

NATIONAL COLLEGIATE CYBERSECURITY SERIES

CYBERHUNT

2026 Edition

OFFICIAL RULEBOOK

A single-track capture-the-flag exercise in progressive key discovery

DOCUMENT CLASS

Participant Handbook — Version 1.0

ISSUED BY

CYBERHUNT Organizing Committee

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SEC. 01 Event Overview

What CYBERHUNT is, and how the competition is built

CYBERHUNT is a single-track, progressive cybersecurity challenge built around ten sequential objectives. Participants investigate nine independent challenges to recover hidden keys, then combine those keys to unlock a final objective. The format rewards accuracy, methodical documentation, and efficient use of assistance over raw speed alone.

Format at a Glance

Attribute	Detail
Duration	120 minutes, plus a 15-minute Final Boss extension where earned
Challenges	9 independent questions + 1 Final Boss
Track structure	Open order for Questions 1–9; Question 10 gated
Scoring basis	Fixed per-level point values, no time bonus
Assistance	Two hints per question and limited AI use, both disclosed

NOTE

This handbook is the authoritative reference for CYBERHUNT. Verbal clarifications given during the event do not override this document unless issued in writing by the organizing committee.

SEC. 02 Eligibility & Conduct

Who may register, and what is expected of them

Participant Requirements

- Open to all currently enrolled students at the host institution, or as stated in the official event announcement.
- Each participant may register under only one identity for the duration of the event.

- Participants must carry a valid institutional or government-issued ID for verification on request.
- Registration is final once confirmed; substitutions after the event begins are not permitted.

Code of Conduct

Participants are expected to act with integrity throughout the event. Interference with the competition infrastructure, other participants, or the scoring system is treated as a breach of this rulebook and is addressed under Section 10, Disqualification Rules.

SEC. 03 Competition Flow

How the event unfolds from start to finish

Stage	Description
Check-in	Identity verification and platform access are issued to registered participants.
Briefing	Organizers confirm rules, timing, and communication channels before the clock starts.
Open track (Q1–Q9)	Participants investigate all nine questions in any order they choose.
Final Boss (Q10)	Unlocks only once all nine keys have been correctly submitted.
Close-out	Submissions lock at the end of the event window; late entries are not accepted.
Verification	Organizers manually review evidence before finalizing the leaderboard.
<p>REMINDER</p> <p>The competition clock does not pause for individual participants. Time spent reading, submitting, or requesting hints is drawn from the same 120-minute window.</p>	

SEC. 04 **Gameplay & Unlock Rules**

Mechanics governing every question, and how access unlocks

Questions 1–9

- Fully independent of one another and available from the start, in any order.
- Each question hides exactly one key, and each key is a single character.
- A question is solved only once its key is submitted and verified by the organizing committee.

Question 10 — The Final Boss

- Locked until all nine preceding questions are solved and verified.
- Once unlocked, participants arrange the nine collected keys into one hidden word.
- Only the completed word is submitted — individual keys are not resubmitted.

DESIGN INTENT

The nine keys are order-independent to solve, but order-dependent to assemble. Track which key came from which question — the assembly logic for Question 10 depends on that mapping.

SEC. 05 **Scoring System**

Point values across the nine levels

Each of Questions 1 through 9 corresponds to a difficulty level with a fixed point value. Points are awarded in full on correct, verified submission — there is no partial credit and no time-based bonus.

Level	Question	Points
1	Question 1	100
2	Question 2	150
3	Question 3	220
4	Question 4	320
5	Question 5	450
6	Question 6	600

Level	Question	Points
7	Question 7	800
8	Question 8	1,050
9	Question 9	1,350

MAXIMUM ATTAINABLE SCORE

The nine levels sum to 5,040 points. Question 10 carries no independent point value — it is a gate on ranking, not a scoring event. See Section 09 for how it is used to break ties.

SEC. 06 Hint System

Assistance available for each level, and its cost

Two hints are available per question. Hints are not deducted from score directly — each request adds fixed time to the participant's effective clock, tracked through the platform. Requesting Hint 2 does not require having taken Hint 1.

