



2026 Student Sputum Bowl Rulebook

April 1, 2026

Dear AARC State Affiliate Presidents, Sputum Bowl Coordinators, and RT Program Directors,

The AARC Program Committee cordially invites you to participate in the AARC Student Sputum Bowl Competition, November 14-17, 2026, in New Orleans, LA. Last year we hosted 30 teams from across the nation and we hope to replicate this year. Your participation in the Student Sputum Bowl Competition will make this a highlight of the AARC International Respiratory Congress.

Each affiliate is encouraged to promote this event to the RT educational programs throughout your state. Some states sponsor a team and assist with travel and other expenses, but this is not a requirement. In fact, we highly encourage the participation of Renegade teams – teams who register to compete regardless of their affiliation or standing within their state (i.e. state or regional champion). We welcome State Champions and Renegade teams alike!

To promote broader state representation, each state is eligible to register up to two (2) teams. For states that conduct a state-level competition, the winning team will receive priority for the first entry. Any additional teams beyond the two (2) allotted per state may register but will be placed on a waiting list.

Due to the time constraints associated with the competition format, we must limit participation to 30 teams. If registrations exceed capacity, a lottery system will be used to determine final participation. Teams not selected will receive a full refund of the registration fee.

The 2026 Student Sputum Bowl Rules and all required forms are included in this packet or can be located on the AARC [Website](#) . Please review the rules carefully and make sure your team members review them as well.

Team registration will open **May 1, 2026**, and registrations will be confirmed once we receive a completed application, accurate roster, and the registration fee is paid. Registration will not be confirmed if any part of the registration process is not complete. Note that confirmed registration will be made first come, first served from completed applications.

We look forward to seeing you in New Orleans!

Sincerely,

Julie Bogawright, M.Ed., RRT-ACCS, RRT-NPS, RPFT, AE-C
Chair, National Sputum Bowl Committee 2026

The American Association for Respiratory Care

Sputum Bowl

Rules of Competition

REVISED March 2026

- I. The prime objective of the Sputum Bowl is to stimulate interest in the current knowledge and practices of respiratory care.**
- II. The competition shall be held in a spirit of professionalism and good sportsmanship.**
- III. There are no losers in this contest. All participants should gain from this experience a greater understanding of respiratory care and themselves.**
- IV. Submission of Teams**
 - a. Any team made up of eligible players may register to participate in the Sputum Bowl. Affiliation with an AARC State Affiliate is not required.
 - b. Each team must submit the following information:
 - i. A completed application for admission to the contest prior to the deadline noted in these rules.
 - ii. A completed roster of eligible team members prior to the deadline noted in these rules.
 - iii. Payment of the required registration fee.
 - c. Confirmation of a team's acceptance into the event will not be provided until all of the above is received and complete.
 - d. Registrations are confirmed based on current capacity when received.
- V. Sputum Bowl Team Composition**
 - a. A team shall consist of at least three (3) and not more than four (4) Respiratory Care student team members. NOTE: Only three members can compete as the core team in any one match, but team members may alternate between matches, or the 4th member may serve as the team's expert.
 - b. Member Eligibility
 - i. Team members (herein considered "the team") must be current members in good standing of the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC) as determined by current AARC bylaws at both the time of team application and at the time of the competition.
 - ii. An individual may be a member of only one team entered into the competition.
 - iii. Student Sputum Bowl team members who win a Student Sputum Bowl championship will not be eligible to compete in the Student Sputum Bowl competition in subsequent years.
 - iv. Each Student Sputum Bowl team member must be a current

student in a Respiratory Care educational program or must have graduated from a Respiratory Care educational program during the current calendar year (2026). This student status must be verified for every team member, validated by the student's program director, on the Student Sputum Bowl roster, which must be submitted to the AARC by **October 14, 2026**.

c. **Team Eligibility**

- i. Teams must meet all requirements of a Sputum Bowl team as set forth in these rules.
- ii. Teams must submit a completed application to play, team roster, and payment of a \$100 non-refundable registration fee prior to the deadline established in these rules.
- iii. Teams may consist of members from different educational programs and/or states if all other eligibility rules are met.

VI. Format for National Competition

- a. The National competition will be held during the AARC International Congress
 - i. Preliminaries will be held prior to the Finals.
 - ii. Preliminaries will be held in a double elimination format and follow a pre-created game bracket.
 - iii. Preliminary bracket play will occur until only 4 teams remain. The remaining 4 teams will advance to Finals.
 - iv. Team matches will be paired using a randomization program.

