

# Regulations of the International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL)

Whereas the faculty of using language is one of the most prominent defining characteristics of the human species, and curiosity towards language is natural and universal,

and whereas linguistic research is one of the foremost ways of learning about mankind and the language technologies are among the leading industries in a world intent to maintain its diversity in this age of global communication,

and whereas the popularisation of linguistics increases prestige of everyone's mother tongue and linguistic pluralism in general,

and whereas the sciences of language are but scantily represented in the curricula of secondary schools, yet the genre of the self-sufficient linguistic problem has shown a great capacity to attract the interest of secondary school students and recruit able young minds for careers in theoretical, mathematical and computational linguistics,

and whereas the art of running contests in solving such problems has, after decades of experience, reached a mature stage in several countries, and the potential for international co-operation in this field has been demonstrated by several visits of contestants, organisers and experts from Bulgaria to linguistic olympiads in Russia and vice versa,

and whereas international science olympiads are now organised in many fields and universally recognised as an outstanding method for discovering, encouraging and challenging talented young people, the International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL) was devised and instituted on the twenty-second day of the month of December in the year two thousand and two.

**2009, revised 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019**

# 1 Introduction

This document contains the regulations of the International Linguistics Olympiad (IOL).<sup>1</sup> The name of the organization in each language shall be agreed by countries where that language is spoken officially. The abbreviation “IOL” is explicitly chosen so as not to reflect the name of the Olympiad in any particular language.

## 1.1 What Is the IOL?

The IOL organises an annual international competition (an Olympiad) for pre-university students in solving, individually and in teams, self-sufficient linguistic problems. The competition requires no special knowledge, only familiarity with such fundamental concepts from the study of language and languages as are typically present in school curricula, as well as general culture and logical thought. Problems can be related to all branches of linguistics, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, computational linguistics, pragmatics, formal methods, corpus linguistics, etc.

## 1.2 Aims of the IOL

The IOL pursues the following aims:

- To promote awareness of language, of the world’s linguistic diversity, and of the essence of linguistics among pre-university students and the general public.
- To foster adolescents’ skills in logical thinking and the creative application of general knowledge in problem solving.
- To acquaint students with the nature of the professions in the sciences and technologies of language and advertise these professions as a career choice.
- To encourage friendly relations, international understanding and a spirit of sporting competitiveness between young people interested in linguistics from all countries.
- To enhance the co-operation between teachers and experts involved in school linguistics and to motivate the launching of new linguistic contests worldwide.
- To stimulate the development and growth of the genre of the self-sufficient linguistic problem.

# 2 Organisation of the IOL

## 2.1 Time and Schedule

The Olympiad is held annually, traditionally between late July and mid-August. A typical schedule is as follows:

- Day 1: arrival, opening, briefing
- Day 2: individual contest
- Day 3: cultural programme
- Day 4: team contest

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<sup>1</sup> Some footnotes have been added for clarification, in a distinctive font, but these do not form part of the Regulations.

- Day 5: discussion of the problems, awards ceremony, closing  
Day 6: departure

## **2.2 Accreditation**

Teams seeking to participate for the first time should seek accreditation from the International Board. Accreditation can be sought at any time, but the deadline of January 1st must be met to guarantee participation in the next Olympiad.<sup>2</sup> An accredited national association will have made arrangements for its contestants to be chosen in conformity with the requirements set out in 2.3 below. It will also have an internet presence which makes information about it freely available. This must include the following features:

- set out eligibility requirements
- give dates and locations of contest in reasonable time
- give instructions on how to register
- include contact details of the national organizer

When a new country seeks accreditation, the application of the proposed national association should be submitted to the International Board who will respond within one month. Responses can be “accept”, “accept subject to minor modifications”, “decline”: in the latter two cases, clear indications of what needs to be changed/fixed will be given.

The accreditation status of a country may be reviewed by the International Board at any time.

## **2.3 Delegations**

Participating teams will consist of no more than four contestants and will be accompanied by a team leader.