Level Tier	Hint 1	Hint 2
Levels 1–3	4 minutes	8 minutes
Levels 4–6	5 minutes	10 minutes
Levels 7–9	6 minutes	12 minutes

NOTE

Time cost scales with difficulty tier, not the individual question. All three questions inside a tier share the pricing shown above.

SEC. 07 Submissions & Verification

What to submit, how many attempts, and how evidence is checked

Questions 1–9

Element	Requirement
Attempts allowed	One per question — submit only when confident
Discovered key	The single character found for that question

Element	Requirement
Location screenshot	Required for every submission; must clearly show where the key was found
AI conversation screenshot	Required only if AI assistance was used for that question

Question 10 — Final Boss

Element	Requirement
Attempts allowed	Two, for the completed word only
Screenshot evidence	Not required
Submission content	The assembled word only — not the individual keys

Verification Standard

All screenshots are checked manually by the organizing committee rather than through automated matching, so a short review delay should be expected. Evidence that does not visibly connect to the location of the key — generic desktop captures, unrelated terminal output, or images reused across questions — is rejected and does not count toward a solve.

SINGLE-ATTEMPT WARNING

Because Questions 1–9 allow only one submission each, an incorrect or unverifiable submission ends that question for the rest of the event. Confirm both the key and the screenshot before submitting.

SEC. 08 AI Usage Policy

Rules governing the use of AI assistance

AI tools are permitted, subject to disclosure and a fixed usage ceiling. This keeps the competition fair between participants who use AI assistance and those who do not, by making usage visible and bounded rather than prohibited outright.

Policy Element	Rule
Disclosure	Every AI use requires an uploaded screenshot of the AI conversation

Policy Element	Rule
Counting	One verified conversation screenshot counts as one AI use, regardless of prompt count
Maximum AI uses	3, for the entire event
Undisclosed AI use	Treated as a rules violation
Use beyond the maximum	Results in disqualification

GUIDANCE

Budget the three uses across the event rather than the harder questions alone — the ceiling applies across all ten questions combined, not per question.

SEC. 09 Timing & Leaderboard

The clock, its extension, and how rankings are decided

Event Timing

Element	Duration
Base event window	120 minutes
Final Boss extension	+15 minutes, granted only on unlocking Question 10
Extension scope	Applies to Question 10 only — Questions 1–9 close at the 120-minute mark

Leaderboard & Tie-Breaking

Participants are ranked by total verified score. Where scores are tied, the following order applies:

Priority	Criterion
1st	Successful completion of Question 10 (Final Boss)
2nd	Earlier time of last verified submission
3rd	Fewer total hints used across the event

SEC. 10 Disqualification Rules

Conduct that removes a participant from ranking

- Exceeding the maximum of three AI uses defined in Section 08.
- Submitting fabricated, reused, or otherwise misleading screenshot evidence.
- Sharing challenge content, keys, or solutions with another participant during the event.
- Attempting to access, modify, or disrupt the competition platform outside intended gameplay.
- Registering or competing under more than one identity.

PROCESS

Disqualification decisions are made by the organizing committee after reviewing available evidence and are communicated directly to the participant. The committee's decision on eligibility and conduct matters is final.

SEC. 11 Results & Certificates

How outcomes are announced and recognized

Results

- Published once all pending screenshot verifications from the event window are resolved.
- Include each participant's total score, solved questions, and Final Boss status.
- Scoring disputes must be raised through the contact channel in Section 12 within the window announced at close-out.

Certificates

- All participants who complete at least one verified question receive a certificate of participation.
- Top-ranked participants receive a certificate of achievement noting final placement.
- Certificates are issued electronically following publication of final results.

SEC. 12 Contact & Final Notes

Reaching the organizing committee, and closing remarks

Channel	Use For
Event help desk	Live issues during the competition window
Organizing committee email	Pre-event queries and post-event disputes
On-site coordinators	Identity verification and check-in support

Specific contact details for the current event cycle are distributed separately at registration and posted at the venue or event platform.

Final Notes

This rulebook is the complete and authoritative reference for CYBERHUNT. By registering, participants agree to compete under the terms described here. The organizing committee reserves the right to issue written clarifications before the event begins; any such clarification supersedes the relevant section of this document.

Good luck, and hunt well.