

# Explorer General Rules

2026



WORLD ROBOT OLYMPIAD™



SOUTH AFRICA

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## Introduction

Robotics is a wonderful platform for learning 21st century skills. Solving robotic challenges encourages innovation and develops creativity and problem-solving skills in students. Because robotics crosses multiple curricular subjects, students must learn and apply their knowledge of science, technology, engineering, math, and computer programming.

The most rewarding part of designing robots is that students have fun. They work together as a team, discovering their own solutions. Coaches guide them along the way, then step back to allow them their own victories and losses. Students thrive in this supportive and immersive environment, and learning occurs as naturally as breathing air.

At the end of the day, at the end of a fair competition, students can say they did their best, they learned, and they had fun.

**There is no international component for the Explorer competition.**

## Explorer – Specific Change Information

1. Explorer for 2026 **will use the Junior RoboMission (Heritage Heroes) game mat** and **NOT** the Elementary game mat.
2. No My-Blocks or pre-programmed code is allowed to be used in the Explorer competition for NXT, EV3 or SPIKE.
3. WRO SA suggests teams run their robots at a **minimum speed of 40%** power. Judges will request that slow robots are sped up to facilitate equal time for teams on the competition table.
4. Rule section for spectators and coaches conduct.
5. Explorer may use any programming language and software available.
6. Explorer is exclusively open to LEGO robots only. No other robot platform is allowed to be used without the express permission from the WRO SA National Organisers.

## 1.1 Explorer Description

- “EXPLORER” is based on the WRO RoboMission Junior (Heritage Heroes) table challenge with simplified tasks and a platform for multiple attempts to keep improving your score.
- Explorer competitions will run for 2 hours at provincial competitions.
- This challenge caters for beginners who would also like to participate in robotics challenges but are not yet ready for WRO.
- A Provincial Explorer Competition may happen on the Friday afternoon before WRO Provincials on Saturdays due to number of entries received.
- Explorer challenge is run on the RoboMission Junior (Heritage Heroes) PVC roll up printed mats.
- For the 2026 Explorer season, provincial organisers have been given the choice to run a physical WRO Explorer event depending on demand from registrations in the province. The WRO National Organising Committee will later in the year make a decision as to the likelihood of a physical Explorer National Event. For more information visit [www.wrosa.co.za](http://www.wrosa.co.za)
- Both age groups, Explorer Lite 8-12 years old and Explorer Prime 11-16 years old will participate on the same mat but the level of difficulty for Explorer Prime will increase (see Explorer Prime rules).
- There is no Explorer challenge for the 17 –19 years age group.
- Team members are only allowed to compete once in Explorer Lite and Explorer Prime physical events.

## 1.2 Explorer Rules

- Teams must have 2-3 members.
- Participants are only allowed to compete in the Explorer Categories Explorer Lite and Explorer Prime once per age group at WRO SA Provincial and National level.

\*\* A participant may participate in Explorer Prime once after having done Explorer Lite, the previous year. They then need to move onto official WRO categories to continue their WRO Journey.

## Explorer Category General Rules

### 1. Surprise Rule

- 1.1. A surprise additional rule may be announced on the day of the competition.
- 1.2. The Provincial Events may feature new or altered challenges. This would differ from the original game rule documents for Explorer Lite and Explorer Prime.
- 1.3. The National Final may feature new or altered challenges. This would differ from the original game rule documents for Explorer Lite and Explorer Prime.

### 2. Material

- 2.1 The controller, motors and sensors used to assemble robots must be from the LEGO® Education Robotics platforms EV3, NXT or SPIKE PRIME. Any other products are not allowed. Teams are not allowed to modify any original LEGO® parts.
- 2.2 Only LEGO branded elements may be used to construct the remaining parts of the robot. WRO recommends use of Education versions of LEGO MINDSTORMS.
- 2.3 Teams should prepare and bring all the equipment, software and portable computers/tablets they need during the tournament.
- 2.4 Teams should bring enough spare parts. Even in the case of any accidents or equipment malfunction, WRO is not responsible for their maintenance or replacement.
- 2.5 **Coaches are not allowed to enter the court to provide any instructions and guidance during the competition.**
- 2.6 **Teams are not allowed to bring with them any pre-made programs or programming instructions. Teams must program their robot during the Explorer Competition from a blank programming page.**
- 2.7 It is not allowed to use screws, glues or tape or any other Non-LEGO material to fasten any components on robots. Non-compliance with these rules will result in disqualification.
- 2.8 Control software for the Explorer age group is open to any programming language and software available.
- 2.9 Teams are not allowed to share a laptop and / or the program for a robot on the competition day.
- 2.10 Teams need to run their robots to test and score on their allocated competition table only.
- 2.11 **No MyBlocks or pre created programming blocks are allowed to be used in the Explorer category. Teams found in violation of this rule may be disqualified or have penalties placed on all of their scoring runs.**