The contestants must be less than 20 years old on the first day of the competition, and must be pre-university students. Eligibility may be extended to students attending an affiliated school in another country or registered as home educated. Citizens living in another country may be eligible for inclusion in the team, at the discretion of the National Organisers.<sup>3</sup> Contestants should be chosen on the basis of participation in a country-wide contest in linguistics or a related field held by a recognised national organisation (including that of another country),<sup>4</sup> open to any resident of the country obtaining their education in the country. This contest should be held in a language of education in that country and should not exclude from participation any students who would otherwise be eligible. It will therefore normally be held in (one of) the official language(s) of the country. Contestants who are eligible for multiple qualifying contests may compete in only one such competition.

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<sup>2</sup> This has been taken to mean that the process of seeking accreditation must be begun before January 1st. Actual accreditation must be confirmed before the deadline for registration.

<sup>3</sup> However, the norm is that contestants will represent the country where they live/are educated.

<sup>4</sup> Including a multinational competition: in this case all contestants may be considered as competing for one country only, and must indicate which beforehand.

Each accredited country is entitled to send one team whose accommodation and full board for the duration of the Olympiad, as well as participation in the social and cultural programme, is covered by the host. A charge not exceeding an amount to be agreed by the International Organising Committee from time to time may be made to supplement costs. Each team must be accompanied by a legal adult (adult in both the team's country and the host country). The team leader must have a common language with which to communicate with the local organisers. A second team may participate at their own expense if the local arrangements allow it, at the discretion of the Local Organising Committee. A request to send a second team must be made by a deadline stipulated by the Local Organising Committee, and accompanied by a deposit, which is refundable only if there is not enough room (but not if the country withdraws the request). Additional (non-competing) participants, as well as deputy leaders, coaches, observers and accompanying persons, may be received, if the local arrangements allow it, at the discretion of the Local Organising Committee.

All participants are responsible for the cost of their travel to the venue of the Olympiad, visa fees (where applicable), medical insurance and sundry expenses, as well as accommodation and board for any extra days spent in the host country.

Teams from countries which have not yet completed the accreditation process may be permitted to attend the Olympiad as guests at the discretion of the International Board in consultation with the Local Organisers, for a maximum of two consecutive years.<sup>5</sup> Guests will be liable for all their own expenses, including costs of accommodation, and participation in the social programme.

It is the responsibility of each national organisation to apply to attend the Olympiad. The Local Organiser will set reasonable deadlines for receipt of such applications, confirmation of attendance and full payment of charges, and may at their discretion offer early-bird discounts. Pro rata rebates for cancellation may be offered according to a pre-arranged schedule depending on the notice given. Failure to meet the deadline for confirmation of attendance and/or full payment may result in exclusion from the competition.

## **2.4 Definitions of countries**

Under exceptional circumstances, two or more entities (“territories”) from the same country may apply to the International Board to be permitted to send separate teams to the IOL. As a guideline, the following are examples of the conditions under which such a request may be considered, but the final decision rests with the International Board:

- The different territories are recognised as separate “countries” by other acknowledged bodies, including those for other competitions (e.g. educational or sporting).

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<sup>5</sup> Such teams will normally be under the auspices of an organisation potentially meeting the requirements of an accredited organisation as described in 4.1 below, and expected to set in motion the process of seeking accreditation as soon as possible.

- The different territories have separate and independent governments or education systems, with independent Education Ministries, or potential funding bodies which treat the different territories separately.
- The different territories have a historical linguistic divergence which makes participation under the “one language per team” rule difficult or impossible.
- The different territories should either
  - hold mutually exclusive qualifying competitions which are justified on clear linguistic, geographical or political grounds. Any students in the country who are eligible for multiple qualifying competitions must choose one or another, and should not be permitted to enter more than one; or
  - share the same qualifying competition, but if so for each contestant it must be clearly identified in which territory they are competing.
- A territory seeking to be accepted as a separate entity should also seek independent accreditation.

If two or more applications for accreditation are received independently from the same country, the International Board will facilitate negotiations between the parties and encourage them to resolve the issue among themselves. If they are unable to do so, the International Board will decide which applicant to recognize.

