

Odyssey of the Mind Coaches Guide

**NCOM
2017-18**

Odyssey of the Mind Coaches Guide

This Coaches Guide is adapted from an excellent, if unfinished, OM coaching manual found on the Internet and forwarded among OM coaches long ago. Although its origin is unclear, some parts of that original document remain. This Guide also includes information from other OM related web sites, other OM coaching manuals discovered on-line, and in particular, it benefits from the learning and insights developed over years of coaching and supporting OM.

Our goal: create a guide that would be helpful to coaches in providing a great OM experience to participating students.

Thanks to the all the anonymous Internet authors whose words and ideas found their way into this document. Thanks too, to the many OM Coaches, Coordinators and students from years past whose thoughts have become part of the culture of OM!

<p><i>This is the first printing of this manual. Comments, ideas, typo identification, etc. are welcome. Contact us at: rburton.ncom@gmail.com</i></p>
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Table of Contents

Introduction	7
I. The Goals of Odyssey of the Mind	9
<i>Independent Thinking</i>	9
<i>Creative Problem Solving</i>	9
<i>Knowledge and Skill Building</i>	10
<i>Project Management</i>	10
<i>Fun and Teamwork</i>	10
II. The Three Components of OM	11
<i>The Long-Term Problem (200 Points)</i>	11
<i>Style (50 Points)</i>	12
<i>Spontaneous (100 Points)</i>	13
III. The Rules of OM	15
<i>Hierarchy of OM Rules</i>	15
<i>Clarifications</i>	16
<i>Penalties</i>	17
IV. Role of The Coach	19
<i>What does an OM coach do?</i>	19
<i>Meetings</i>	19
<i>Obtaining Resources</i>	20
<i>Team Building</i>	22
<i>Focus on a Plan</i>	23
<i>Registration and Volunteers</i>	24
V. Outside Assistance – Maintaining OM Ethics	27
<i>So what exactly is Outside Assistance (OA)?</i>	27
<i>How do you coach WITHOUT risking OA?</i>	28
<i>Making the team responsible...</i>	29
VI. The Season (or... What Do I Do...?)	31
<i>The Year in OM</i>	31
<i>A Guide to Running OM Meetings</i>	32
<i>Suggested Goals For The First Five Meetings</i>	33
<i>Coaching Hints and Tips</i>	36
VII. Coaching the Long Term Problem	39
<i>Problem Solving Format for Long-Term Problems</i>	39
<i>Solving the Problem – Work Begins</i>	43
<i>The Final Month – Prepare For Competition</i>	45
<i>Style</i>	47
VIII. Coaching Spontaneous	51
<i>Teaching Spontaneous Skills</i>	52
<i>Spontaneous Process in Competition</i>	55

IX. Creative Problem Solving Process	57
<i>Ask The Right Questions.</i>	57
<i>Reduce Functional Fixedness.</i>	57
<i>Brainstorm</i>	57
<i>Questions, Questions...</i>	59
X. Tournament Day	61
<i>Before You Go...</i>	61
<i>Paperwork</i>	61
<i>Sportsmanship and Common Sense</i>	62
<i>Registration and Check-In</i>	62
<i>Find Your Competition Areas</i>	62
<i>Costumes and Props</i>	63
<i>Surprises</i>	64
<i>Long-Term Process</i>	65
<i>OM Scoring</i>	66
<i>Other Important Stuff</i>	66
<i>Awards Ceremony</i>	67
<i>If Your Team Advances...</i>	67
Attachments	69
1. <i>SCAMPER – Creativity Technique</i>	71
2. <i>What Makes a Successful Team?</i>	73
3. <i>If Brainstorming Doesn't Work...</i>	75
4. <i>Creating a Successful Style Presentation</i>	77
5. <i>Examples of Outside Assistance</i>	81
5. <i>OM Resources</i>	89
6. <i>Primary Problem</i>	91

Introduction

The goal of this document is to help parents, teachers and others who volunteer their time to coach an Odyssey of the Mind team. Although it is lengthy, please think of this length as an abundance of resources – not as an intimidating amount of requirements or knowledge! We've tried to include pretty much everything a new coach will need to coach an OM team. Undoubtedly, we've missed a few things, but this should help you get started on your coaching journey. If after going through this document you have something to add, please send it our way and we will add it in subsequent editions.

Start with this as your guidepost:

The OM Coach should see their goal as "facilitator" and project manager where they try to ensure their team has access to the skills and materials they need and the organization they will require to finish the project.

The specific goals of this guide are to:

1. **Explain OM** – define the three components of OM, rules, definitions, outside assistance, etc.
2. **Provide the basic steps to coaching a team** -- selecting a problem, solving the problem, scheduling, etc.
3. **Help with team dynamics** -- tools for problem solving, team building, problem avoidance, leadership, etc.
4. **Provide insight into what makes a team successful** -- finding the points in Long-Term, defining real Style, the importance of Spontaneous, etc. See the "**COACH'S NOTES**" and **Attachment 2** for some of those points.

Please think of this document as having two parts:

Sections I – V can be read as information about Odyssey of the Mind that's helpful to those who are new to OM. Read these chapters to gain an overall understanding of the program.

Sections VI – X are focused on coaching requirements, processes and hints. Use the **Table of Contents** to find what you need as you need it.

We want to support each Coach so that they can allow the team they support to feel the full benefits from their OM experience. In the end, it's the team members learning and empowerment that OM is all about -- NOT the outcome of the tournament.

Finally, this guide is for Coaches – not team members. Use it to guide your Coaching within the guidelines of Outside Assistance.

I. The Goals of Odyssey of the Mind

Odyssey of the Mind (OM) uses team problem solving as a vehicle for learning. Teams spend the fall and winter seasons preparing a solution to present at a series of competitive tournaments. If the team places first or second, they will be able to continue to the next level of competition in the spring. Tournament competition inspires teams to use their competitive nature to create their best solution. This results in a richer experience than if a purely "demonstration" format were used.

The goals of OM include providing kids with important learning in:

Independent Thinking

It's very important that coaches know that the real benefit of OM comes from what the kids learn while they prepare their solutions -- not from the outcome of the tournament. A fundamental principle of OM is that while teaching generic skills is encouraged, the TEAM must solve and prepare their solution without any outside aid. There is a wonderful feeling of capability and accomplishment the kids enjoy when they know their solution came from their own minds and hands. As they work together, listen to each other's ideas and incorporate these "collective" ideas into a complete solution, they will learn they have the ability to solve a challenging problem completely on their own.

More importantly, they will come away with the knowledge that they have the skills and commitment to complete other challenging tasks they will face in their lives.

Any Outside Assistance (OA) will severely undermine this lesson. Consequently, it is critical that **coaches and parents** avoid OA (*see **Chapter V** for an explanation of Outside Assistance*) and ensure that the team's solution is a product of the *TEAM*, and the team alone.

Creative Problem Solving

Another important goal of OM is to encourage divergent or out of the box thinking. What this term means is that, while it is important that teams solve the problems completely, OM rewards teams who solve the problem in a particularly creative manner. This means the team must be encouraged to resist the temptation to simply adopt the first (or most obvious) solution that comes to mind.

It can also mean that teams identify not simply what the problem says must be done but, just as importantly, what the problem doesn't say.

<p>COACH'S NOTE: <i>Finding "what isn't said" in a problem often opens the door to the most creative solutions.</i></p>
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Teams will generally find that once they have considered many different options, they will be able to find one that offers the balance of creativity, effectiveness and "style" that gives their solution its own, unique stamp. **Section IX** is dedicated to helping Coaches support Creative Thinking.

Knowledge and Skill Building

Another lesson OM strives to teach is the capacity to apply theoretical knowledge in the creation of their solution. Consequently, it is entirely appropriate for coaches to encourage teams to learn new skills and to seek out knowledge that might aid them in their solution. A coach can confidently make available any skills the team requests to learn at any point in the season. For example:

- An art teacher at school might teach basic painting skills and techniques;
- A parent who is an engineer or architect might explain the basics of structural engineering; or
- A theater teacher might talk about using your voice on stage.

However, coach-directed training is probably best done early in the season -- before a team plans or conceptualizes a particular element of a solution, such as a script, prop or costume -- so it doesn't become a subtle form of directing the team's solution. This "juggling act" of facilitating skills development while not directly contributing to the solution of the team's problem is one of the fundamental challenges for an OM coach.

Project Management

Completing a 4-6 month process from start to finish is a significant accomplishment requiring the teams to learn time-management, planning, resource allocation, budgeting and other important life skills. Procrastination and social chat are an inevitable part of the OM process -- and a large of part of the challenge of coaching. Use their social energy in a positive manner to build teamwork.

Fun AND progress are the key.

Fun and Teamwork

Finally, OM should be fun! A team's efforts during the year should be viewed as a "journey of discovery" -- and the tournament viewed as an opportunity to "show off" the fruits of that journey. If this approach is taken, there is little danger that the team will become overly focused on the competitive aspects of OM.

History shows that kids will make lifelong friends from their OM experience -- a coach can balance competitiveness, effective teamwork and the right amount of social interaction to make that happen.

II. The Three Components of OM

At an OM tournament, teams are judged in three distinct areas:

1. Long-Term Problem
2. Style
3. Spontaneous Problem Solving

The Long-Term Problem (200 Points)

Every year, the OM organization publishes five competitive Long-Term problems, and one non-competitive Primary problem. The team prepares their Long-Term solution in advance of the tournament. Usually, three to five months are spent developing these solutions.

