



## 14<sup>th</sup> HIPPO Regulations

### INTRODUCTION

Hippo is organising 14<sup>th</sup> Hippo English Without Borders – the Contest (hereinafter the Contest). The Contest is open to students 6 – 19 years old from the whole world. Students wishing to participate take tests in one of the Hippo approved venues (state schools and schools that are part of the formal education system, as well as private schools, and venues set up by country coordinators).

### HIPPO AND ITS AIMS

Hippo English Without Borders – the Contest is an international event that promotes the English language, challenges students worldwide to test their knowledge, and inspires teachers to collaborate. The Contest fosters a shared sense of identity and integration, serving as a model of how young people can live and grow together as one global community. Its main goal is to build and nurture friendship, mutual understanding, and a spirit of healthy competition among young learners of English from all around the world.

In addition, by taking part in this unique challenge, students have the opportunity to measure their English proficiency against international standards and become familiar with the concept of examination. Participating schools gain valuable insight into their students' level of English, motivating them to strive for even greater achievement.

### THE CONTEST REGULATIONS

#### 1 ROUNDS, DATES & VENUES

The Contest is run in four stages: the Preliminary Round, the National Finals, the Continental Round – Qualifiers / Play-Off Qualifiers and World Finals. Candidates who do not qualify for the World Finals will be given the opportunity to participate in the Continental Round – the Qualifiers and the Play-Off Qualifiers (See 3. *Continental Round – the Qualifiers* & 4. *Play-Off Qualifiers*).

The first two rounds will be held on different dates in different countries. Hippo schedules the contest dates according to the region of the world where each country is located. The most suitable dates are selected for every participating country, taking into consideration the local school calendar and national holidays.

All official dates are published on the Hippo website — [www.hippo-thecontest.org](http://www.hippo-thecontest.org) — on the Join Us page. By clicking on a country on the map, participants can view the specific dates that apply to their region.

The three sets of dates are as follows:

Area 1 broadly defined as EUROPE & AFRICA including: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Austria, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Nigeria, Niger, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and Zimbabwe.

- Preliminary Round: 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> March 2026
- National Finals: 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> April 2026; 17<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> April 2026 Italy only

Area 2 broadly defined as GREATER MIDDLE EAST & CENTRAL ASIA including: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Mongolia, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

- Preliminary Round: 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> April 2026
- National Finals: 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> May 2026

Area 3 broadly defined as ASIA-PACIFIC & AMERICAS including: Bangladesh, Brazil, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Venezuela, Vietnam.

- Preliminary Round: 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> May 2026
- National Finals: 29<sup>th</sup> & 30<sup>th</sup> May 2026

\*LATAM countries joining Hippo for the 2026 edition will be given the opportunity to adjust the Contest Rounds to better align with their national education systems.

Every school, independent of the type and country, can participate in the Contest. Schools that wish to enrol a group of candidates are required to host the preliminary round of the Contest, even in the countries that accept individual enrolments.

Schools that wish to participate in the Contest need to apply through the country coordinator. If there is no country coordinator in the country, the school needs contact Hippo directly ([venue@hippo-thecontest.org](mailto:venue@hippo-thecontest.org)) for venue approval. Where a country coordinator's contact is listed on the Join Us page of the Hippo website, all venue approvals must be obtained through the coordinator.

The National Final round will be held on one of the aforementioned dates. The network of national finals venues will be based on the location of the qualified students.

The World Finals will be held in Spoleto, Italy, from 28<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2026. 240 finalists (plus wildcards, for details please see *10. Marking and Ranking*) as well as a school representative (chosen by the school), e.g., the student's teacher, will be invited to the final round of the Contest. Hippo reserves the right to increase the number of

finalists if the number of applicants exceeds 93.250 in accordance with the Contest regulations.

## 2 CANDIDATE REGISTRATION AND FEES

Each participating school needs to appoint one of their staff as the Contest school coordinator and contact person (the details need to be provided in the Venue Approval Form). This person will be in charge of student enrolments and will need to ensure that all the Contest examination regulations are followed.