## **2.5 Contests**

The Olympiad includes an individual and a team contest, held on different days.

At the individual contest a set of five problems is assigned; the duration is six hours (the former may be altered by the Problem Committee, and the latter by the Jury, under compelling circumstances). There is no break, although it is customary for refreshments to be provided.

At the team contest the members of each team work jointly on a single problem set, sharing the work as they choose, and hand in a single script. The time allowed for this is three or four hours, at the discretion of the Problem Committee.

The problems are handed out to the contestants on paper and remain their property after the contest. Writing paper is provided by the Local Organising Committee; no other paper shall be used. Contestants are urged to bring their own pens or pencils, although the invigilators should have a supply to help out those whose pens run out of ink in mid-contest. Artificial aids such as pocket calculators and calendars should not be used. All mobile phones or other communication devices or devices with access to the WWW are strictly prohibited. Any equipment that is essential for solving the problems must be made available to all by the Local Organising Committee.

The contests are not anonymous.

During the individual contest all participants are asked to fill out a brief questionnaire containing (but not necessarily limited to) the following questions:

- What problems did you work on?
- What problem did you find hardest?
- What problem did you find easiest?
- What problem did you like best?

The information from this questionnaire is intended to assist the Jury in the marking or be used for statistical purposes. The author of the best-liked problem receives a Solvers' Choice Award at the end of the Olympiad.

## **2.6 Languages**

Contestants in the individual competition will receive the statements of the problems in a language of their choice and will write the solutions in the same language. Teams in the team competition will likewise receive the problem and write the solution in one language only. By default all contestants in the individual competition will use the same working language that their teams have chosen for the team contest, but a contestant in the individual competition may opt for a language requested by another team. National organisers must notify the Local Organisers which language(s) they wish to use no later than ten weeks before the Olympiad. For a language that has not been used in the previous year, notice must be given by February 1st.<sup>6</sup> Each contestant in the individual competition or team in the team competition may have access to only one version of the problem set during the contest.

All business of the IOL is conducted in such languages as are best understood, English being the default choice when a multinational audience is addressed. All diplomas and certificates must be written in English, but may also contain some text in the language(s) of the host country.

## **2.7 Awards**

In the individual and team contests the numbers of gold, silver and bronze medals awarded shall be approximately in the ratio 1:2:3, and the total number of medals in the individual contest shall be between one quarter and one third of the number of contestants. The actual number of medals awarded shall depend on the allocation of gaps in the sorted list of scores, which means that the Local Organising Committee must be prepared for adjustments in this scheme.

A contestant who obtains a score higher than the average but does not win a medal will receive an Honourable Mention.

It is also customary to award a prize for one or two best solutions of each problem of the individual contest. In this, too, adjustments may be made.

Other symbolic or substantial prizes may be prepared and awarded at the discretion of the Local Organising Committee.

All contestants who are not awarded a medal or an Honourable Mention shall receive a certificate of participation.

# **3 Bodies of the IOL**

## **3.1 International Board**

The International Board shall consist of elected or co-opted members of the International Organising Committee, normally including

- Chair of the Board

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<sup>6</sup> This was previously an advisory note only.

- Secretary
- Funding chair
- IOL web site coordinator
- PR chair
- Local organisers of the previous two Olympiads \*
- Local organisers of the next two Olympiads \*
- Chair of the Problem Committee / Chair of the International Jury \*
- Secretary to the Problem Committee
- Local organiser liaison officer

Members of the International Board shall be elected by the annual meeting of the International Organising Committee. Posts marked \* will be appointed by the Board and will serve until such time as their successor is appointed.<sup>7</sup>

The International Board shall confer at least once between Olympiads, normally in December or January, to prepare for the forthcoming Olympiad. This may be done electronically, e.g. via an exchange of emails, or with a conference call. Minutes of the meeting, or a summary of the conclusions of the email discussion shall be sent to all current members of the International Organising Committee no less than ten weeks before the forthcoming Olympiad. The Board shall also meet at the Olympiad, to prepare the agenda for the meeting of the International Organising Committee.