The Long-Term problem requires a set of defined tasks (either technical or dramatic depending on the problem) to be completed during the presentation of a dramatic performance (the skit).

- Some problems are completely "dramatic" in nature, focusing on a literary topic, with the performance at the heart of the problem's scoring.
- Other problems are "technical" in nature, involving the creation of one or more devices that accomplish certain defined tasks during the performance.
- Some problems provide a combination of both.
- Carefully review each problem to understand how the specific yearly problem balances dramatic/creative and technical issues. Do not be fooled by the title – read the problem!
- All problems are open-ended enough that an unlimited number of interpretations are possible.

There are six problems each year, each with a different focus:

- Problem 1: Vehicle – building moving vehicles, large or small.
- Problem 2: Technical – some technical component included within the performance
- Problem 3: Classics – based on some traditional tale.
- Problem 4: Structure – build a weight bearing structure made of balsa wood and glue.
- Problem 5: Humor – finding humor in everyday life.
- Problem 6: Primary – for grades K-2, see Attachment 6

You can download the full long-term problems from the OM website. You will need your membership number and school zip code to access the full problems.

Choosing the right problem is a critical step in the OM process. Help the kids assess the make-up of the team, understand the team's interests and skills and pick up problem that suits their team.

- Are they technical and like to build things – think about *Vehicle or Structure*.
- Are they jokers with great senses of humor – consider the *Humor* problem.
- Are they theatrical and dramatic – maybe *Classics* is the problem for you.
- Is there a good balance – take a look at the *Technical or Vehicle* problem
- Are they uninterested in performing – think about *Structure*, it's the most reliant on the technical solution for points.

COACH'S NOTE: *Understanding the Long-term problem, as detailed in a 5-10 page problem definition, is key to success. The problem will define very specific criteria for required scoring elements of your solution.*

*Teams often get caught up in the overall performance and are disappointed when they do not score well because they didn't focus on the specific method the judges use to score the performance. **"Targeting the points"** available is key to competitive success.*

Style (50 Points)

OM long-term problem solutions require creative problem solving. The program rewards teams for elaborating on their Long-term problem solutions since this requires additional creativity. OM calls this elaboration **Style**.

Confused? Think of it like the *icing on the cake*: If the Long-term problem is the cake itself, then Style is the way the cake is decorated. All teams that solve a given problem have met the requirements of the problem -- the cake. But all teams have "*decorated their cake*" in unique ways -- they all have created special aspects of their solutions that were not required by the long-term definitions -- and that is their Style. Up to 50 points can be rewarded to teams for these special features.

COACH'S NOTE: *Great style takes the simple to the wow -- not just in execution but also in creativity. For example, a team creates a backdrop with a nature scene. That backdrop might include a painted scene as part of your style. However, having that scene "painted" using recycled materials of many types and colors (metal from cans, candy wrappers, etc.) rather than just paint is great style.*

Points are also an important element in Style. The problem will require that the team define which elements of style are to be scored – focus on those! However, remember that the team's overall style also will influence the judge's view of the performance. We all like to be entertained – judges are no different.

Example:

A team is required to do a skit based on the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The team creates the required skit, but elaborates on it by making it an opera, complete with subtitles - that is Style!

Spontaneous (100 Points)

Each team entering a tournament must also solve a Spontaneous problem. Team members will not know the content of the Spontaneous problem until the judge presents the problem to them during the tournament. One of the purposes of spontaneous competition is to see how well the team members react to new situations so, in addition to the solution itself, teamwork and creativity are generally included as scored elements in Spontaneous.

Spontaneous problems take one of three forms:

- **Verbal**, in which team members generate multiple creative verbal answers in a short time period;
- **Hands-on**, in which a physical or technical problem must be solved in a short period of time; and a combination of the two...
- **Hands-on Verbal (or “Combo”)**, in which the team members manipulate a physical object in turns as they generate creative verbal answers.

Examples of Spontaneous Problems:

This is a simplified example of a verbal problem:

There is a brown paper bag on the table. Your problem is to say what the bag may be used for. You have one minute to think and three minutes to respond. Responses will begin with a team member of your choice and will proceed to their left. No one may be skipped. You will receive 3 points for a creative answer and 1 point for each common answer.

This is a simplified example of a hands-on problem:

You are provided with 3 standard pieces of lined paper, three rubber bands, two paper clips, a small brown paper bag, two pencils, one 6-inch piece of tape, one 4 by 6 inch piece of cardboard, two paper cups and a hard-boiled egg. You have 5 minutes to build a bridge that can hold the egg off the ground. The bridge must have two distinct points where it contacts the table. Points will be assigned based on a) how high off the ground the egg sits, and b) the length the bridge spans between the two points of contact.

Teams competing against each other are required to solve the same Spontaneous problem. Team members are not allowed to discuss the problem they were given until the end of the tournament.

COACHES NOTE: *as with all of OM, thinking outside the box is key in Spontaneous. Teach your team to look at the problem for openings or opportunities. Look for what isn't said and see if that creates an approach that solves the problem. It's not unusual for OM Spontaneous problems to have a hidden trick – a method that makes solving the problem easy. Find it by thinking outside the box.*

Spontaneous problem solving is a learned skill – it takes both practice and the learning of specific spontaneous skills that facilitate the team’s capability to think creatively under time pressure. In each type of problem there are different lessons to be learned. For example, in a hands-on problem, the team must learn to identify the “points goal” that will ultimately determine their success and determine how to use the object they are given to solve the problem. **Section XIII** provides more specific direction on Coaching Spontaneous.

COACH’S NOTE: *Some schools hold weekly Spontaneous Practice session for all teams. Having your team participate in sessions like these provides the team with weekly lessons on Spontaneous and lots of practice doing problems of all kinds. Also, make sure to register for the Regional Spontaneous Fair if offered in your region.*

III. The Rules of OM

OM is a rule-based process. The rules are designed to make the process fair to all, which is especially important when teams are working on the same problems all over the world. Coaches are the foundation of this process – both to ensure that their teams follow the rules and to assist their team in working within the rules while “thinking outside the box” in solving the problem.

Hierarchy of OM Rules

The rules of OM can be viewed as a hierarchy:

General Rules superseded by...
Problem Rules superseded by...
Problem Clarifications superseded by...
Safety!!

Everyone is responsible for adherence to the rules of OM:

- It is the team’s responsibility to learn the rules of OM and, in particular, the rules for the chosen problem (including clarifications).
- It is the Coach’s responsibility to assist them in doing so.
- It is the Parents’ responsibility to understand the OM rules regarding Outside Assistance so as not to jeopardize the team’s learning.

So where do you get them?

- General Rules -- *Program Guide*
- Problem Rules -- *Problem Description*
- Clarifications – <http://www.odysseyofthemind.com/> and select *Clarifications*
- Safety -- *Program Guide...* and a big dose of Common Sense

The **Program Guide** is always your first source of information on OM rules. Use it continuously through the process. By February, both the guide and your problem description should be thoroughly worn!

Remember that the rules aren’t made for coaches – they are made for the team. Make sure the team understands the rules clearly and can apply them to the problem. OM rules are designed to allow each team to interpret them in their own manner. Your team should be able to explain how they have interpreted the rules in their solution. Judges will often ask your team about the solution and ask about how it fits into the rules. A clear interpretation may cause a skeptical judge to re-examine their thinking when your team can clearly state their understanding of the rules.

Finally, recognize that all rules, deadlines, etc. that are specified by OM are inflexible. A limit of 8 inches does not mean that 8.1 inches will probably be OK. In

some cases, missing a critical dimension can mean that the kids will either have to modify the offending item or not be able to use it in the competition. This can be VERY stressful for the kids if they discover it at the competition.

COACH'S NOTE: *Make sure to carefully review the rules for things like performance space or ceiling and door height. Teams have been known to arrive at competition and find they have to dismantle a backdrop or prop because it won't fit through the door or in the room!*

Clarifications

Coaches will discover that the long-term problems, although often lengthy, cannot possibly provide a resolution to every situation a clever team will come up with. In fact, OM problems are purposefully written with an eye towards ambiguity. This is designed to encourage teams to find creative interpretations of the problem and its rules. However, this often creates the need for further interpretation that can be resolved by requesting a rules clarification.

- **Clarification** - an on-line request to OM officials for added clarity about the problem rules.

Help the kids to feel comfortable sending in clarifications. Thinking outside the box means that clarifications are both necessary and a good sign of divergent thinking. Encourage them to send in for a clarification whenever there is any doubt about whether their solution conforms to the rules. Some of the "best" solutions will sit on the edge of what is legal and what is not.

A formal clarification is the ONLY method to be sure that a given solution will not be penalized. A simple example of a clarification request would be:

The problem requires the team to build a vehicle that must "fit in a box 16' by 12'." The team is requesting answers to two questions: Is there a limit on the third dimension? Does the vehicle have to fit in the box in the way it will be used (e.g. wheels down)?

These questions can only be resolved by having your team submit a clarification. Don't "chance it" or assume you know what's OK.

To submit a clarification request, go to the Odyssey of the Mind website, select *Clarifications* and follow the directions. In preparing the request, encourage the kids to specify all their assumptions, give plenty of details and phrase the questions to accommodate simple answers.

If your team submits a clarification, it will usually receive a **Private Clarification** (*not published to the public*). Clarifications should be clearly written to make sure

your specific question is answered. You should **always bring the response** with you to the tournament. (The judges may not be aware of how this particular situation has been clarified.)