### 3. Regulations about the robot

3.0 Teams can arrive with a prebuilt (complete) robot ready to commence with programming when the “START” is announced

3.1. The maximum dimensions of the robot before it starts the “mission” must be within 250mm × 250mm, the dimensions of the starting square on the competition mat. After the robot starts, the dimensions of the robot are not restricted.

3.2. The controller (SPIKE, EV3, NXT) must be placed in the robot in a way that makes it easy to check the program and stop the robot by a Judge.

#### 3.3. The robot is restricted to the following number of Sensors and Motors.

- **1 x Touch/Force Sensor**
- **1 x Colour/Light Sensor**
- **1 x Ultrasonic Sensor**
- **1 x Gyro Sensor**
- **4 x motors (2 x driving motors, 2 x extra medium/large motor)**

3.4. It is not allowed for the teams to perform any actions or movements to interfere or assist the robot after the actions to start the robot is performed. Teams that violate this rule will get a score of 0 in this particular run.

3.5. A robot must be autonomous and finish the “missions” by itself. Any radio communication, remote control and wired control systems are not allowed while the robot is running. Teams in violation of this rule will be disqualified and must quit the competition immediately.

3.6. The robot can leave on the field any parts of the robot that are not containing main units (controller, motors, sensors) if needed. As soon as the part is touching the field or its game element and does not touch the robot it is considered as a free LEGO element not being part of the robot.

3.7. The Bluetooth function **is allowed to be used by teams using tablets/iPads**, the program must still be downloaded to the robot and started manually by teams. Tablets/iPads/computers must remain in the team’s preparation area and may not be brought to the competition table.

### 4. Table and game mat specifications

4.1. The dimensions of a WRO mat in an age group are 2362 mm x 1143 mm.

4.2. The internal dimensions or a game table should be 2362 mm x 1143 mm (like the game mat) or max. + / - 5mm in each dimension.

4.3. The height of the borders is 70 +- 20mm.

4.4. All black lines are at least 20mm.

4.5. The game mat is printed on PVC roll up material.

4.6. The Explorer Category uses the Junior RoboMission Mars Exploration game mat.

## 5. Prior to competing

- 5.1. Teams can arrive with their prebuilt robot ready to commence programming when “Start” is announced.
- 5.2. Teams will not be able to score if their robot does not completely fit into the 250mm x 250mm start block. The start area includes all of the white space not the surrounding line.
- 5.3. Remove all EXPLORER programmes from the laptop/tablet and brick used before. The challenge is about programming on the day.
- 5.4 **NEW!! No MyBlocks or pre created programming blocks are allowed to be used in the Explorer category. Teams found in violation of this rule may be disqualified or have penalties placed on all of their scoring runs.**

## 6. Competition

- 6.1. The competition format follows a continuous scoring method with teams able to register a score at any point within the competition by **notifying the judge** when they are attempting a scoring run. Teams must have recorded one scoring run with their table judge within the first hour of the competition and then again with every consecutive hour.
- 6.2. Competitors are not allowed to programme outside of specified competition times
- 6.3. Once “Start” is announced competitors can immediately start the programming and test runs.
- 6.4. **If teams want to make test runs, they need to queue with their robots in hand. No laptops/tablets/iPads should be brought to the competition table and should remain at the seating area.**
- 6.5.1 **NEW!!** The maximum amount of time a robot is allowed to run for is 3 minutes.
- 6.5.2 There is no limit on the number of test runs within the allocated time.
- 6.5.3 The scoresheet allows for 4 official registered scores.
- 6.6. The robot must be placed in the starting area so the projection of the robot on the game mat is completely within the start area. The participants are allowed to make physical adjustments to the robot in the starting area.
- 6.7. Once physical adjustments have been made to the satisfaction of the participants, the judge will give the signal for the SPIKE / EV3 / NXT program to be selected. The judge will give a countdown “3,2,1, GO” on the word “GO” the robot program must be run.
- 6.8. If there is any uncertainty during the task, the judge makes the final decision. They will bias their decision in the team’s favour.
- 6.9. If a team starts the run early by accident (without any tactical reasons, e.g. because of a nervous situation), the judge can decide that the team can start the run again.