Any Board member unable to attend a meeting in person or online may request a proxy who, once approved by the meeting, shall have full voting rights.

### ***3.2 International Organising Committee***

The International Organising Committee (IOC) consists of the National Organisers<sup>8</sup> of accredited countries, and members of the International Jury. At a convenient time during the Olympiad they will hold an annual meeting to discuss any matters concerning the IOL, including appointment and/or (re-)election of International Board members, and choice of venue of future Olympiads, so that at least the next Olympiad venue can be announced officially at the closing. This meeting is led by the Chair of the Local Organising Committee or their delegate. IOC members who are absent may be represented by team leaders. Each accredited country represented by a full member of the IOC or their representative shall have two votes. Members of the International Jury shall be invited to attend the IOC meeting but shall not have a vote unless invited to do so. Representatives of countries attending as guests shall not be considered full members of the IOC: they may attend the meeting, and speak, but they will have no voting rights unless invited to do so. Other persons in attendance at the Olympiad may be invited to attend the meeting of the IOC under the same rules.

Members of the International Jury will remain members of the IOC until the membership of the Jury for the following year is established.

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<sup>7</sup> The PC chair normally serves as Chair of the Jury and is normally nominated soon after the end of the previous Olympiad.

<sup>8</sup> Members of the IOC are (apart from jury members) actually organisations rather than individuals, so IOC business is conducted by individuals acting as representatives of these organisations.

### **3.2 Local Organising Committee**

The Local Organising Committee is composed of representatives of the host country. It elects a Chair who must be experienced in the organisation of contests for secondary school students on a national or higher level.

It is the duty of the Local Organising Committee to:

- advertise the Olympiad well in advance on appropriate forums
- design (or commission the design of) a logo for the Olympiad
- create and maintain a Web site with information on the Olympiad
- forward expressions of interest and requests to attend from non-accredited countries to the International Board
- receive registrations from national organisers and obtain accurate information on the delegations' itineraries
- assist team leaders in the organisation of their journey by sending official invitations and providing information on the venue and the schedule upon request
- advise the Problem Committee of the list of teams and working languages requested by them as soon as it is finalised, which must happen no later than ten weeks before the IOL

The Local Organising Committee is also responsible for the local organisation of the Olympiad, which includes:

- choosing an appropriate venue for the Olympiad in the host country, aiming to ensure equal living conditions for all contestants
- planning and arranging the social and cultural programme
- raising funds to cover the cost of
  - accommodation and full board for four contestants and a team leader from each participating accredited country, as well as the Jury, for the duration of the Olympiad
  - the cost of travel for members of the International Jury to the venue of the Olympiad, including visa fees if applicable
  - the participation of the abovementioned people in the social and cultural programme
  - provision of invigilators
  - other technical expenses
- raising funds to cover the cost of, and arranging or providing as the case may be,
  - halls for the opening, briefing, contests, discussion, awards ceremony and closing
  - a suitable location where participants can gather socially when not otherwise occupied
  - meeting rooms for the IOC meeting, the International Board if requested, and for the Jury
  - writing paper for the contestants, extra pens, as well as any special equipment required for the two contests
  - refreshments during the individual contest
  - medals, prizes, diplomas and certificates



- recruiting invigilators for the contests

### **3.3 Problem Committee**

The Problem Committee of the IOL has the mission of putting together the problem sets for the two contests. It is composed of specialists who have had the experience of doing the same for national competitions.

The Problem Committee is responsible for:

- authoring and soliciting high-quality linguistic problems for the two contests and having them evaluated by experts in strict confidence
- creating a problem set for each contest, ensuring that the level of difficulty is appropriate and will be the same for all participants regardless of their working language, and keeping the problems secret until the contests
- editing a handout containing the statements of the problems for each contest, and another with the solutions, in each working language, ensuring the equivalence of all versions
- advising the Local Organising Committee as early as possible of any special equipment that might be needed for the two contests.