A team asked the above question and received a private clarification. The rules clarification answer was 1) the only limit on the third dimension is the size of the room and 2) No, it can be placed in the box in any orientation. The team was then able to make a much larger, more powerful vehicle than most other teams competing because the other teams hadn't asked this question.

In addition, Coaches must make sure that the team is aware of all published **General Clarifications** on the OM web site. These clarify issues with the problem that were identified after publishing or have been brought to light by multiple teams. Often these clarifications can be very important – the judges at the tournament will rely on them. Be sure that the team gets all published clarifications. Otherwise, the problem that they solve at the tournament might be different than the one the judges measure at competition!

Penalties

In OM, Judges make every effort to avoid giving teams penalties. However, to ensure that teams follow the rules in a way that ensures fairness to all teams, penalties can be assessed.

Although any OM rules may result in penalties (e.g. size, time, materials, etc.), the most common penalty is probably for not complying with the specific rules of your Long-Term problem. Always pay attention to both the detail and the spirit of your Long-Term problem. Just as you can be penalized for going over time or not complying with the specific rules (e.g. your vehicle is larger than specified), a team can also be penalized for the “Spirit of the Problem” if their problem solution does not appropriately address the problem (e.g. a Humor problem solution that does not attempt to be humorous).

Another common penalty is for Outside Assistance. Please review the OA section to ensure all team members, Coaches and Parents understand OA.

If your team is penalized, Coaches should feel free to contact the Head Judge to discuss the issue and ensure everyone understands the basis for the penalty. If your team believes they have been penalized in error, you can request a Tribunal. The Tournament section has more information on Scoring and Tribunals.

IV. Role of The Coach

What does an OM coach do?

Coaching OM is unlike most “coaching” roles – you are not there to tell the kids what to do and how to do it and you’re not required to be an “OM expert” to be a great OM coach! Instead, you need to be someone who enjoys kids, is well organized, open-minded (to crazy, creative, out of the box ideas), patient and tolerant of the (sometimes frustrating) learning process.

In simple terms, the Coach provides the opportunities for team members to:

- **Meet** – schedules meetings and makes them productive
- **Obtain resources** – provides access to resources needed by the team, including both skills and material resources
- **Team Build** - keeps team motivated, cooperative, using its skills wisely and supportive of each other
- **Focus on a Plan**– ensures the team has a plan, is working towards their goals and is staying on track
- **Support the Program** – each team is responsible for registering their team and providing a volunteer judge and a general volunteer for the tournament.

The Coach must have a plan that makes sure the team has the opportunity to learn and develop. The Coach cannot do it – they can only provide the necessary environment and opportunity. As with being a parent, however, when working with kids the *devil is in the details*.

It’s important for a coach to keep organization and planning at the top of the priority list, be resourceful and provide a risk-free environment -- physically, emotionally, socially and mentally. Do these things and, you will be successful.

Meetings

Meetings are discussed in detail in **Section VII**. In general, meetings should be regularly scheduled, well planned in advance, include some time for fun and have specific goals for that session.

Attendance should be required, understanding that valid and reasonable absences are inevitable. A Coach might say: *“You are needed at all team meetings unless there is a specific reason for your absence.”* Parents need to understand that OM is a team process and frequent absences are disruptive to the process and unfair to other team members. Get commitments from both the team and their parents up front. Tell the parents up front that signing up for this team is no different than signing up for any other team. The success of the team is dependent on all the team members fulfilling their commitment.

OM is an intense process. Teams will not succeed, either in the feeling of accomplishment or in the tournament, without a commitment from all team members for frequent meeting across the entire year. Coaches must help to find a balance – one day a week for two hours isn't enough – 6-hour meetings every weekend day from September to March will burn out your team. It is important for you to keep in mind the age of your team when setting up meeting times and length.

Coaches should ask each team member (and/or the parents of elementary and middle school students) to make a list of commitments they have aside from school and OM. It is very likely that some team members will participate in religious, sports or volunteer activities. Some students are good at balancing multiple extracurricular commitments, school and OM while others may not be. You should also ask about planned vacations or weekend trips. Be sure to alert parents to the tournament and spontaneous fair dates. Coaches should have a frank discussion of the importance of participation because once the team has started solving the problem they are not allowed to replace team members.

Obtaining Resources

There are two elements to finding resources – resources for the Coach (!) and resources for the team.

For the Coach, it's very difficult for anyone to go it alone in coaching an OM team. Remember that teachers have librarians, gym teaches, janitors, art teachers, cafeteria workers etc. to help them do all the things that can fall to you as an OM Coach. So, look for help:

- Find out if anyone else in the school is coaching an Odyssey of the Mind team. If so, you may wish to get together and develop ways to share materials and tools, and to train team members in spontaneous problem solving.
- Ask one or more of the team members' parents to act as assistant coaches. They can be very helpful in teaching skills, keeping the process organized and even giving pep talks. Sometimes a second adult voice can be helpful but make sure roles are clearly defined and the team isn't confused about who is the Coach. A good role for an assistant coach is for them to organize and prepare spontaneous problems for the team.
- Use all of your Parents. They want to help, particularly as the year progresses and they sense the excitement their child feels for OM. They can help with providing transportation both for competitions and buying/scrounging trips, drying tears, baking cookies, etc. Parents can also be a great resource once the team starts building, by making sure kids are staying on task and are using tools safely.

- Your OM Coordinator will be your most frequent resource, especially for the mechanics of OM (*e.g. How do I register? What is our membership number?*). Often they are a former Coach and are also available for any type of advice or just for a sympathetic ear.
- Seek out students who have participated in OM in the past. Some schools give service hours to students who help coach OM teams or provide volunteer service. However, remember that these students are used to being team members – remind them of their responsibility regarding outside assistance!

For the team, Coaches are the primary, but not the only source of materials. Make sure your parents understand that they can be a great source of materials as well, especially by collecting or harvesting (from closets, garages, basements, grandparents...) materials that can be useful.

- Basic material – items that can be used for multiple things – tools, cardboard, wood, duct tape, old sheets, glue, fasteners, paints, brushes, etc. form the basis of every OM teams workshop. Acquire them early so the team has some items to think about as they begin to develop ideas. Build a stockpile of things so you do not have to stop working every time you need a basic tool.
- Unusual items – every family has some strange but interesting things hidden away. Ask each team member to search their house and bring in a couple of items. These can be directly useful but can also be helpful with brainstorming sessions – your team will amaze you with their creativity. (*See the SCAMPER attachment for ideas on how to creatively repurpose items*)
- Home Depot/Lowes – when you are ready to start building backdrops and props, take the team on “*fishing expedition*” to a big box store. Let them wander and look at the materials to see where they see opportunities. Ask them to find everyday items that could be repurposed in OM. It’s better for the budget if you do not buy things new at these stores, but where else can the team actually see all the possible items they could use in one place? These big box stores can also be helpful with donating damaged merchandise, large boxes, wooden crates, etc. when you tell them it’s for a school project.
- Recycled Materials – judges respond well to the creative use of recycled materials. It’s easy to paint a backdrop - more creative to color it with recycled cookie boxes. Keep your team focused on “crazy creativity” – how can they use the red metal in Coke cans, or the pull tops from soda cans? One team collected lint from their dryers to use!

COACH'S NOTE: *using creative materials is a winning strategy and it can be fun for the team too! Finding better, more unusual materials is a good "homework assignment" for the team. You'll be amazed at what they find!*

Finally, remember it's the Coach's job to help the team obtain the resources that they want. Aside from the basic tools, let the team create the demand for items. Do not let providing items become a means of steering the team towards a solution!

Team Building

Team building is important. It is difficult to be creative "on schedule". Sometimes, just letting the kids have some fun together will allow them to develop better communication and respect. This will lead to smoother progress when work resumes, and this downtime is often when the most creative solutions come about.

Another area where a Coach can help is in managing "group dynamics".

- One approach to helping a Team to work constructively with each other is to create Team Rules -- such as *"Team members can disagree with a proposed idea, but should not call each other derogatory names"*.

The process of creating these rules can be a nice "team building" exercise. Here's an example of one team's rules with some comments included from their coach on how he used the rule:

ALL Team members will...

- ***Contribute and share in the workload.*** This will probably not be completely equal...but unequal effort tends to lead to tension within a group.
- ***Use their abilities, skills, and talents to help the team.*** Kids are generally aware of the talents they have. Encourage them to try roles, skills and activities they have not tried before.
- ***Find a way to play a leadership role.*** Leadership is not limited to being in charge...it can also mean being a role model for others.
- ***Be supportive of, and respectful toward, their teammates and coaches.***
- ***Help to clean up at the end of meetings.***

The kids will naturally develop roles. Leaders will emerge, someone will become the go-to person for technical issues, someone will be the joker who keeps everyone loose and someone else will fade into the background. By their nature roles can be perceived as either positive or negative – do not fight the roles but help the kids keep them in perspective. Use these natural roles but find ways to keep kids from becoming locked into one role alone:

- Ask the technician to teach;
- Initiate a discussion about the leader's idea; or
- Assign the kid in the background a chance at an important task.

Watch out for cliques. It's natural that some friendship will be brought to the team and others will form. Both are good things. However, cliques that create "outsiders" within the team can be destructive. Keep this in mind when the team is working in groups.