**Hippo 2026 Candidate Registration on .soa.** Upon venue approval, each school will receive login details for the Hippo Online Platform ([www.soa-htc.org](http://www.soa-htc.org)) where they need to register the candidates by entering the required details. The registration deadline varies from one country to another – candidates and/or participating schools are kindly asked to contact the country coordinator for more detail. After the enrolment deadline, no further amendments can be made. The system will automatically assign candidate numbers to applicants. The lists of candidates will remain available for printing the Preliminary Round attendance lists. School coordinators are required to print the attendance registers for the Preliminary Round of the Contest. They are also kindly requested to double check the accuracy of candidate details. Candidate entries can only be made in Latin letters (A - Z, no language specific letters). No candidate can be registered without the DOB and grade. School coordinators need to have the data ready before they start registering the candidates.

Some of the participating countries accept individual candidates. To find out whether your country accepts individual candidates, please contact the country coordinator. In the countries where individual candidates are accepted, they will be assigned to the nearest approved venue. Participation fee is payable only once per student and covers the student's participation in all the Contest rounds except for the Continental Round – and the Play-Off Qualifiers. For detailed information about deadlines and fees, schools need to contact the country coordinator. The list of participating countries and coordinators, as well as some country specific details, are available on the Registrations page of the Contest website.

N.B. Children, family or relatives of organisers, coordinators or anyone involved in the Contest organisation cannot compete in the Contest.

## 3 CONTINENTAL ROUND - QUALIFIERS

The Contest participants will be divided into the Contest regions (hereinafter Regions) for the purpose of organising the Continental Round - Qualifiers. Based on the number and location of the participants in previous Hippo years, the pre-set regions have been established. Pre-set regions are as follows:

1. Mediterranean Countries (Europe & North Africa)
2. Continental Europe
3. Middle East
4. Central Asia
5. Indian Subcontinent

6. Southeast Asia
7. Far East
8. Africa
9. America
10. Oceania

The 2026 Continental Rounds – Qualifiers will take place in:

1. **Jesolo Lido, Venice, Italy** for **EUROPE & AFRICA** and will include the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Austria, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Nigeria, Niger, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine and Zimbabwe.
2. **Baku, Azerbaijan**, for **GREATER MIDDLE EAST & CENTRAL ASIA** and will include the following countries: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Kuwait, Pakistan, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
3. **Thailand** (the exact location to be announced), for **ASIA-PACIFIC** and will include the following countries: Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam.
4. **Buenos Aires, Argentina**, for the **AMERICAS** and will include Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela and other countries in the North or South America joining Hippo in 2026.

Where the number of enrolments in a specific region reaches 1,000 students in the 2026 edition, with a minimum of 50 candidates per Hippo Category, the Continental Round will be organised. Students with the best ranking among those not qualified for the World Finals will be admitted to the Continental Round.

The Continental Round - Qualifiers will be held in person. Online examinations will not be available, and no exceptions will be made. The minimum percentage a student needs to achieve to be invited to the Continental Round will be 70% of that of the first-ranked student's points. The top 20% of students in each category within each country macro-region if applicable, or otherwise within the country, provided that they do not qualify for the World Finals and that their minimum percentage of achievement is 70% of that of the first-ranked student's points, will be invited to participate in the Continental Round and their names will be highlighted in yellow in the ranking list published on the official Hippo website on the Results page. The number of participants in CR events will be limited and bookings will be accepted on a first-come first-served basis.

Students invited to the Continental Round are required to pay a Participation Fee. This fee covers the cost of insurance, merchandising items (provided to participants upon arrival), participation in organized activities, and examination materials.

Where applicable, an accommodation package will be offered to participants through an exclusive service provider. Students and accompanying teachers or parents are responsible for their own travel and accommodation expenses. While participants are expected to arrange their own travel, Hippo will provide recommended accommodation

options, allowing participants to choose between the proposed package and independent arrangements.

