast?
  6. How should the examples and arguments be emphasized?
  7. How should the tone of the couplet be interpreted? Ironical? Witty? Contradictory?
- **Summarize, Summarize**  
Make sure you completely understand the sonnet's language. Use this exercise:
  1. Summarize the sonnet in the shortest sentence possible.
  2. Summarize each line of the sonnet. If you come across unknown words, consult a dictionary.
  3. Work on achieving this same clarity when delivering Shakespeare's words.



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### **STEP 3: PRESENTING THE SONNET**

*Your Aim: To incorporate an understanding of the sonnet's form, rhythm and content into your recitation.*

You should fully understand the sonnet and its language and clearly convey that understanding to the judges.

REMEMBER:

- be aware of the sonnet's **form** as you study and interpret the piece;
- try to keep the **rhythm** of the sonnet in mind as you practice;
- always be aware of the **content** of the language.

TIP: You may find it beneficial to think of a sonnet not just as a Shakespearean sonnet, but as a short scene, story or meditation. Thinking of the sonnet's progression in this way may help you as you prepare your piece.

#### **TASKS FOR YOU:**

*As you work on your recitation, you should:*

**ADDITIONAL PREPARATION  
TIPS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE  
AT [WWW.ESUUS.ORG](http://WWW.ESUUS.ORG).**

- **Recognize the Difference**  
A sonnet is not the same as a monologue; one is a dramatic text (speech) and the other is a poem. Thus, they should not be approached in the same way. Remember this as you prepare your recitation.
- **Explore the Language**  
Sit down and recite the language out loud (focusing on the rhythm). Articulate every word. If you are unsure of a pronunciation, ask your teacher for assistance. If there are multiple pronunciations for a word, decide which pronunciation best fits the sonnet.
- **Speed Check**  
Every line of a sonnet contains a line break (when the line of a poem ceases to extend, and a new line starts). Not all line breaks, however, are necessarily the same. Decide if a line break requires a pause and, if so, for how long. Avoid extended pauses that can detract from the recitation.
- **Stand Up for Sonnets**  
Get up on your feet and practice your sonnet (body and voice together).

#### **NOTE ON JUDGING CRITERIA**

You will be judged on two main categories of evaluation:

- **Understanding** (includes Meaning and Language)
- **Communication & Expression** (includes Vocal, Physical and Ownership)

Movement and gesture should *subtly enhance* your delivery of the sonnet. Excessive movement that distracts from the language and rhythm is discouraged.

For more information, please review the *Sonnet Scoring Rubric* and *Judging Advice for Students* (both available online at [www.esuus.org](http://www.esuus.org) in the National Shakespeare Competition/Judge Resources section).