- Suggest new groupings and find creative ways to re-focus the team on tasks rather than chitchat with their friends alone.
- One way to do this is to "pair" kids up during a working meeting. This allows you to control who works with whom thus giving all the kids to get to know one another
- Try not to let kids vote on issues. This can cause divisions within the team based on who voted for what. If you feel you must have a vote, have a silent or written vote. In this way only you get to see who voted for what.

Watch out for boy-girl dynamics, especially with younger teams. Try not to focus specifically on the boy-girl issues (*"Boys, you are not listening!"*) but instead focus on individual's actions (*"Jason and Will, you need to listen carefully to your teammate"*). Focusing on the boy-girl dynamic can often lock in gender roles and harden gender-based cliques. Focus instead on mutual respect and good teamwork.

In many ways the OM Coach job is unique and especially challenging: Kids, especially young kids, will naturally turn to an adult to give them direction and advice when they are having a bit of trouble solving a difficult problem. One of the biggest challenges of an OM Coach is to help the kids learn to depend on each other for this kind of support. Praising and encouraging the kids is natural, but a Coach must be careful they don't use "selective praise" as a kind of indirect control of the direction the kids take in developing their solutions. If you praise everything, the kids will have to decide for themselves which direction to go.

Focus on a Plan

Have a plan -- for both your overall progress towards competition, for teaching skills, for each meeting, for dealing with obstacles, etc. The coach is the adult in the room and can play a valuable role in simply identifying what is needed and moving the team towards success. However, it should be the team's plan - not yours. Helping the team develop plans will increase their commitment and buy-in to each plan. If you make it theirs, they will own it and be more likely to follow it. Generating positive peer pressure is the best way to create forward momentum and focus. Remember -- teams without a plan will flounder - floundering teams are not successful and, most importantly, do not have fun!

Determine how you can help the team remain organized and on plan:

- Take five minutes at the beginning of every meeting to have the kids set goals for what they want to accomplish in the meeting (the younger the kids, the more guidance they will need with this).
- Set specific goals. (*e.g. complete the first draft of our skit by x date.*)
- Post “to-do’s” and check them off when completed.
- Break large work products into specific, manageable tasks (especially for younger teams who can become overwhelmed easily)

Despite your best efforts, there will be times when the kids will appear to flounder -- or their progress will seem painfully slow. A natural "parent response" is for a Coach to feel they should step in and DIRECT the kids back on "the Right Track."

RESIST THIS TEMPTATION!!

One of the great benefits of OM is for kids to learn methods to evaluate what is getting them stuck and find ways around it. It's entirely appropriate to teach the kids the process of brainstorming -- and to encourage them to carefully evaluate the alternatives they come up with, manage their time, etc. All of these are general skills that a Coach can reasonably share. Moreover, acting as the "facilitator" for these sessions is entirely appropriate.

Strive for perfection, but be willing and ready to accept the best that your team can offer.

Registration and Volunteers

As the Coach, you are responsible for making sure your team is appropriately registered for the tournament – on time and with fees paid. There are two critical registrations:

- School Registration with Odyssey of the Mind – each team will have a membership number that shows that the school has purchased a membership from the international organization. In some cases, the school Coordinator purchases this membership. However, you will need this number for forms and it must be included on your membership sign at competition along with your membership name.
- Tournament Registration – each team must individually register for the Regional Competition at the regional web site (see Resources), including the payment of a tournament fee. Make sure you know the deadline for this year’s tournament.

In addition, you should make sure you register yourself for **Coaches' Training** and your team for the **Spontaneous Fair** each fall. These are great ways for you and your team to prepare for the Tournament.

Odyssey of the Mind relies completely on volunteers to staff OM tournaments. The teams competing supply these volunteers. Each team is required to provide two volunteers:

- Judge – one volunteer will be trained as a Judge for the Regional Tournament. No experience is required but the person must be available for both the Tournament and for one day of Judges Training.
 - Judges work all day and will NOT be able to see your team compete. Make sure your Judge volunteer understands this when they sign up!!
- Volunteer – this volunteer will work on Tournament Day to support the teams competing. Assignments vary but will include jobs ranging from registration to sales to sign in for Spontaneous. No training is required.
 - Volunteers will be scheduled so that they can see the team compete.

Parents, grandparents, older siblings (over 18), neighbors, friends or even teachers are good candidates for volunteers. Begin the process to identify your volunteers early and make sure they sign up at the regional web site. They will need your name, membership number problem number/name and division to sign up.

V. Outside Assistance – Maintaining OM Ethics

The intention of the OM program is to provide long-term problems that are to be solved creatively by the participants of each team.

The ODYSSEY OF THE MIND program does not allow **Outside Assistance** in the development of the problem solution. You, the coach, and everybody else not on the team may not help. Since you cannot make anything, it does not fall on your shoulders to design, create, or complete any part of the solution. The team should understand that the responsibility is theirs alone. For the coach and the team, it is challenging, exciting, frustrating, and very rewarding.

While there are no "wrong" answers in OM, there are many "right" answers. The job of OM team members is to find a solution, style etc., which are right for them. This can only be achieved through listening, contributing, cooperating, refining and intense practice. Remember a key rule in OM:

**For students, OM is hands-on.
For coaches and parents, OM is hands-off.**

The "fundamental principal" of OM is that the kids are the SOLE force behind the ideas and construction of everything associated with the Long Term Problem. In some ways, this makes the Coach's job easier: *You don't have to be able to solve the problem.*

Some would say not knowing how to solve the Long Term Problem actually makes you MORE suitable to be a coach. You don't have to be skilled at anything the kids need to know to solve the problem. Again, since you CAN'T tell the kids how things should be done, it is often preferable to bring in outsiders (who don't know what problem the kids are trying to solve) to help develop any skills the kids might need. You don't even have to like the solution the kids come up with! Remember, it's THEIR solution, not yours!

So what exactly is Outside Assistance (OA)?

There is a list of questions and answers about OA included as **Attachment 5** to provide some examples of what is, and is not, Outside Assistance.

A simple way to think about OA is summarized in three points below:

- The ideas, language, movements etc. in an OM performance must arise entirely from the team members – not Coaches or parents or anyone outside the team.

- Any materials used in the performance – backdrops, props, signs, costumes, etc. – must be entirely the product of the team members in both generating the idea and creating the item.
- The skills used to produce any part of the performance must be skills whose use was determined by, and executed by, the team members. Coaches or other non-team members can teach skills generically but cannot direct the team towards any actions by teaching a specific skill as a specific solution to part of the performance (*i.e. – a Coach cannot use teaching a specific skill as a way to prod the team into a specific solution.*).

Here’s another way to describe OA from the *OM Program Guide*. The Rulebook should be read in its entirety. This section is duplicated here because it provides a nice discussion of Outside Assistance:

Team members should be encouraged to do research about their problem. Resources used may NOT solve the problem for the team, but merely offer insight or teach skills that can be used to solve the problem. For example, as a resource, team members may have a dancer teach them dance steps, but the dancer may NOT choreograph the team's dance. Or, a structure team may have a civil engineer speak about various methods of construction, but it may NOT have a civil engineer tell it the best method to solve the structure problem.

Teams may not ask, hire or engage an individual to perform a task(s) that team members are not capable of doing and/or able to do. This would include such tasks as welding items together or hand selecting strips of balsa wood.

When considering whether or not an item you wish to use will receive an Outside Assistance deduction, determine if the item is available in basically the same form to anyone. If an item the team wishes to use is not a standard item, but one that someone must make or alter to fit the team's design, then the team must make or alter it.

COACH'S NOTE: *The bottom line – the performance must be the product of the team members in every sense – their ideas, their materials, their skills, their decisions, etc. Use this as a simple rule and you're on your way to coaching an OA compliant team.*

How do you coach WITHOUT risking OA?

A coach's help to a given team should be **Socratic** in nature. A coach in the process of guiding a team should utilize appropriate questioning techniques, discovery through the experience of trial and error, and research and knowledge gained through the use of mentors.

To avoid OA, a Coach should learn to use the following types of answers when a team member asks a question that expects an answer:

“Well, that’s a good question, what do you think you could do?”

“That’s a great question; let’s discuss that with the team.”

“Good question: it sounds like a great opportunity to do some research.”

Avoid interference from parents who wish to impart their ideas on solutions to a given problem – instruct parents of their responsibility not to provide OA (and instruct team members to stop parents who mistakenly try to “help.”)

It’s unfortunate but all too common for OM participants and parents to worry about OA from other teams. You should avoid spending time and effort worrying about the legitimacy of a problem solution from a different membership. Those concerns are the direct responsibility of the trained tournament judges.

Emphasize that solving the problem is reward in itself. It is not necessary to have the winning solution in a competition to be successful.

Making the team responsible...

Finally, make the team responsible for policing their exposure to OA. Teach them that it’s OK to say:

“Stop, you can’t do/say that (coach, Mom, Dad...), that would be OA!”

For younger teams, who might be uncomfortable being so direct, try a movement, signal or word as a way to stop inadvertent OA. For example:

***A child might put both hands on the tops of their head.
The kids could yell “Bananas” if they hear something that may be OA!***

Empower your teams by teaching them what OA is and that it’s okay to respectfully call someone out on giving inappropriate help. This lesson is one of the most important lessons your team members will learn as OM participants. It teaches them self-confidence, self-reliance and integrity. In the end, it’s the team’s responsibility to make sure their performance is not marred by OA. The team will be:

- Asked to provide written assurance before competing that no OA was provided;
- Asked questions by the judges at the performance that are designed to discover if OA was provided.

