Q: Should I read the rules?
A: Yes. You and your family should read the rules so everyone understands how the competition is conducted. The rules will be read out loud prior to the start of the competition.

Q: What should I wear?
A: Comfortable clothing. No hats, please.

Q: What information can I request from the Spell Master regarding the word?
A: You can ask for a word’s definition and that it be used in a sentence. You may also ask the language of origin for the word. The Spell Master will not syllabify (divide into syllables) the word or provide the part of speech.

Q: Can I write the word down before spelling?
A: Yes. A pencil and paper will be provided at the podium. You can write the word down and read it to the Spell Master and judges. Remember, it’s not what you write, but what you say out loud that counts. (See Rule 1)

Q: Is there a word source for me to study?
A: We only provide suggested word resources.

Q: How are the words chosen for the state competition?
A: Words are selected randomly from any source deemed appropriate by the Spell Master and judges prior to the competition. (See Rule 2)

Q: Should I pronounce the word before spelling?
A: Yes. In fact you are encouraged to pronounce before spelling so that the Spell Master and judges know that you heard the word correctly. After you pronounce your word, pause briefly before spelling so the Spell Master and judges can correct you if necessary. (See Rule 3)
Q: Once I begin, can I stop spelling and start over?
A: Yes, but you can’t change the letters or their sequence. (See Rule 4)

Q: Is there a time limit before I must begin spelling?
A: We do not use a stopwatch or buzzer. The Spell Master and judges will allow you a “reasonable” time period, and then will give you a warning if you are taking too long. (See Rule 6)

Q: What if I know the word I am given is a homonym?
A: You should ask for a definition, or if no definition of a homonym is given, the correct spelling of either word shall be accepted as correct. When a speller is given the definition of a homonym, he or she must spell the word defined. (See Rule 7)

Q: Can there be a tie?
A: No. The competition continues until we have one winner. (See Rule 8)

Q: How many words can I miss before I am eliminated from the competition?
A: When you misspell one word, you will be eliminated from the competition. (See Rule 1)

Q: How are places determined?
A: We no longer eliminate spellers by the order in which they misspell words. Once a round begins, all spellers remaining must spell a word. Therefore no places are determined. Among the top remaining spellers, only one will be the champion and the others will be named finalists.

Q: What do I do if I misspell a word?
A: The Spell Master will provide you with the correct spelling, congratulate you on your effort, and welcome you back to the audience. A greeter will escort you to the corridor, back to the lobby, and then back inside the auditorium so you can sit with your family.

Q: Should my family and I leave after I misspell a word?
A: No. Contestants should stay through the remainder of the competition to lend support to the remaining spellers. At the end of the competition, all spellers are invited back on stage for the awards ceremony, participation souvenirs, a group photo, and a final round of applause. We encourage all families to stay for this important part of the program.
Q: I have special needs. Who should I tell?
A: If you have any hearing, speech or medical needs, please notify the San Joaquin County coordinator as soon as possible so the proper action can be taken. Please do not wait until the evening before, or the day of the competition to communicate your special needs. Only our team of judges and greeters will be notified if necessary, and it will not be printed or shared with anyone else.

Q: What if I have to use the restroom?
A: It is preferred that you wait until after you spell your word. Spellers may—one at a time—borrow the restroom pass. Greeters will be on stage to escort you to a backstage restroom. Upon returning to the competition, they replace the pass so that the next speller who needs to use the restroom may follow the same procedure. (See Rule 12)

Q: What is a continental breakfast?
A: Coffee, juices, fruit, cold cereal, and a selection of pastries, bagels and muffins will be available before the competition. If you have special dietary needs, you should plan accordingly.

Q: Will there be a break?
A: There will be a ten-minute break after the second round and again at the end of round five.

Q: What is the Bio used for?
A: Information about yourself will be printed in the program.

Q: What can be protested?
A: The spelling of a word. (See Rule 10)

Q: How do I/we protest?
A: Any problem relating to the spelling of a word must be referred immediately to the Protest Official located in the back of the auditorium. If an error is discovered, the Protest Official will submit their findings to the judges before the beginning of the next round. The Spell Master and judges will pause briefly to discuss the protest and announce their decision. The decision of the Spell Master and judges will be final. (See Rule 9)
Q: Can we use our video camera or tape recorder to aid in our protest?
A: No.

Q: How long will the competition last?
A: The competition should be over by 1:00 p.m. (You are encouraged to make your departure flight after 5:00 p.m. to avoid stress should the competition end later than 1:00 p.m.)

Q: Who notifies my local newspaper?
A: After the competition, the San Joaquin County Office of Education will send a press release and photographs to local media.

Q: Can anyone attend the competition?
A: Yes. The competition is open to the public. In consideration of others, we request that small children who become restless or noisy, be taken to the Chartvilles. A closed circuit TV is available so they can continue to watch the competition. Noises are distracting to other spectators and make it difficult for the Spell Master and judges to hear the speller.

Q: How many spellers are participating this year?
A: There are usually more than 60 spellers from over 30 counties.

Q: If I am champion or one of the finalists do I advance to the Scripps National Spelling Bee?
A: No. The California State Elementary Spelling Championship is not affiliated with the Scripps National Spelling Bee.