VII. Moderators

- a. A moderator shall be familiar with the profession's terminology and appointed by the Sputum Bowl Committee Chair.
- b. The moderator shall have the power and option to accept or reject an answer without asking for a judge's ruling.
- c. The Committee Chair and moderator shall be responsible for the physical setup of the contest site, the proper functioning of all equipment, questions, and all other necessary arrangements to ensure a smoothly run game.
- d. During game play, the moderator is in charge. He/she must control the actions of the teams, judges, scorekeeper, timekeeper, and audience.
- e. The moderator shall review all questions prior to the competition to determine the limits of acceptable alternate responses to each question and determine sets of questions for use during each round of play.

VIII. Judges

- a. The judges shall be qualified individuals in their respective fields.
- b. Judges may review the individual and team eligibility prior to and during the actual competition to determine if any irregularities exist.
- c. The judges shall not be directly related to team members involved in any individual contest.

- d. The judges impaneled for the competition shall rule on the response to any question when asked by the moderator and indicate whether they accept or reject a team's answer. All decisions shall be final, and no challenges will be accepted based on the judges' prior ruling.

IX. The Competition

a. Preliminaries

- i. A game will consist of:
 - 1. Two teams of up to three members each competing at a time.
 - 2. Ten (10) minutes in length
 - 3. The team scoring the most points at the end of ten minutes is the winner of that game
 - 4. A team will be eliminated when losing two games during the preliminary competition.
- ii. If a team is not on time for their game as scheduled, the team that is present will be seated. At the time the game is scheduled to start, a 60-second clock will start. If the missing team does not arrive prior to the clock expiring, the team that is present will be given a win with a score of 1-0. Under extenuating circumstances, the committee will discuss and vote on whether a team is permitted to play.
- iii. No technology of any kind permitted on stage unless approved by the sputum bowl committee (i.e.. Smartphones, smartwatches, AI glasses, etc.)

b. Finals

- i. A game will consist of:
 - 1. Two teams in competition
 - 2. Ten (10) minutes in length for the semi-finals, fifteen (15) minutes in length for the Finals match.
 - 3. The team scoring the most points at the end of each game is the winner.
- ii. The final four teams will be paired at random and will compete for berths in the championship game.
- iii. The teams losing their first game in the final competition will be awarded third place.
- iv. The winner of the championship game will be awarded first place. The loser of the championship match will be awarded second place.

- c. The moderator shall signal the beginning of each game.
- d. The timekeeper shall time the length of play and announce the end of play.
- e. The scorekeeper shall maintain a running score visible to all participants and audience and record the verbal portion of all match play.
- f. The moderator will ask the pre-selected questions. Anyone may answer a toss-up question. The element of **"Risk/Reward"** will exist throughout the entire

game. If a team buzzes in to answer **before** the moderator has finished reading the question, the moderator will stop at that point in the question and indicate to that team that they are **“At Risk.”** The team then has ten (10) second to begin an answer. Team members have the liberty to confer during this time period. If the answer is correct, they are **“Rewarded”** with a point. If the answer is incorrect, a point will be deducted from their score. The moderator will then turn to the opposing team, re-read the question, and give that team ten (10) seconds to begin an answer. If that team is correct, they score a point. If they are incorrect, a point will not be deducted from their score. The moderator will judge the first answer given by any team as to its correctness, and if correct, indicate so to the scorekeeper.

- g. A team will never be **“At Risk”** if they respond to a question **after** the moderator has finished reading it.
- h. If they wish, each team, once per game, may use a lifeline called **“Ask the Expert.”** This lifeline becomes **“Call Your Posse”** during the Finals competition.
- i. **“Ask the Expert/Call Your Posse”**
 - i. In **preliminary** competition, each team must submit the name of the **“Expert”** to the Sputum Bowl Committee prior to the start of each game. The team may choose whomever they wish except anyone on the Sputum Bowl Committee or any judge who is presiding during the round. Expert must sit in front of team, facing away from team. Expert cannot signal team in any way. If the expert does signal team, the team will lose the question and the other team will be given the chance to answer the question, and the expert will be excused from the game. When a team responds to a question and wishes to use the **“Expert”**, they will announce to the moderator that they would like to ask their **“Expert.”** The time clock will then be set to ten (10) seconds. The **“Expert”** must be readily available to join the team for the single question; upon joining the team the clock will start counting down from 10 seconds. The team will have ten (10) seconds total to begin an answer. If the time to answer the question has passed, the moderator may move on to the opposing team and re-read it. If both teams have been read the question, the moderator will proceed on with the round. **“Risk/Reward”** will apply when using your expert.
 - ii. In **Finals** competition, each team will compose 8 people for their posse prior to the evening’s contest. The **“Posse”** will sit at the tables reserved for the teams at the front of the auditorium. The **“Posse”** will be responsible for answering the question **without** consultation with their team. **“Risk/Reward”** will apply when using your **“Posse.”** Once a team decides to **“Call the Posse”** the game clock will be stopped. When the **“Posse”** has been identified, a separate clock will be used to time the

Posse's answer period. The Posse will have ten (10) total seconds to begin to answer. Once the "Posse" gives an answer or when their answer time runs out, time on the original game clock will be restarted and regular game play will continue.