It’s their team and their responsibility. Make sure they understand that!

VI. The Season (or... What Do I Do...?)

A sample timeline is shown below. Note that many division 3 teams form their teams much later in the season and develop very successful solutions. The younger your team, the longer it is likely to take them to come up with a viable problem solution and the longer it takes them to execute their plan!

The Year in OM

September - October - get organized...

- Teams formed.
- Team orientation meeting with parents.
- Team building exercises if the team members don't all know each other.
- Select a long-term problem and begin research and brainstorming solutions. Create a vision of how you'll proceed.
- Register your team for the **Spontaneous Fair** and yourself for **Coach's Training**.
- "Learn" your team - skills, personalities, team dynamics...

October - November - create your plan...

- Organize your team, your approach and support materials.
- Finalize decisions of their solution to the Long-Term problem as soon as possible. Commit to it!
- Team building and training - including brainstorming practice, spontaneous problems, and long-term problem study.
- Begin to work on solution including script, props, etc.
- Ask your parents, teachers or friends to become a **VOLUNTEER**. Each team must provide two volunteers, one of which is a volunteer judge. Training is provided. Volunteers must register on-line.

November - December - get the ball rolling...

- Continue research and brainstorming on refining long-term solution.
- Continue work on your long-term solution and Style items.
- Register for regional tournament.

December - January - execute the team vision...

- Continue to work on solution including script, props etc.
- Refine the long-term solution to the specific scoring of the problem as defined in the long-term problem definition (e.g. having a beautiful backdrop is less helpful if it's not scored by the judges!)
- Confirm that your two volunteers are registered on the NCOM web site.

February - finalize and then refine the presentation...

- Continue to refine solution to long-term problem and get ready for regional tournament.

- Identify weak areas and brainstorm improvements.
- As the tournament approaches, the team's focus should move towards the presentation of your solution rather than preparing materials.

February – March – have fun at the Tournament!

- Finalize paperwork for Tournament (Note: Coaches can prepare paperwork for D1 teams using information/descriptions from the team)
- Regional Tournament.

April – May – Congratulations!

A Guide to Running OM Meetings

A common complaint coaches have regarding their teams sounds like this: "All they do is goof around at meetings." If this sounds familiar, read on.

Left to their own devices, it is unlikely that 5, 6, or 7 elementary, middle school, or high school kids will accomplish much at an Odyssey Of The Mind meeting, particularly in the initial stages of the team's progress. Making the most out of that hour and a half depends on how you structure it. Here are some suggestions.

Division I Teams (grades 3-5)

Elementary school teachers know that young children in these grades have short attention spans. Plan your meetings so that, from the moment they begin, you have more (fun) activities than you need so that there is little or no "down" time. In other words, "hit the ground running."

- Allow 10 to 15 minutes per activity. That's right. Remember those attention spans.
- Start with brainstorming and wait until they're really warmed up before you work on the long-term problem.
- Keep the meetings fairly short, especially at the beginning – probably 2 hours maximum at the beginning.
- Safety is important. Some of these kids may have never used tools before - even scissors can be dangerous. Establish rules and always provide oversight if any item with any risk is being used. It is a good idea to recruit parents ahead of time to help during a meeting if you know the kids will be doing lots of hands-on activities. The more adult eyes you have the more likely the kids are to use the tools safely.
- Try to end the meeting with a silly just-for-fun activity that has nothing whatsoever to do with the long-term problem. This way they will leave the

meeting feeling great about Odyssey Of The Mind, and about their team. (That's why they joined Odyssey Of The Mind, after all.)

- Plan on a 10-minute snack time to break up the meeting.
- Having the kids do a short spontaneous problem in the middle of the meeting (or whenever seems appropriate) is also a useful way to break up the meeting.
- For longer meetings (on the weekends or as you get closer to competition time) consider giving the kids a 10-15 minute “go out and run” break. This does a lot towards getting rid of the wiggles.

Above all, remember that these are kid. Kids do not do things like grown ups. That's why we don't call them "adults."

Middle School and Upper School Teams

The role of the Coach is generally the same for all levels, however, as with parenting the level of detailed involvement changes and the teams progress. Don't think that coaching an Upper School team requires any less commitment that a LS team – it may be different but it's no less of a responsibility.

- Activities can be longer and work can become more independent.
- Be more aware of social interactions, especially in the Middle School years.
- As they grow older, kids can become less adventurous and don't want to “look weird.” Help them get out of that box by making it fun. Creativity requires risk taking. Give them an excuse for being silly when it's needed – it's OM after all!
- Be careful with tools – saws, drills, etc. Older kids can assume they know how to use tools and become less likely to ask for help.
- Make safety rules! Talk to parents for an OK before any power tools are used and create a “buddy system” to have two sets of eyes for safety. For some activities (e.g. a table saw), allow them to use tools ONLY when supervised by an adult for safety!

Suggested Goals For The First Five Meetings

These goals should be adjusted according to age levels and experience level of team members.

First meeting

Meet with students and parents (for primary, elementary and middle schoolers).

1. Explain the Odyssey of the Mind philosophy (*see program handbook*).
2. Describe the OM process and give dates of Regional and State Meets.
3. Discuss the time commitment necessary, and the responsibility of every team member to ensure a team effort.

- An average LS team might meet for 2-3 hours per week in through December, increasing to at least 5 hours a week after that with final tournament preparations requiring more time in the last two weeks. Special meeting on “off-school” days can be helpful.
 - MS and US teams tend to meet more frequently and for longer periods.
 - Remember - time spent depends on expectations. You can meet 2 hours a week all year but most other competing teams will outwork your team.
4. Enlist parental assistance for transportation, refreshments, helpers, etc. You WILL need it and giving parents a role to play also helps them feel part of the process and might avoid their tendency towards OA.
 5. Get buy-in for Parent on the financial commitment. You’ll need supplies and there will be costs for snacks, and other out of pocket expenses.
 6. Explain **Outside Assistance**. Help parents understand that they can be valuable resources for knowledge and skills, but they cannot volunteer solutions or do work for their children. *“Teach them to sew, do not sew it for them!”*
 7. Set up a practice schedule appropriate to your group. You will need longer meeting once the hands-on work begins and more frequent meetings as the tournament approaches.

Second meeting

1. Incorporate team-building activity.
2. Inventory team skills and preferences. *“Things I’m good at.... not good at...”, “I like to do.... I don’t like to do...”*
3. Review the long-term problems with the team. Use the skills inventory to discuss what problems this team is best suited to, and most interested in. You may not be ready to decide this today. This is a big decision!
4. Review brainstorming rules (use brainstorming frequently and at length!)
5. Explain spontaneous. Plan on practicing a few problems at every meeting. Spontaneous can be used as a device to start meetings as a warm-up and to put them on task. You can also use spontaneous practice as a way to break up a meeting.
6. Homework – each team member should choose their favorite problem and prepare to explain to the rest of the team why it is the best choice.

Third Meeting

1. Incorporate team-building activity. Brainstorm ideas and strategies on how WE CAN BE SUCCESSFUL as a team.
2. Discuss/ choose problem. Brainstorm kinds of knowledge and skills needed to solve this problem. Help the team structure their thinking about the problem selection process. Ask them questions like “Does this problem requires someone who’s very technical? Do any of you like building things? See **Section VIII** for help with Problem Selection.
3. Practice spontaneous.
4. Homework - research the problem; assign topics and areas of knowledge.

COACH'S NOTE: Find ways to keep any particular problem selection or skit idea from becoming one person's or one group. This can lead to a popularity contest or a dominance issue. For example, you might ask the team members to introduce or explain each other's recommendations rather than their own or create teams that have to build upon ideas initiated by other team members.

Fourth meeting

1. Incorporate team-building activity.
2. Brainstorm problem solutions (*may include/overlap style ideas*). Allow plenty of time for this; never settle for the first idea, easiest idea, etc., without exploring all. This process may extend over several meetings.
3. Discuss questioning techniques with your team. "*Nothing new is learned until a question is asked.*" Refine this art over the course of the year.
4. Practice spontaneous.
5. Homework - choose a favorite problem solution/idea and rough out on paper HOW the team could accomplish this. Bring to next meeting to share.

COACHES NOTE – *problem selection is a key part of success in OM. Success means a good experience, not necessarily winning the tournament! The team should all line up in favor of the chosen problem (not be split), understand what this problem will require them to do (build a vehicle, build a structure, be funny, learn about Shakespeare...) and believe that it will be a fun experience. Many teams that struggle do so because they picked the wrong problem for their skills and interests or some team members "just went along" with a choice they didn't believe in. Get both understanding of the challenge and consensus!!*

Fifth meeting... (and beyond.... or what to do after the team has decided what to do.)

1. Continue team building.
2. Continue spontaneous practices.
3. Brainstorm lists of tasks to accomplish. Assign tasks.
4. Make lists of materials needed (*better yet, function needed and brainstorm what materials might provide it*) and how to get them.
5. Make a team generated time line. Discuss team member responsibility for doing what they say they are going to do, and when. (*e.g. complete skit drafted by November 15*).
6. Keep a list of specific weekly/monthly "to-do's" and let the team experience success and they get crossed off the list (*e.g. Finish covering backdrop*).
7. Feel free to assign homework to work on before the next meeting such as a script, prop, membership sign, costume, or something similar. Have a discussion about OA beforehand.