The Problem Committee for each Olympiad is led by a Chair who will be appointed from among the members of the Problem Committee with the approval of the International Board. The Secretary to the Problem Committee shall be the main point of contact between the Problem Committee and the Local Organising Committee.

### **3.4 International Jury**

Members of the International Jury are recruited from among the members of the Problem Committee and affiliated experts who have the experience of working in juries of national linguistic contests or earlier Olympiads. Members of the Jury who have not served on the Problem Committee should familiarise themselves with the problems as early as possible, and likewise keep them secret.

It is the duty of the Jury to:

- explain the rules of the contests to the students and their leaders during the briefing
- answer any questions that contestants may have on the statements of the problems during the contest
- mark the scripts after each contest and
  - produce a sorted list of scores, on the basis of which medals are awarded,
  - nominate recipients of prizes for best solutions of individual problems and other special awards
- compose an unofficial ranking of teams by the average score in the individual contest
- arrange a discussion of the problems and their solutions after the contests.

The work of the Jury is directed by a Chair who will normally be the person who has served as Chair of the Problem Committee for the last year. If this is not possible, the Chair of the Jury shall be appointed from among the members of the Problem Committee with the approval of the International Board.

The number of Jury members appointed shall be determined by the Chair of the the Jury in consultation with the Local Organizer and subject to the approval of the International Board.

## 4 Other People

### 4.1 National Organisation

A National Organisation is the body responsible for organising a country's local selection process and that country's participation in IOL. They should be *bona fide* organisations with a connection with education, having the aim and capability of organising a national competition in the long term. The duties of the National Organisation with respect to the IOL are as follows:

- informing the International Board of any changes in contact details
- communicating to the Local Organising Committee their intent to bring a team to the Olympiad at the earliest possible date and no later than the announced deadline<sup>9</sup>
- confirming this intent by the deadline and informing the Local Organising Committee no less than ten weeks before the competition of the language(s) their students wish to work in. If requesting a language that was not in the previous Olympiad, notice must be given by February 1st.<sup>10</sup>
- paying all fees and charges in a timely manner and in any case before the deadline for payment

### 4.2 Team Leaders

The Team Leader shall be a legal adult in both the team's country and the host country, and shall have a level of ability in a common language (usually English) sufficient to allow them to communicate at the Olympiad, and to relay instructions and information to their team members.

The duties of Team Leaders include:

- representing their National Organisation at the annual meeting of the IOC held during the Olympiad if required
- helping the invigilators, if deemed desirable, during the seating of the contestants before each contest
- assisting the Jury, if need arises, in reading illegible handwriting or, in the most extreme of cases, translating some passages from the scripts
- functioning as invigilators during the team contest, if necessary
- taking care of their students' well-being and good behaviour throughout their entire journey and acting as mediators between them and the organisers during the Olympiad.

Team Leaders must not have taken part in the work of the Problem Committee for this Olympiad as members or experts, nor may they be on the Jury.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that it is the NO's responsibility to contact the Local Organizer, not vice versa.

<sup>10</sup> This was previously an advisory footnote only.

### **4.3 Invigilators**

Invigilators are appointed for the duration of the individual contest, during which time they are responsible for:

- taking care that the contestants can work through the allotted time in peace, without anyone distracting their attention (except the Jury, if absolutely necessary, and then for the shortest time possible), and that they are provided with writing paper and pens
- preventing and suppressing any attempts at
  - communication between a contestant and anyone other than the Jury (in accordance with the established procedure) and the invigilators themselves,
  - use of unauthorised tools and sources of information
- contacting the Jury, should a contestant so require or any unforeseen situation arise
- assisting the Jury in collecting the scripts and questionnaires and ensuring that all paperwork is in order.

This document is subject to amendment, subject to approval by a majority vote of the IOC. However, any of the above regulations may be subject to temporary exceptions, granted by the Board, in the face of special circumstances surrounding the holding of the next Olympiad. Any such exceptions expire after the next Olympiad has concluded.