The three-day program will be published on the Hippo website as well as Hippo social media. The program will be sent to the participants and their families along with the booking information.

First place winners of each Hippo category and for any of the Regions will proceed to the World Finals.

## 4 PLAY-OFF QUALIFIERS

Hippo organises Play-Off Qualifiers in order to give additional participants the opportunity to reach Hippo 2026 World Finals by offering an intensive five-day Hippo English Language preparation course followed by a Hippo Test to be taken on day 6.

Play-Off Qualifiers options will be held in:

- 1 Brighton, UK
- 2 Doha, Qatar
- 3 Cluj, Romania

N.B. All three Play-Off Qualifier events are open to students from all categories. However, if the number of registered students in any category is fewer than three, those categories will either be combined, or their participants will compete within the closest-in-age and most numerous category. In such cases, students will be ranked together to compete for a place in the World Finals.

Students who qualify for the Continental Round – Qualifiers can choose to participate in the Play-Off Qualifiers instead. In addition, students with the best ranking among those not qualified for the World Finals, with the percentage of achievement above 50% of the first-ranked student's points, provided they are not among the top 20% of the students, will be admitted to the Play-Off Qualifiers only and cannot compete in the Continental Round. These students will be highlighted in orange. If a student applies for both the CR and POQ, and wins at the CR event, they will be able to choose whether to use their POQ registration as a Hippo Summer Camp (with a 15% discount) or to get a refund. The number of Play-Off Qualifiers slots are limited and will be available on a first-come first-served basis.

Students will need to make their own travel arrangements and cover the costs themselves. The package covers the costs of teaching, learning materials, accommodation, all meals, transfers arrival/departure, all activities and 1 excursion. Costs and other details are available on the Play-Off Qualifiers page of the Hippo website.

No accompanying teachers or parents are accepted. Students will be accommodated in a college open to students only, supervised by guardians 24/7. The courses will be taught by Bucksmore Education qualified teachers, for a minimum of 15 and maximum of 20 hours in classes of 20 students. Students will be allocated to their class based on the category in which they participate and the entry test results. Lessons will be tailor-made

and will include Hippo mock examinations. Play-Off Qualifiers examinations will take place on the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> day of their stay.

## 5 THE CONTEST MATERIALS

In both the Preliminary Round and National Finals, schools can choose between online and paper-based examinations.

**Online Examinations.** Schools will be provided with guidance on how to access the examinations and login details. The tests need to be taken in an approved Hippo Venue but can also be invigilated remotely. Different regulations apply.

**Paper-based Examinations.** Tests for the preliminary round of the Contest will need to be delivered to the approved venue 2 days before the Contest date and need to stay closed until the Preliminary Round start time. They need to be sent back on the first working day after the Preliminary round date and must be delivered within 5 working days, unless the Country Coordinator has provided another deadline. The return address will be provided with the materials. Where the return address is not provided with the materials, schools need to contact either the Country Coordinator for instructions. The materials delivered after this date will not be marked.

## 6 SCHEDULES & INSPECTIONS

Each approved venue decides on the start time of the test depending on the number of participants per category. All approved venues must send their schedules to the Country Coordinator three working days before the Contest date for possible inspections. The Contest Examination Regulations<sup>1</sup> will apply throughout the Contest. Hippo reserves the right to randomly inspect examination venues. Where it has been decided to deliver National Finals Examinations online, the Country Coordinator will need to facilitate remote observation if requested. Remote observations will be carried out by one of Hippo staff members.

## 7 THE CONTEST – REGULAR & SPECIAL CATEGORIES

The participants will compete in 12 categories (7 regular and 5 special) based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and will take Gatehouse Awards examinations as well as Hippo Tests. The students in grades lower than the ones in the table can also compete if they feel prepared for the level. The age limit for the Contest is 19 or as long as the students are in high school.

