

# HEC 2020 Abbr. Guide



**HOKKAIDO ENGLISH CHALLENGE**

## What is HEC?

The Hokkaido English Challenge (HEC) is an English competition for students in Hokkaido. HEC was established by participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme in 1994 as a means of motivating students to improve their oral communication skills. It was intended that by interacting with ALTs, the students' confidence and language proficiency would improve. HEC gives ALTs the chance to become instrumental in their students' progress and gives both students and ALTs a goal to work towards as a team.

The challenge has two divisions: junior (JHS) and senior high school (SHS). Only first year students from both divisions may enter. This age restriction is not only meant to make the competition fair, but also to take into account the demands of HEC and the time constraints that are likely to be experienced by second and third year students.

The challenge consists of a 30-minute test based on the national syllabus, which is administered and recorded by the contestant's Assistant Language Teacher (ALT). The video is sent to judges for evaluation and the results are announced before summer vacation. The test's emphasis is on communicative ability. Entrants are awarded points for 1) showing creativity with their acquired English, 2) their ability to express thoughts clearly and 3) how well they cope with unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar.

If the students' video is ranked among the top 20 in SHS category or the top 30 in the JHS category, they will be invited to attend the HEC Summer Camp. Furthermore, the top senior high school student will receive the grand prize of a home-stay in Canada, Australia, or New Zealand. Other prizes will include English related items chosen by the student.

Camp funding and provided prizes rely heavily upon entry fees, donations and fundraisers. The support garnered from the Hokkaido Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (HAJET) and Hokkaido's ALTs enables HEC to hold this competition every year.

## Why Should You Get Involved?

Many ALTs report an increase in their students' interest and enthusiasm for English as well as a marked difference in students' language skills as a result of their participation in HEC. Every student who enters can become more comfortable speaking English and feel a sense of pride in having risen to a challenge. Those who are able to attend summer camp or participate in the home-stay have the chance to meet new people and enjoy new experiences while developing their English.

## Is My English Good Enough?

Of course! Every year HEC receives test videos from students who vary widely in their English

ability. Some have practiced long and hard in preparation, others have only met with their ALT once or twice to prepare. Typically, the upper tier of senior high school winners can communicate in English relatively easily. The lower tier are usually able to understand intermediate spoken English but may be slower in responding or find it more difficult to respond naturally. Both levels are sufficient for entering HEC.

Likewise, the top junior high winners are usually able to express themselves using the grammar and vocabulary they have learnt. They are able to construct sentences with some creativity as well as to ask and respond to simple questions and instructions. The lower placed winners will understand questions and instructions but may have more difficulty responding or finding the right words.

Students who demonstrate an ease and enthusiasm in communicating but may not have the ability to express themselves still have a good chance of receiving a place at camp. Our aim is to encourage and motivate students to speak English and to help nurture their oral communication skills. Furthermore, for many students, simply spending time individually or in a small group with their ALT and having a chance to improve their English creatively is an amazing opportunity.

## Prizes

### Junior High School Division

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Place

- English related prizes of the student's choice (up to ¥30,000)
- Invitation to HEC Summer Camp

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

- English related prizes of the student's choice (up to ¥20,000)
- Invitation to HEC Summer Camp

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

- English related prizes of the student's choice (up to ¥15,000)
- Invitation to HEC Summer Camp

#### 4<sup>th</sup> - 30<sup>th</sup>

- Invitation to HEC Summer Camp Place

### Senior High School Division

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Place

- Two-week homestay experience in Canada, Australia, or New Zealand
- Invitation to HEC Summer Camp

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Place

- English related prizes of the student's choice (up to ¥30,000)
- Invitation to HEC Summer Camp

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Place

- English related prizes of the student's choice (up to ¥15,000)
- Invitation to HEC Summer Camp

#### 4<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup>

- Invitation to HEC Summer Camp Place

## HEC Camp

In order to accommodate the varying number of entrants into HEC from both divisions, the places offered to junior high and senior high school students at HEC Summer Camp will be set at an appropriate ratio. Currently, we offer thirty (30) places to the top scoring junior high school students and twenty (20) places to the top scoring senior high school students. However, if the ratio of entrants changes dramatically in favour of one division, these numbers will be adjusted accordingly. Students who place within the top tier of their division will be offered a place at HEC Summer Camp.

The camp is five days long and all camp expenses are paid. The parent/guardian of the student attending camp is responsible for the costs of transportation to and from camp. In the case that a winning student is unable to attend summer camp for the full duration, priority will be given to the next ranking student. Partial attendance will only be allowed after consultations with and approval given by the HEC Director, [hec@hajet.org](mailto:hec@hajet.org). This is providing that a valid reason and no less than 1 month's notice is given to the HEC Coordinator and HEC Camp Coordinator regarding the student's ability to attend camp for the full duration.