8. Carry on, good luck, and ask for help if you need it!

Do not think of these meeting tasks as absolute. If it takes you longer than five meetings to get there that's OK as long as the team is working together and progress is being made.

New teams and younger teams will take longer to select a problem and decide on their solution. But remember, new teams and younger team may also take longer to build props, write a skit, etc. Watch the calendar. If its Thanksgiving, you're coaching 4th graders and you still don't have a plan you'll have a problem!

Coaching Hints and Tips

Get Help...

- Communicate with the parents: They can be invaluable, but they can't read your mind. Tell them what you need.
- Consider a weekly e-mail update to Parents. They enjoy being in the loop and it's a great way to ask for help.
- Talk to Other Coaches and your Coordinator – get help with hints, warnings, help with an issue, etc.

Running the Meeting...

- Plan your meetings carefully and in detail. As the kids get older, assume their attention spans are only marginally longer – they are still kids after all!
- Keep the meetings tightly structured so that their time is not wasted but ...an occasional fun-break can make everyone more productive afterwards.
- Have goals, post lists of to-dos – let the team know where they stand so they can self-police. Praise them when they succeed – make a point of crossing items off the list and are done!
- Keep the stress low. De-emphasize the competitive aspect of the program, and do not forget the FUN.

If you are a Parent/Coach

- For most parent coaches, this is your hardest role but it's also the one that will most benefit your team (and probably your own child as well). Let your child be part of the team and make sure you coach the whole team in a consistent manner.
- Make sure you can "*walk the line*" between favoritism and burdening your child.
- Avoid creating any impression of favoritism – it's destructive to team building and difficult for your child.
- In contrast, refrain from putting more pressure or responsibility on your child. It's easy to fall into the trap of "having Billy work on that this week" while the other kids go home until the next meeting. Keep the "homework" fair and even.

Create a True Team Approach...

- Do “team-building” by going on field trips, having pizza together, choosing an item for team identity, such as a team hat, pin, etc.
- Be the adult in the room when it’s needed. Watch for participation by all team members in their own way. Is everyone being heard? Is anyone dominating the meeting? Are decisions being made by consensus? Step in when you see kids being ignored, kids being bullied (intellectually, not just physically), etc.
- Define the difference between “fun” and “chaos.” Call them out so that they begin to understand where the line is and don’t go beyond it.
- Make a special effort to draw out the strengths of the quieter kids, and insist that everyone is involved and mutually respected.
- Let kids self-identify their strengths and interests. Make sure that everyone is appreciated. Most successful OM teams seem to have one member who cannot paint, isn’t an actor, isn’t technical, etc. but remains an important part of the team because they are eager and willing to just pitch in as needed.
- Remember that at some point things are bound to fail or go wrong. Take this as an opportunity to be calm and show them that there is always a way to solve a problem. In times of stress the team will look to you as a role model. How to handle problems is an important lesson for the kids to learn.
- Team members have to learn to work well with each other. This builds trust and group friendships. Help your team build that trust:
 - Sometimes when close friends work together, they have difficulty staying on task. Watch your team to see if outside friendships add value or are a distraction.
 - Keep switching pairs of team members as they work on different tasks.
 - Limit whole group work: individuals, dyads, and triads are usually more productive.

The Stretch Run...

- As the Regional tournament date approaches try to exude confidence that everything will be done in time, they will be wonderful, etc. In other words, LIE!
- The last two weeks before the regional tournament can be very intense - help them relax by holding a dress rehearsal for their parents, followed by a celebration. Pizza is a great stress reducer! Tell them they're wonderful. Let the inconsequential stuff go - it's not important.
- Above all - Never, never let them see you sweat!

BIG TIME STRESS = Competition + Deadlines + Judges

- The key with these kids is Perspective. As a coach, your biggest job is to help the kids keep their perspective. After all, this is supposed to be FUN. The world is not going to end if things aren't letter perfect.

- Whatever they create will probably not really look like they envisioned it, and this will disappoint some kids. If you have ever worked with perfectionists, and there are a lot of them in Odyssey Of The Mind, you know that they are never satisfied with their creations. Your job then, is to help them maintain the playfulness and fun that is so important in Odyssey Of The Mind.
- Detailed information on what to do/expect at Competition is the focus of **Section X**.

VII. Coaching the Long Term Problem

The Long Term problem, and the style you use to present it, is the heart of OM. It's what you will spend months working on.

Problem Solving Format for Long-Term Problems

Introducing Long-term Problems in OM

For a new team, the decision process for long-term problems should begin with two discussions:

First, review the different type of OM problems – Structure, vehicle, technical, humor and classical. Discuss what types of skills and interests the team should have before attempting each problem.

- Vehicle and technical problems require at least 2 or 3 members who enjoy building things and tinkering. This problem also has a strong dramatic component to it as well. In some cases, teams who have both technical skills and dramatic/artistic skills well represented on their teams choose one of these problem.
- Structure problem requires at least 2 members who like to build things but are also very patient, and detail oriented. This problem probably requires *less* technical skills and experience “in the garage with Dad” and *more* someone who is meticulous, has steady hands and likes detail. In addition, kids who excel at structure need strong math skills (needed for calculating the weight using difference types of balsa). Finally, building a structure is a lot of responsibility focused solely on the builder. Make sure your builder(s) has the self-assurance to take on that responsibility.
- Humor requires just that – a group of kids who enjoy being a little crazy and have low inhibitions. The best humor solutions are often completely out of the box.
- Classical is a problem for actors and drama types. It doesn't have the technical or humor components so scoring well in classical requires a great story, great overall style and good actors. Music and art are often a key component in classical solutions but may not be a requirement.

Second, review the team's skills and interests. Are there technical kids on the team? Do you have kids who are funny and comfortable acting on the edge? Is the team interested in the kinds of stories that might work in Classical (e.g. any big Harry Potter fans)? This involves both taking an inventory and taking the pulse of the team. What features of the various problems are catching their attention?

Discuss the Problem Synopsis

Once the basic types of OM problems are understood, and the team has begun thinking about their interests, it's time to review this year's problems. Start out with the Problem Synopsis. This is a one-paragraph description of each problem. It will give the team a sense of each one and form the basis for an initial discussion. It might help to narrow the field. However, **DO NOT** make a decision based on the synopsis. There is far too much detail involved in each problem to decide before that detail has been reviewed. End this process with at least 3 options – if there are fewer than those, it's likely your team has assumed too much.

Deciding on Your Long-term Problem - Narrow the Field

Now, have the group walk through each problem (*or just those still in contention*) in detail using the FULL problem description and rules.

What Does the Problem Say We Must Do?

- Each team member must have a copy of the problem.
- Dig up the facts.
- Focus on parts of the problem; then look for sub-problems.
- What specifics do we need to know?

What Facts Do We Know About the Problem?

- Have team members make up Who, What, Where, Why, When, How questions that they will need to answer.
- If it doesn't say you can't (*in either the problem limitations, clarifications, or handbook*) then you probably can!

How Does This Problem Fit Our Team?

- Does this problem fit with our interests?
- Does our team have the skills to do this problem?
- Do we want to spend the next few months solving this problem? It is interesting? Will it be fun?

Can you further narrow the field to 2 potential choices? If so, begin another round of discussion:

Review The Facts; State The Problem.

- Select each piece of the problem and restate it in the team's own words. Write each one on a LARGE sheet of paper.

Re-visit the Fit vs. the restated problem

- Does this problem fit with our interests?
- Does our team have the skills to do this problem?
- Do we want to spend the next few months solving this problem? It is interesting? Will it be fun?

Final Decision – Consensus

Work to make the final decision a consensus – not a vote! Make sure that everyone is bought in. This is the **MOST IMPORTANT** decision to be made. Make sure it's "all-in."

- If the decision is a technical problem – are the technical kids committed to it?
- Is anyone too disappointed?
- Did someone give in to a more forceful teammate?
- Is the team being realistic about fit?
- Is there truly energy around this problem?

COACHES NOTE: Remember that if at any point you decide to take a vote on where the team stands, do not under any circumstance do this with a show of hands. Have them write down their answers on a piece of paper so that only you can read the results. Voting with hands-up can result in splitting the team and creating clichés. Avoid this whenever possible.

Attacking the Problem – Finding the great Idea...

Now the fun starts – what is the team really going to work on from this point until March?

How Else Can You Say It? Consider All Possibilities.

Restate the problem using all possible aspects:

- Use SCAMPER.
- If there are not enough possibilities, students will fall back on the tried and true.
- Look at the play on words: If it has to move 10 feet, could this be ten one-foot rulers... or real feet... or feats of strength? These can be opportunities for a clarification!
- Look for what the problem doesn't say! For example, if the problem defines the size of a prop but only gives two dimensions, ask what this means? Could the third dimension be any size? Often, when your team finds an opportunity because of what the problem doesn't say this will create the best and most creative solutions. *(If you decide to do this problem, you may need to prepare a clarification!)*

Look for Ideas That Might Solve the Problem.

This is the brainstorming stage:

- Review brainstorming rules. Don't allow students to do any evaluation of their ideas.
- Record all brainstorming ideas. Do not censor – sometime the wackiest ideas can evolve into something great!
- Encourage piggybacking of ideas. Ask: "What if combined...?"
- Push for something more.

- Use SCAMPER.
- Use forced association-take two objects and make them work together. (Ex: how could glasses be used to make a robot move?)