- iii. If neither team responds to a question within ten (10) seconds after the moderator has completed its reading, the question will be set aside and questioning will continue.
- iv. Each correct answer to a question will have a value of one point.

After the 2:00 minute mark (or 3:00 minute mark in Finals), no slide questions will be asked, nor will any "Ask the Expert/Call the Posse" lifelines be allowed.

- v. Bonus/Penalty Phase
 - 1. There will be a Bonus Phase during the last two minutes of preliminary play and during the last three minutes of Finals play. A team who buzzes in first with a correct answer will receive 2 points (bonus). A team that buzzes in first with an incorrect answer will have 1 point deducted (penalty). IF the first team that buzzes in is incorrect, that team will lose a point and the second team will then receive an opportunity to answer the question. IF correct, the second team will earn 1 point. If incorrect, no points will be deducted.
- vi. If, due to moderator error, a question must be thrown out after Team A has already missed it and before Team B has had a chance to answer, the very next question will be read to Team B who shall then have ten (10) seconds to respond within the rules. Examples in which the situation mentioned may occur could be a poorly worded question read by the moderator that elicited an incorrect answer from Team A due to the wording or if the moderator recognizes that the question has already been presented. The moderator will state the question is being thrown out and instruct the scorekeeper how to adjust the score, if needed, and the timekeeper when to resume the time. Any points lost by Team A on the first question (penalty phase) shall stand and Team B shall earn points on the next question based on their correctness. The moderator at all other times shall have the freedom to select questions in the order he sees fit and to throw out questions at any time as deemed necessary.
- vii. Tie games at the end of regulation play shall be resolved by a sudden death playoff. The first team to score three points shall be declared the winner. ***"Risk/Reward" will apply but not "Ask the Expert/Call the Posse" during the sudden death playoff.***
- viii. Any question begun prior to the end of regulation play shall be completed in accordance with the above rules if either team has

responded prior to the end of play. (Elapsed time to 0:00 as determined by the timekeeper).

X. Questions

- a. The questions used in the competition will be of both the traditional oral and visual types. They will be reviewed and selected by the Sputum Bowl Committee prior to competition.
 - i. The questions will represent the level of didactic and clinical proficiency the respiratory care practitioner is expected to possess.
 - ii. The questions will not be of either the true/false or multiple-choice format.
 - iii. The questions will be referenced to the list specified in Appendix A.
 - iv. The categories of questions for competition will be used in the following approximate percentages:

1. Anatomy & Physiology	9%
2. Diagnostics	9%
3. Pathology	9%
4. Mechanical Ventilation	9%
5. Neonatal/Pediatrics	5%
6. Airway Management	5%
7. Pharmacology	5%
8. Gas Therapy	5%
9. Acute/Critical Care	5%
10. Humidity/Aerosol	5%
11. Microbiology	5%
12. Chemistry/Physics	5%
13. Patient Assessment	5%
14. Bronchial Hygiene	5%
15. Patient Safety	3%
16. Management	3%
17. Cardiopulmonary Rehab	3%
18. Home Care/Long Term Care	3%
19. History	2%

XI. Challenging the Competition

- a. Team captains are asked to wait at the contest site for **two minutes** after the completion of their game to learn of any protests relative to that contest.
- b. Protests will only be accepted for review if the protest will affect the outcome of the game, **and** the protest is based on moderator error. Any protests concerning questions the judges have already ruled on will not be accepted. The judges' rulings are **final**.
- c. A team member may submit a protest form within two minutes of the game's completion. The team captain is required to get the protest form from the

Sputum Bowl Chair. The form must be completed and returned to the Sputum Bowl Chair by the team captain by the end of the following match.

- d. Any Sputum Bowl Committee references are on-site for use by the Committee and judges only.
- e. The Review Committee shall consist of:
 - i. Scorekeeper
 - ii. Moderator
 - iii. Timekeeper
 - iv. Judges
- f. Review shall consist of:
 - i. Team captains stating discrepancy and any or all supporting material or statements (limited to 5 minutes).
 - ii. Any rebuttal from the opposing team captain (limited to 5 minutes).
 - iii. Committee meeting and reviewing all material pertinent to the proceedings.
 - iv. The final decision voted upon and decided by the majority of the Review Committee **within 10 minutes of the completion of that match.**
- g. A team which won a game in regular play cannot be declared the loser of that game due to a protest. Teams, which lose a game in regular play and because of the remedy applied to a successful protest would not lose, will play their opponent in a sudden death playoff per the rules contained in IX.N above.