The camp is an enjoyable experience for everyone involved. The schedule is carefully designed to help students improve their communication skills and sociability in English. Students are also exposed to a variety of cuisine that they do not have the opportunity to eat in Japan. As camp progresses, students typically become more comfortable around ALTs and leave camp full of confidence while eager to continue their English studies.

### HEC Camp Student Testimonial

Honestly, it was difficult for me to understand what the ALTs were saying on the first day of camp, and I couldn't even respond when spoken to. Because of that, I even got a bit homesick. However, although it may not have been in perfect English, after hearing my HEC friends say something along the lines of, "We've come all the way here to practice speaking English! We have to!" I realized that this was my chance to do so. By the end of camp, speaking in English became a given for me, and I became so accustomed to it that I even accidentally said, "Thank you" to the Japanese Camp Staff instead of "Arigato"! Furthermore, among the camp activities, the dance party was a "memory of a lifetime" that was fun beyond my expectations. We also ate some American and Mexican style food for the first time, and while it's different from Japanese food, it was delicious! I'm glad I participated in HEC camp! I think this was a great opportunity for me to rethink my future path and dreams. I want to go to a university or work at a job that allows me to interact more with people from other countries. Thank you very much.

Nayu, Nemuro High School HEC 2015

## The Test

The test is based on the grammar and vocabulary in the year's English studies provided in the Ministry of Education's syllabus. Held in March, the test lasts about 30 minutes long and is done in front of a video camera. The ALT or native English speaker administers the test in the presence of a Japanese teacher of English (JTE) or another Japanese teacher who acts as a witness. Once the recording is complete, the video is sent to the assigned judges who determine which students go through to the final round. Head judges then select the overall winners and rank the top scoring students. The results are announced at the end of May. Preparation for the test is at the discretion of the ALT or native English speaker and student. It can range from months of one-on-one tutoring to group conversation practice during the lunch break.

## Rules of Eligibility

A maximum of 10 students from one school may enter in each division. A maximum of 3 students from any one junior high and senior high school may be awarded a prize. The school limits apply regardless of the number of ALTs at the school. There is no limit to the total number of students an ALT or native English speaker can enter. There is no limit to the number of students who can enter from a single city or town.

The number of students per school who may enter and subsequently be awarded a prize is limited to ensure that a variety of schools are represented at HEC Camp. In cases of school transfers between test time and HEC Camp, the student will count towards the attendance limits of his/her original school.

Student(s) must attend a junior or senior high school in the prefecture of Hokkaido.

Student(s) must be in his/her first year of either junior or senior high school at the time of registration.

Student(s) must have never spent more than three consecutive weeks in an English speaking country. This not only includes a country where English is the official language, but also countries or regions where English is often used in public as a practical means of communication.

Student(s) must not attend core subject classes in an English immersion setting.

Student(s) must not reside in a household where English is a primary means of communication.

*\*\*\*If you have any questions regarding your eligibility, please contact the HEC Director at [hec@hajet.org](mailto:hec@hajet.org).\*\*\**

## Entry Fees

The cost of entering HEC is ¥3000 per student.

Entrance fees may be covered by either the parents or by the school. It is more common for

parents to cover the cost, but sometimes schools or boards of education may be willing to do so.

## Registration

Registration should be completed as far in advance as possible using the HEC website ([hec.hajet.org](http://hec.hajet.org)) or by following this link: [[LINK AVAILABLE ON DECEMBER 1ST](#)]. Registration can start at any point once the forms become available (December 1, 2019) up until the registration deadline (February 14, 2020).

### **December 1st**

Registration opens

### **December-January**

Register your students.

Begin practicing.

Decide whether you will continue practicing throughout the holiday or resume after the school term starts.

### **December-February**

Email and complete your entry fees and registration forms to HEC by February 14th, 2020.

### **March**

Administer the test and send in your video by March 31st, 2020.

### **May**

Results will be announced by May 31st, 2020.

### **June**

Certificates and are distributed.

### **July**

HEC 2020 Camp!

### **August**

Prizes are distributed.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about HEC please do not hesitate to contact Colin Takeo, the HEC Director at [hec@hajet.org](mailto:hec@hajet.org).

If you have questions about the test or test registration, please contact Casey-Lyne Lodge, the HEC Test Coordinator at [test.hec@hajet.org](mailto:test.hec@hajet.org)

Additional information and documents can be found on the HEC website:  
<http://www.hec.hajet.org>.