6.10. The attempt and time will end if:

- a. Any team member touches the robot or any mission objects on the table during the run.
- b. The robot has completely left the game table.
- c. Violation of the rules and regulations.
- d. A team member shouts “STOP” and the robot does not move anymore.  
The robot program must be stopped immediately, and the robot left in the position it stopped on the table.

6.11 The score calculation is done by the judges at the conclusion of each scoring run.

6.12 **Ranking (physical events only)** of a team is based on two factors first the highest score out of all attempts and second by the time (of day) this score was registered.  
For example, if team A scored 200 points in the first 40 minutes of the competition and team B scores 200 points in the first 30 minutes of the competition team B will be ranked first.

6.13 When the competition timer hits zero (0) only the team that has a robot running on the mat will be allowed to complete its run and the team must then return to their seating area.

6.14 **NEW!!** WRO SA suggests teams run their robots at a minimum speed of 40% power. Judges will request that slow robots are sped up to facilitate equal time for teams on the competition table.

6.15 When the competition timer hits zero the competition is over and no teams will be allowed to score unless:

- i Their robot was running on the mat before the timer hit zero.
- ii The head judge has given a team permission to run due to issues which the team may have encountered which is out of the teams control.

6.16 As you build and program, keep in mind that organisers make every effort to ensure that all fields are correct and identical, but you should always expect some variability, such as:

- i Flaws on the fields
- ii Variety in colour brightness on the game mat, from table to table
- iii Variety in lighting conditions, from hour to hour, and/or table to table
- iv Judges’ shadow on the field
- v Judges will walk around the field during judging
- vi Texture / bumps under the mat
- vii Waviness in the mat itself. Location and severity of waviness varies.

6.17 The judges decision is final.

## 7. Team area

7.1. Teams must work on and program their robot in an area designated by tournament officials (each team has its own area). People, other than competing students are not allowed to enter the competition area, apart from authorized WRO Organizing Committee staff and special personnel.

7.2. The standard of all competition materials and courts are according to what are provided by the committee on the competition days.

## 8. Prohibited matters

- 8.1. Destruction of competition courts/tables, materials or robots of other teams.
- 8.2. Use of dangerous items or behaviours that may create or cause interference with the competition.
- 8.3. Inappropriate words and/or behaviour toward other team members, other teams, audience, judges or staff.
- 8.4. Bringing a cellular/mobile phone or a medium of wire/wireless communication into the designated competition area.
- 8.5. Bringing food or drink into the designated competition area.
- 8.6. Competitors using any communication devices and methods while the competition is in process. Anyone outside the competition area is also banned from talking to or communicating with competing students. Teams violating this rule may be penalised. If communication is necessary, the committee may allow team members to communicate with others under supervision by tournament staff or by exchanging a note under permission by judges.
- 8.7. Any other situation which judges might consider as interference or violation of the spirit of the competition.

## 9. Coaches and Spectators Conduct

- 9.1. Coaches and spectators are not allowed to communicate with any teams and team members during competition time. If communication is necessary communication must happen through the head judge and coach only.
- 9.2. Spectators must communicate through the team coach. Judges will not communicate with spectators unless the team coach is present.
- 9.3. Disruptive behaviour from spectators and coaches will not be tolerated and may result in teams being disqualified and asked to leave the venue due to the behaviour of their affiliated spectators or coaches.
- 9.4. The judges decision is final and must be respected. Disrespecting judges, other teams and coaches may result in teams being disqualified and asked to leave the venue due to the behaviour of their affiliated spectators or coaches

## 10. Fairness

- 10.1. If any of the rules mentioned in this document are broken or violated, the judges can decide on one or more of the following consequences:
  - a. A team may be given a time penalty of max. 15 minutes. In this time, teams are not allowed to do any changes on their robot and program.
  - b. A team may get up to a 50% reduced score in one or more runs.
  - c. A team may not qualify for the national final.
  - d. A team may be disqualified completely from the competition.