Bilingual students can only compete in one of the special categories. Students that are considered bilingual are the ones who were born or have lived and attended school for at least 3 years in an English-speaking country in the past 5 years as well as those who live in a non-English speaking country but attend an English/American International or a specialised school. Should a student, who is considered bilingual according to the above, apply for a regular category through another school, and should one of the

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<sup>1</sup>The Contest Examination Regulations for PB, Remotely Observed Online, and On Premises Online Examinations are detailed in Annex 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

abovementioned schools apply as a regular school, Hippo reserves the right to disqualify them from the Contest.

Special categories are aimed at students who are considered bilingual according to the Hippo Contest regulations (see above) as well as for the international schools and the schools where 50% or more of the subjects are taught in English (except for the countries where English is the only official language, e.g., UK). The percentage of curriculum delivered in English can be revised in agreement with the country coordinators. These students can compete in one of the five special categories. Baby Hippo and Little Hippo students, even if they are considered bilingual according to the above, will still compete in the regular categories.

N.B. Hippo reserves the right to check the school curriculum, the language of instruction and number of hours of English taught. Students who enrol in one of the regular categories but are supposed to compete in the special categories according to the regulations will be disqualified.

Category	CEFR Level Preliminary	CEFR Level NF & Finals	Category	CEFR Level Preliminary	CEFR Level NF & Finals
BABY HIPPO*	CEFR Pre A1 YL	CEFR A1 YL			
LITTLE HIPPO	CEFR Pre A1 YL	CEFR A1 YL			
HIPPO 1	CEFR A1 YL	CEFR A2 YL	HIPPO S1	CEFR A1	CEFR A2
HIPPO 2	CEFR A1	CEFR A2	HIPPO S2	CEFR A2	CEFR B1
HIPPO 3	CEFR A2	CEFR B1	HIPPO S3	CEFR B1	CEFR B2
HIPPO 4	CEFR B1	CEFR B2	HIPPO S4	CEFR B2	CEFR C1
HIPPO 5	CEFR B2	CEFR C1	HIPPO S5	CEFR C1	CEFR C2

\*Baby Hippo examinations will be of the same level of difficulty as the ones for Little Hippo in all rounds of the Contest. The two categories will, however, have two separate ranking lists. In accordance with the national education systems, potential Hippo candidates have been divided into two groups: those where children start school at the age of 6, and those where children start school at the age of 7. Grade 1 is the first grade of primary education, while each next grade number is next grade of the country's education system.

**6 as school starting age.** The table below applies to the candidates from the following countries:

Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Austria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, Ghana, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Latvia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, North Macedonia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Palestine, Philippines, Qatar, Romania, Russia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sudan, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Zimbabwe.

#### REGULAR CATEGORIES

Grade	Hippo Category
1 - 2	BABY HIPPO
3 - 4	LITTLE HIPPO
5 - 6	HIPPO 1
7	HIPPO 2
8 - 9	HIPPO 3
10 - 11	HIPPO 4
12 - 13	HIPPO 5

#### SPECIAL CATEGORIES

Grade	Hippo Category
1 - 2	BABY HIPPO
3 - 4	LITTLE HIPPO
5 - 6	HIPPO S1
7	HIPPO S2
8 - 9	HIPPO S3
10 - 11	HIPPO S4
12 - 13	HIPPO S5

7 as school starting age. The table below applies to the candidates from the following countries:

Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Guinea, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, South Africa, Tajikistan and Tanzania.

#### REGULAR CATEGORIES

Grade	Hippo Category
1	BABY HIPPO
2 - 3	LITTLE HIPPO
4 - 5	HIPPO 1
6	HIPPO 2
7 - 8	HIPPO 3
9 - 10	HIPPO 4
11 - 13	HIPPO 5

#### SPECIAL CATEGORIES

Grade	Hippo Category
1	BABY HIPPO
2 - 3	LITTLE HIPPO
4 - 5	HIPPO S1
6	HIPPO S2
7 - 8	HIPPO S3
9 - 10	HIPPO S4
11 - 13	HIPPO S5

When registering candidates, both the DOB and grade are mandatory. .soa only allows candidate registration in accordance with the above tables and will only allow candidates to register for their or higher categories. In the countries where candidate registration deadline is in one school year and round examinations in another, candidates need to be registered according to the grade at the time of registration.