XII. Electronic Systems

- a. The device shall be constructed to provide the following:
 - i. Hand switches for each contestant.
 - ii. Indicator system to show which team has responded first.
 - iii. Timer mechanisms to time responses of 10 seconds for initial responses and timer for 10 seconds when the question is given to the opposing team.
 - iv. Reset device for timekeeper to reset system in preparation for the next question.
- b. The timekeeper shall be the person in control of the device and shall have a thorough working knowledge of the device.
- c. In the case of an electronic malfunction, any Sputum Bowl Committee member or judge shall immediately notify the moderator who will call time. The game clock shall be reset to the time when the malfunction was first noticed. The question in progress shall be thrown out. The moderator shall signal time in and begin with a new question. No points may be awarded on the question thrown out nor may they be deducted if in the penalty phase. Before restarting play, the moderator shall ensure all systems are operational and clear.
- d. **In keeping with the AARC annual meeting policy, no recording devices of any**

kind will be permitted during contests.

XIII. Student Sputum Bowl Competition

- a. The AARC Sputum Bowl Committee will conduct a Student Sputum Bowl competition at the International Congress.
- b. As part of your participation, each team member will receive free **student-level** Congress registration. However, please note, a student-level registration **does not allow** you to earn CRCE. If you have graduated and would like to earn CRCE at this year's Congress, you will need to register at the Active-level, paying the full amount.
- c. The Student Finals competition will have two semi-final games of ten minutes each and a Student Championship game lasting 15 minutes.
- d. All other issues relating to the Student Sputum Bowl competition will be governed by the rules and contained here or in the Timetable and Format. Student Sputum Bowl context, structure, and resources will be provided by the AARC Sputum Bowl Committee, including question bank, moderators, and judges.

XIV. Competition Decorum

- a. Participants are expected to display a professional and ethical decorum throughout the competition.
- b. Participants must comply with competition rules and refrain from any actions that violate the integrity of the competition, including, but not limited to, recording the games or helping on-stage competitors.
- c. No food or beverages of any kind are permitted at the competition table during game play.
- d. Participants violating these rules may be disqualified from the competition.
- e. Assistance from audience members, coaches or other individuals (including but not limited to, mouthing answers, verbal cues or non-verbal signaling) is strictly prohibited. Committee members will monitor the audience throughout the competition. If a violation is observed, the associated team will receive one warning. A second violation will result in immediate removal of the team from the competition.

APPENDIX A

<p style="text-align: center;">AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR RESPIRATORY CARE 2026 Student Sputum Bowl Competition Reference List</p>
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American Academy of Pediatrics. (2025). *Textbook of neonatal resuscitation* (9th edition). American Academy of Pediatrics.

American Association for Respiratory Care. (2023, November 20). *Evidence-based clinical practice guidelines*. Clinical Practice Guidelines. <https://www.aarc.org/resources/clinical-resources/clinical-practice-guidelines/>

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Des Jardins, T., & Burton, G.G. (2023). *Clinical manifestations and assessment of respiratory disease* (9th edition). Elsevier.

Gardenhire, D.S. (2023). *Rau's respiratory care pharmacology* (11th edition). Elsevier.

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Hess, D.R., MacIntyre, N.R., Galvin, W.F., & Mishoe, S.C. (2020). *Respiratory care: Principles and practice* (4th edition). Jones & Bartlett Learning.

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APPENDIX B

Question Categories and Percentages

1. Anatomy & Physiology	9%
2. Diagnostics	9%
3. Pathology	9%
4. Mechanical Ventilation	9%
5. Neonatal/Pediatrics	5%
6. Airway Management	5%
7. Pharmacology	5%
8. Gas Therapy	5%
9. Acute/Critical Care	5%
10. Humidity/Aerosol	5%
11. Microbiology	5%
12. Chemistry/Physics	5%
13. Patient Assessment	5%
14. Bronchial Hygiene	5%
15. Patient Safety	3%
16. Management	3%
17. Cardiopulmonary Rehab	3%
18. Home Care/Long Term Care	3%
19. History	2%

APPENDIX C

DUE DATES AND MAILING ADDRESS

Please submit your completed application, questions, and roster no later than the listed due dates. These deadlines are the dates on which the information must be received in the AARC Executive Office.

Teams are encouraged to submit ALL completed requirements and payment ASAP after the opening of registration.

<u>Requirement</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
Team Application & Registration Fee	August 14, 2026
Lottery decisions made	September 14, 2026
Team Roster	October 1, 2026
Roster Revisions	October 14, 2026

If you have any questions, please feel free to call or email:

AARC Sputum Bowl
16749 Dallas Parkway, Suite 420
Addison, TX 75001

972-243-2272 Phone
Susan.mathis@aacrc.org

Thank you for your cooperation and best of luck to everyone!