

Competitor Guide – National Spoken Word Competition (previously known as ‘Variations on a Theme’)

(Rules and Guidance for Teams and Participants)

What is this competition?

The National Performance is about celebrating creativity, teamwork, and the joy of performing. It's a chance for Institutes across Scotland to come together and showcase their talents.

Who can enter?

- Teams of 4 SWI members.
- Two or more Institutes may join forces to form a team.
- You don't need experience — enthusiasm is enough!
- Federations may hold local heats to select their representative entry, but this is optional

What do teams do?

- Create a 15-minute programme based on the year's theme.
- Include 6–9 pieces of prose and/or poetry.
- At least one piece must be in verse.
- Pieces can be extracts or complete works.
- Original writing is encouraged.
- Variety matters — try to mix moods and styles.
- You may use local dialect.

Performance Guidance

- Reading aloud is fine — you don't need to memorise.
- Teams may sit or stand.
- Acting, props, music, or effects are not allowed — the focus is on voices.
- Hand gestures and natural expression are welcome.
- Content should be suitable for a wide audience.
- Remember copyright rules — if the author has been dead for less than 70 years, check if permission is needed.

What's in it for me?

- Work creatively with your Institute (or a partner Institute).
- Share stories, poetry, and ideas with a Scotland-wide audience.
- Be part of a supportive, friendly competition.
- Showcase your talents — or help backstage with organisation, direction, or design.
- Celebrate the energy and creativity of SWI members across the country.

How much does it cost to enter?

The cost is £40 per team. You can enter by visiting the SWI website.