N.B. Students who reached Hippo 2025 final round, cannot compete in the same category in Hippo 2026.

## 8 THE CONTEST – PRELIMINARY ROUND

The tests for the preliminary round of the Contest will consist of two parts: a test of reading comprehension (multiple-choice questions) by Gatehouse Awards, and a Hippo Use of English multiple-choice test. The maximum allowed time per part is shown in the tables below.

It is strictly forbidden to open the Contest materials before the exam date. The school coordinator can open the parcel to check that all the materials have been received. The transparent envelopes with the tests, however, need to stay sealed and be opened in front of the students, right before the start of the Preliminary Round tests.

The test samples are available on the Contest website. There is only one correct answer to every question. There are no negative marks. Ranking is based on the total number of marks achieved on the two tests.

	BABY HIPPO	LITTLE HIPPO	HIPPO 1	HIPPO 2	HIPPO 3	HIPPO 4	HIPPO 5
READING	30 questions (1 point each)	30 questions (1 point each)	30 questions (1 point each)	34 questions (1 point each)	34 questions (1 point each)	34 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)
USE OF ENGLISH MC	20 questions (1.5 point each)	20 questions (1.5 point each)	20 questions (1.5 point each)	20 questions (1.5 point each)	20 questions (1.5 point each)	20 questions (1.5 point each)	20 questions (1.5 point each)

	HIPPO S1	HIPPO S2	HIPPO S3	HIPPO S4	HIPPO S5
READING	34 questions (1 point each)	34 questions (1 point each)	34 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)
USE OF ENGLISH MC	20 questions (1.5 points each)	20 questions (1.5 points each)	20 questions (1.5 points each)	20 questions (1.5 points each)	20 questions (1.5 points each)

Both reading test and Use of English answers are given on an answer sheet (OMR).

Maximum allowed times per category and part for regular categories:

	BABY HIPPO	LITTLE HIPPO	HIPPO 1	HIPPO 2	HIPPO 3	HIPPO 4	HIPPO 5
READING	20 min	20 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	40 min	45 min
USE OF ENGLISH MC	20 min	20 min	20 min	20 min	20 min	30 min	30 min

Maximum allowed times per category and part for special categories:

	HIPPO S1	HIPPO S2	HIPPO S3	HIPPO S4	HIPPO S5
READING	30 min	30 min	40 min	45 min	45 min
USE OF ENGLISH MC	20 min	20 min	30 min	30 min	30 min

## 9 THE CONTEST – NATIONAL FINAL ROUND

After the Preliminary Round tests have been marked, the top 20% of participating students from each participating country will be invited to the National Finals. The list of qualified students will be expanded to include all those whose number of points is the same as the number of points of the last students in the first 20%. Country coordinators can decide to divide the country into macro-areas. In such cases, the 20% of preliminary round candidates who qualify for the national finals will be per macro-area, not per country.

N.B. In order to qualify for the National Finals, candidates must obtain a minimum score of 50%.

The list of qualified students will be published on the Contest website within three weeks of the preliminary round date. The network of National Finals venues will be based on the location of the qualified students.

Wildcards are available for the countries where no student qualifies for the finals and will be granted to the best candidate in each category from the country.

The exam level for the National Finals will be one CEFR level higher than the one in the Preliminary Round. The tests for the national finals of the Contest will consist of a reading test, a writing test (30 questions) and an essay (except for Baby Hippo and Little Hippo).