Which Two or Three Ideas Might Be Really Great?

- Begin by narrowing and clarifying. Make sure ideas meet the spirit of the problem.
- Combine two or more ideas.

COACH'S NOTE: *One of the big wins a Coach can create at this point is buy in. As the team generates great ideas for solutions/skits, idea ownership becomes an issue. One solution can be creating joint ownership. If you have a couple of great ideas, break the team into two groups. Have the "owners" or strongest proponents of each idea in different groups. Ask each group to DEFINE the idea – what is the idea in concrete term. Then, swap the groups. Ask the teams to expand on the other's ideas. What could really be done to make this a great solution? What jokes could we use? What props could we build? If you are a lucky Coach, the team may realize that one is stronger than the other or the "ownership" issues could fall away.*

Test Some of the Solutions:

- What does the team want this solution to accomplish?
- What criteria are important?
- Does the solution meet the specifications?
- Can the solutions be accomplished in the time given?
- Does someone on the team have the expertise to complete the solution?
- Does the solution meet the scoring criteria?
- Does the team have the resources available?
- Will it work for the Judges? Remember that the Judges are Adults – think carefully about Kid Humor or kid culture/trends that might not play well with adults.
- Is it truly creative or is it the current fad? For example, one year's fad was "Gangnam Style." Fads do not work well.
- Is it truly creative or is it a common theme? Star Trek, Harry Potter, etc. have all been done before. Make the skit truly unique to your team. If you're using a well-known story or theme (for example, the story of the three little pigs) make sure that your team makes it their own.

Solving the Problem – Work Begins

The steps required moving from an idea to a finished product that's ready for a performance may seem daunting to both you and your team. However, take them slow, address each in its proper time, allow for evolution and change and continually look to make it better. Do all this and your team will amaze you.

The basic steps can be summarized as:

1. Select the problem (***DONE!***)
2. Develop the idea – the framework for the performance (***DONE!***)
3. Determine the “big picture” of the performance. This expands on the idea just enough to help the team visualize what they are doing. For example: *“We’re in a child’s house and at night her toys become human.... There are two leader toys... they need to work together to save the day...”* Sound familiar? That describes *Toy Story*.
 - Ask them to expand their vision across the many elements – color, sound, humor vs. serious, etc.
 - Make a list of the key characteristics of the team’s vision. Go back and refer to it when decisions are being made.
4. Break the performance down into its sub-parts
 - Script – First, determine if your team understands what a *plot* is or what *character development* is? If the answer is “NO” teach them about plot and character development using the *Three Little Pigs* or another simple, well know story. Have them practice developing their own plots and characters. At another meeting have them brainstorm answers for their solution: What is the plot? Who are the characters? What will they say? What will they wear? How will they move/sing/dance...?
 - Setting – Where are we? What does it look like? How does the audience know...? Most teams use some type of backdrop, often made of sheets or other similar materials. Ask your team how this can be done creatively. Most teams will use wood or plastic pipes. How can yours be different? How can it change from scene to scene?
 - Props – what do we use/touch/show to tell the story and help to meet our required points. Focus on props that could be scored – original, creative, clever... – look for the wow!
 - Stage presence – what will draw the judge’s attention and make viewing enjoyable. Remember that movement and sound are key elements in a pleasing, interesting performance. Don’t stand around talking – move, dance, sing, rhyme, etc.

- Identify the scored elements. They need more time and attention. It's OK if you don't have a plan for every single one at first. Remember, this performance will evolve over time.
5. Casting – it's the Coach's responsibility to make sure the team is fair in casting roles. Do not let it be a popularity contest. Also, do not pre-judge. Sometimes the shy kid who rarely speaks up becomes out-going when playing a role. *(One team had a child recognized by the Head Judge at Worlds as the best performer she'd seen at Worlds in 20 years. He was very quiet and often stuttered when speaking outside of the OM stage!)*
 6. Create a plan, identifying who is responsible for each component. Keep it high level and soft so that the team can adapt as the process continues. Do not discuss ALL the work that has to be done. It's overwhelming. Say things like "OK, so you want to start out with..."
 7. Get to work – do not wait for everything to be set in stone. Find some solid parts that seem safe to start and get to work building a set, creating costumes or building props.
 8. Keep focused on progress and celebrate successes. Post a list and cross items off with a flourish!
 9. Refine... refine... refine.... STOP. Beware of "It's good enough!" Ask the team: *What we could do to make it better? How could this be done differently? How could we make it more interesting? How could we make it more clear to the judges?*

However, at some point you need to call STOP and move on. Endless cycles of change are not productive.

Technical Problems

The Structure, Technical and Vehicle problems can be very different from the other two long-term problems and require dedicated team members to focus on the building of these items.

- Structure places the most emphasis on points for weight held and is usually less affected by the skit and style.
- The Vehicle problem can vary significantly from year to year. In some years, one vehicle transporting a team member is required. In others, multiple small vehicles may need to travel on their own. Consider the different demands of the problem when considering the vehicle problem.
- The Technical problem always has multiple technical components that are required elements. Although the skit carries weight, the technical components are key to this problem.

The Final Month – Prepare For Competition

By the beginning of February, the team should have a good handle on the basics of their coming performance. They can see the major pieces coming together:

- Characters – voice, costume, personality, etc.
- Setting – backdrops or other items that present the scene
- Props – items that enhance the story and potentially address required elements
- Solution – for technical problems, the vehicle, structure or other device

Taking Stock – Priorities for Competition

This is time to take stock. Where are we? Do we have time to get everything done? Do we need to cut back and adjust? Can we do more? Is this truly our best work or can we do better? It's almost universally true that you WILL run out of time. There is always more the team and the coach wishes could be done.

Advise your team to be honest and make decisions on what to do between then and the competition. Explain that it's OK if not every little thing they have dreamed up get done – bring them back to the **SCORED ITEMS!** Teams always get carried away with their story, their characters, etc. Explain that spending the next two meetings adding beads to Molly's costume isn't needed because it's not a scored item.

Budgeting

Every OM long-term problem will have a defined budget limit. The team will have to prepare a worksheet that lists every item used in the performance and its cost. However, there are a number of OM rules that apply to these costs that are important to remember:

- Only the actual items used in the performance are included. This budget is not a measure of dollars spent, it *measures dollars used*. For example, if you pay \$5.00 for a can of spray paint and use half the can, include \$2.50 in your expenses – not the entire cost of \$5.00.
- Recycled materials such as cardboard, soda cans, paper products, etc. can be used in any amount free of charge. This provides your team with a great opportunity to be creative with the use of materials. (One team decided to use brightly colored candy wrappers to create the neon buildings in their backdrop so they had kids in their class bring in empty candy wrappers for them to use).
- Used items such as clothing can be included at yard-sale prices. Your teams estimate is fine, just be reasonable. There are web sites with yard sale prices that might help.
- Check the **Program Guide** for cost rules. There are a number of exceptions that you need to be aware of. For example:

- Certain items listed in the **Program Guide** (e.g. extension cords) are “exempt” from costs – they do not have to be included in the cost.
- Certain items, usually Audio/Video related, can be included at a “Stated Cost” listed in the Guide. It’s usually \$5 or \$10.
- Items that are not normally included as costs (e.g. the pants or shoes the kids are wearing) must be included *only if they are part of a character’s costume*.
- Include everything used in the performance on your listing, even if the assigned value is zero or \$0.01. The rule for “Miscellaneous” costs in the Program Guide helps here.
- Try to avoid new items. Even a slightly used version will create a discount that frees up valuable pennies for your budget.
- Designate a “budget officer” on your team that is responsible for tracking your items. The coach can help with estimates and even a spreadsheet but make sure the team understands the final basis for all costs. The judges will ask.
- As competition nears, do an audit. Walk through every item used in the performance (backdrops, props, costumes, etc.) and make sure that they are included in the list. Also, remember to drop items from the list that the team has decided not to use – remember, this is a measure of money spent on *the performance*, not on the process.

Last Work Days

Just as “Molly’s costume” isn’t a scored item and isn’t a priority, there will be opportunities to refine or improved items that are scored. Ask the team to look for those opportunities. What is just “good enough” and could be better with just a little more effort? How could it?

- Be more beautiful, clearer, or more unique?
- What would make an item draw attention to your team?
- One of the easiest ways to make things better is to make sure all the t’s are crossed and the i’s dotted. Does everything look neat? Attention to detail is the key.

Practice the Performance

Leave at least the last three meetings for practicing the actual performance. Break it down into pieces so that it seems less intimidating:

1. The very first thing that a team needs to do when getting started practicing their performance it to choreograph it. Have every team member take responsibility for something they must take on stage. Where will everyone be standing when time begins? What will be their first steps to the stage? Who will be responsible for changing the scene, changing costumes, moving props? CHOREOGRAPH it! If they can manage to practice what is choreographed they will learn it and be able to do it even with butterflies in their stomachs!