There is only one correct answer to every question. In open-ended questions, where there can be more than one correct answer, all correct answers will be accepted. There are no negative marks. Ranking is based on the average number of marks achieved on both the reading and the writing test. Reading test answers are given on an answer sheet (OMR) while the Writing test answers are given in the test booklet. The writing test will consist of a free-writing task (100 – 200 words depending on the category) and 30 questions. The level of difficulty of all the questions will be one level higher than the one in the Preliminary Round. The essay will be assessed only in case two or more candidates have identical scores on both the reading and the writing test and/or in case of suspected malpractice.

	BABY HIPPO	LITTLE HIPPO	HIPPO 1	HIPPO 2	HIPPO 3	HIPPO 4	HIPPO 5
READING	30 questions (1 point each)	30 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)	34 questions (1 point each)	34 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)
WRITING	30 questions (1.5 points each)	30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)

	HIPPO S1	HIPPO S2	HIPPO S3	HIPPO S4	HIPPO S5
WRITING READING	34 questions (1 point each)	34 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)	40 questions (1 point each)
WRITING	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)	free-writing task (essay) + 30 questions (1.5 points each)

Maximum allowed times per category and part for regular categories:

	BABY HIPPO	LITTLE HIPPO	HIPPO 1	HIPPO 2	HIPPO 3	HIPPO 4	HIPPO 5
READING	30 min	30 min	30 min	30 min	40 min	45 min	45 min
WRITING	45 min	45 min	45 min	45 min	45 min	45 min	45 min

Maximum allowed times per category and part for special categories:

	HIPPO S1	HIPPO S2	HIPPO S3	HIPPO S4	HIPPO S5
READING	30 min	40 min	45 min	45 min	50 min
WRITING	45 min	45 min	45 min	45 min	45 min

## 10 CONTINENTAL ROUND – QUALIFIERS & PLAY-OFF QUALIFIERS EXAMINATIONS

In both the Continental Round – Qualifiers and the Play-off Qualifiers, the candidates will take a Hippo Test of English consisting of 30 Use of English open-ended questions and a crossword. Hippo Test of English samples are available on the official website.

## 11 FINAL ROUND EXAMINATIONS

In the final round of the Contest, the candidates take a Gatehouse Awards exam, all 4 skills included. GA Writing test will only be marked for the purpose of certification, not for the purpose of the final round ranking list. In addition to the four-skill GA examinations, candidates take a Use of English test consisting of 30 questions. The results of this test will be used for final round ranking purposes and will not affect the GA examination qualification score. The test samples / past papers are available on [www.hippo-thecontest.org](http://www.hippo-thecontest.org). The exam level for the final round will be one CEFR level higher than the one in the preliminary round that is the same as the national finals test.

## 12 MARKING & RANKING

The reading test answers are marked by an OMR device and for that reason need to be properly filled in. Candidates are required to use a pen while completing the OMR form. An OMR sample form is available on the Hippo website. In case an OMR form is not properly filled in (e.g., incorrect or missing candidate number) or scanned and the OMR device cannot read it, Hippo reserves the right to not mark the OMR if the identity of the candidate cannot be established. In the National Finals, the essay will be marked only if two or more candidates have the same number of points on both the reading and the writing test or in case of suspected cheating or malpractice.

For online examinations, in case of suspected malpractice, Hippo reserves the right to re-test the candidates using a parallel test and under the invigilation of the Hippo staff.

The ranking list for all categories as well as the names of the candidates who qualified for the national finals will be available on [www.hippo-thecontest.org](http://www.hippo-thecontest.org) within three weeks of the Preliminary Round date.

The ranking list for all categories as well as the names of the candidates who qualified for the National Finals and eventually the Continental Round and the Play-Off Qualifiers

will be available on [www.hippo-thecontest.org](http://www.hippo-thecontest.org) within three weeks of the National Finals date.

The final round places will be assigned in the following way. Top 140 finalists will be admitted directly from the national finals ranking list. The number of finalists per category and country will be proportional to the number of preliminary round participants per country. In order to promote a multicultural environment, wildcards will be granted to the best participant from each of the countries that does not have a finalist. In addition to the above, winners of the Continental Round and the Play-Off Qualifiers will be admitted to the World Finals.

Hippo reserves the right to increase the number of finalists if the number of applicants exceeds 93,250, all in accordance with the Contest regulations.

## 13 FINAL ROUND

The World Finals will be held in Spoleto, Italy, from 28<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> October 2026. All candidates can be accompanied by their English language teacher, or an English-speaking teacher from their school. Baby Hippo, Little Hippo and Hippo 1 candidates may be accompanied by one parent at no additional cost.

Parents of students of other categories who wish to accompany their children need to make their own travel and accommodation arrangements as the hotels where the students are accommodated are booked exclusively for the Contest participants.

Three-day half-board accommodation will be provided for all the candidates and one accompanying person per candidate, while the costs of travel will be borne by the participants.

Finalists are expected to arrive the day before the examinations start; examinations will be held over two days while the proclamation of winners and awards ceremony will be held on the evening of the second day of examinations.

The programme of the final round will be sent directly to the finalists who confirmed their participation one week before the event.

Hippo will provide support to finalists with their visa arrangements.

## 14 PRIZES

All Preliminary and National Final Round candidates will receive a certificate of participation.

THE CONTINENTAL ROUND – QUALIFIERS. Winners of each qualifier round will proceed to the World Finals.

PLAY OFF QUALIFIERS. Winners of each Play-Off qualifier round will proceed to the World Finals.

WORLD FINALS. All candidates who pass the final round tests (score 55% minimum) will be awarded a Gatehouse Awards internationally recognised certificate in English.

Other World Final prizes will be announced closer to the World Finals date.

## 15 PROCESSING AND PROTECTION OF PERSONAL DATA

As we organize HIPPO the Contest and events, we determine which data, including personal data, is processed, the purposes of the processing, and the means of processing within the context of HIPPO the Contest and associated events. Therefore, we are considered the data controller within the meaning of the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union. More about the concept of the data controller, the data we process, and other relevant information concerning our practices related to data processing and data protection are available in our Privacy Policy available [here](#).

For the organization and implementation of the Contest and for the purpose of realizing associated events, we engage other organizations and individuals to help us. These include the engagement of country coordinators and school coordinators. The country coordinators are organizations/institutions that support us in the organization and implementation of HIPPO the Contest and associated events in their countries with the necessary logistical measures. The schools with their appointed staff (school coordinators) also help with the implementation of the Contest at their locations as soon as they are approved. Both the country coordinators and the school coordinators process personal data for the purpose necessary for the organization of Hippo the Contest and associated events. In doing so, they should strictly follow our instructions as they process personal data on our behalf. Therefore, the respective country coordinators and school coordinators are treated as data processors within the meaning of the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (entities processing personal data on behalf of the data controller).

In view of the fact that the country coordinators and school coordinators have the status of data processors, we have taken appropriate safeguards to comply with the relevant legal requirements, in particular with regard to the transfer of personal data and making data available. These requirements emphasize inter alia that whenever our data processors plan to engage third parties that will process personal data while assisting them in Hippo-related activities, they should seek our permission to do so. The same rules for data protection and data processing must apply to these third parties (as the case is with country coordinators and school coordinators). These rules are set out in the Data Processing Agreement available [here](#). Thus, this Data Processing Agreement forms a mandatory and integral part of each contract concluded between:

- us on one side and the appointed country coordinator and/or school coordinator on another,
- appointed country coordinator on one side and school coordinator on another,
- country coordinator and/or school coordinator on one side and any third party on another.

When collecting and processing data, including personal data, the country coordinators and school coordinators must duly observe national/local data protection regulations. If they identify a legal requirement from the domain of national/local data protection

regulations that deviate from the European Union General Data Protection Regulation or any other legal requirement that could affect the lawfulness of the data processing, the processing must be stopped and addressed to the Hippo organization without undue delay.

## 16 CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

By applying for the Contest, the participants accept the rules and regulations of the Contest as detailed in this document.