2. The entrance – responding to the Judges “*Team, are you ready,*” moving their props onto the performance area and making sure everything is ready. Have standard places for loose props or bring a prop box or prop table to have behind the scenes. Do not have kids looking for items during the performance! Sometimes you can have a character begin speaking while the stage set-up is still underway. This is an accepted practice in OM performances.
 3. The first scene – even if the skit doesn’t have individual scenes, break the performance down into two or three parts and learn them one at a time. When doing a scene, help the team learn to:
 - Block the scene – learn where to enter, where to stand, how to move, etc. so that the scene flows smoothly.
 - Speak loudly – performance sites are often large, sometime in gyms. Make sure your actors can be heard.
 - Be expressive – young kids can go from naturally expressive to frozen when they “act.” Remind them of their character’s personality and teach them that actors are sometime extreme in their personality to make a point. Tell ‘em to have fun out there!!
 - Practice behind the scenes – what are the team members off set doing? Are there cords to be plugged-in or scenery to be moved? Make sure everything is assigned and is done in the run-throughs just as it will need to be later.
 4. The Second scene – move through each section...
 5. Final Run-Through – the team will need many, many rehearsals before the entire performance comes together. Make sure you have time in the schedule. In your “dress rehearsals” make sure:
 - Do complete runs – do not skip the entrance or a costume change. Perform as they will at competition.
 - Time the performance - OM performances are 8 minutes long. Going over is generally a penalty. At a minimum, any scored elements that occur after time is called will not be scored. **Also, remember that every OM performance ends with the team saying “*TIME*”** – make this part of the skit.
- 5. Tell them they’ll be great.**

Style

Style is that which is added to the solution of the problem and relates to the nature of the problem or solution, but is not required to solve the problem. It provides the lowest number of “points” in an OM competition but it can also be a major factor in influencing judge’s opinions about your entire performance.

If done well, Style is what makes your performance memorable, exciting and fun. It's what makes watching a tournament more enjoyable and entertaining. That makes it fun to the team to produce as well.

Although every team will present a solution for the long-term problem, each presentation will be unique. Remember that OM is a creative competition. This applies not only to your problem solution but to style as well. Your team needs to be creative in defining its "style" as they solve the problem.

COACH'S NOTE: *if there is one constant is OM scoring, it's that creativity trumps all. Judges invariably favor the creative, out of the box, unexpected element over the traditional. Your team could paint the Mona Lisa in perfect reproduction – another version made out of sesame seeds, candy wrappers and old shoe leather is likely to score more points!*

Style is an elaboration of the solution and enhances it creatively. Every long-term problem has 5 style categories. To score points a team must include those categories or a certain aspect of them in a problem presentation. The fifth category is always overall effect and is also mandatory. It takes into account how the other 4 categories work together to enhance the long-term solution.

Creating Your Style

Style is that sometimes-subtle quality that separates the superior Odyssey of the Mind team from the others. It requires much thought and time to develop. Once a team has selected its problem, early on in the brainstorming sessions, style should be considered.

- A good way to begin is to inventory the students to determine what skills and talents each can offer the team. Perhaps one can dance, another might have a facility for writing poetry or a third can paint like Picasso! Why not utilize this talent pool to the team's advantage?

The best groups select a theme and weave it throughout all aspects of their solutions and performances. Just keep in mind that the style categories chosen should be elaborations of, and not requirements for, the solution of the problem.

COACH'S NOTE: *If your team is struggling with Style, ask them to reverse their thinking. Ask them to think about how to produce a skit that entertains and "wows" the judges, while also fitting the requirement of the problem. For a moment, ask them to make the problem solution secondary. What could they do? What would be fun? What would best use their talents? What would make them memorable?*

A new team might be confused as to what to select; so some possible categories for those “free choices” are listed below. This list is not inclusive but is just a starting point for discussion.

- Descriptive Language *[story, play, narrative]*
- Costumes
- Scenery/ Props *(especially if creatively produced)*
- Movement *[dance, exercise, marching]*
- Foreign Accents
- Music *(live or recorded)*
- Special Effects *(lights, sound effects, media)*
- Membership Sign *(related to Theme)*
- Appearance *(costume, make-up, personality)*
- Sound *[song, music, rhythm, sound effects, poems, chants, rhyme]*
- Narration of activity *(great for technical problems)*

Once you have decided on what to create, you should also think about what would be attractive to you as a judge – what catches a judge’s eye.

- Ask your team what catches their eye?
- What kinds of things do people make that are meant to attract attention (stop signs, business signs, magazine covers, etc.)?
- Make a list and define WHY they are eye-catching or memorable.

As stated, the creative use of recycled materials trumps all, but also think about:

- Size and scale – larger items will be noticed...
- Color – bright items, or items with sharp contrast...
- Movement – could it rotate, move up and down...
- Animation, light, and other differentiators...

Scoring with Style

Once your team has determined how they want to proceed with their long-term solution and created their approach to style, you will go through the process of refining both elements. Style is often the easiest place to pick up points – it’s far simpler to improve a costume than to improve your entire long-term solution. Too many OM competitions are decided by one or two points to leave a single point on the table!

When you discuss your style, ask the team to look at these questions about your scored elements in Style:

- Will this wow the judges?
- Is it memorable – will people walk away talking about it?
- Does it capture your attention?
- Is it amazing and clever or just routine or simple?
- Did we take a short cut with this? Could it be better?

- Does this really deserve to be a scored item?

See **Attachment 4** for more detailed hints on creating a successful Style with your team.

VIII. Coaching Spontaneous

Spontaneous is the part of OM that truly demands creative thinking in the moment. Your team is alone in a room with the judges – no Coach, no parents, no one but their teammates. It is a test of both skill and teamwork. To be successful, teams must be both well prepared and trusting of each other.

Preparing a team for Spontaneous takes three things – practice, practice and practice! Make sure your team practices spontaneous consistently throughout the year and take advantage of all opportunities to practice in learning/competitive settings like the Spontaneous fair.

Some keys to becoming great at Spontaneous: a Coach must learn their teams strengths and weaknesses. Watch your team in practice.

- *Who takes the lead? Are they effective?*
- *Who really listens to the problem?*
- *Who stays aware of the situation – time left, points to be earned, etc.*
- *Who stands out at Verbal? Hands-on?*
- *Who gets left behind or ignored? Teach them to speak up.*

Based on your observations, work with the team to develop defined roles for each teammate. For example, some schools designate roles for each of the team members when they are solving hands-on or combo problems. They might include:

1. Leader – this team member is responsible for making sure that everyone on the team has a chance to share his/her ideas. This member keeps the team focused and on point.
2. Timekeeper – makes sure the team is efficient and cognizant of the time constraints listed in the problem. This team member can ask the judges how much time is left and alert the others when time is running out.
3. Reader – Teams are typically given two copies of the problem to read along with the judges. The reader is someone who has good reading comprehension and who can alert the team when they have misunderstood something about the problem.
4. Materials Manager – When teams are given hands-on problems, typically there are lots of supplies that go along with many of these problems. It is important that someone knows what all the materials are so that no important items are missed.
5. Points Manager – Sometimes hands-on or combo problems have various ways for the team to earn points. This team member can help the team come up with a game plan about which points to focus on.

As the coach, you can either designate these roles or let the team decide. However, team members often self-identify during practice. Stress that the most important

role played by anyone is that of a team member! Teams that work together, using everyone's skills and ideas, are the teams that do well in Spontaneous.

COACH'S NOTE: *Although all seven members of the team are allowed into the spontaneous competition room, only 5 of the members are allowed to compete. Therefore, one of your tasks will be to figure out which 5 team members should be on the verbal team, which five on the combo team and which 5 on the hands-on team. DO NOT wait for the kids to decide this in the competition room. Make sure they all know exactly who is on what team.*

Teaching Spontaneous Skills

Scoring in Spontaneous is defined in the problem when it is read to the team. However, these problems often include a "teamwork" score based on the judges view of the manner in which the team works together and a "creativity" score based on the originality of the solution. To present the judges with a positive view while effectively solving the problem, teach your team to:

- Remain calm. Doing so will result in a more thoughtful process,
- Listen to each other. The best ideas can be lost if teammates do not listen to all the team members
- Function as a team, include all the members in the process
- "Be quick but don't hurry" - move consistently towards completion without going so fast you make mistakes or miss opportunities.
- Use all their senses to understand the problem. The Judge reads the problem but a written copy is also supplied. Some kids may learn more effectively by reading than by listening.
- Focus on the goal. Teams often get focused on the process (e.g. build a bridge) rather than the scoring (e.g. points based on how wide and high the bridge stands). It can be a subtle but important difference.
- Use the language of a good team by not being negative to one another. Praise each other for good ideas, etc.

Despite its name, Spontaneous can be taught and there are processes that teams can use to gain an advantage. In general, these are things that bring order to chaos or create a framework that the team can rely upon when solving a problem. Some examples include:

- Learn to listen carefully when the problem is being read. Asking questions can use up a lot of response time unnecessarily.
- Speak loudly and clearly. Learn to enunciate!
- Make sure the team members are standing when they are working on giving answers. This tends to give them more energy.
- Give your answer with confidence.

- Use accents or characters in answering verbal problems. Breaking into a British accent to answer can make a marginal answer seem creative. Remember – judges like to be entertained!
- Use gestures when giving an answer. This will help your answer come alive.
- In verbal problems that are timed, any answer (even a nonsense one) is better than freezing and taking up time. Say something so that the next team member can answer and use the time before it's your turn again to think of an answer or two.
- Don't wait for your turn to begin thinking. Listen to what your teammates are saying as you think of your next answer.
- Try to be brief. Unnecessarily long answers take lots of time that could be used by another member to give another answer.

Providing your team with strategies like these can also help them relax and stay focused, especially when they get a difficult or unfamiliar problem.

Running Spontaneous Practice

Try to practice spontaneous at least once a week. This will get your team in the habit of expecting it. You may want to assign a parent or assistant coach the task of preparing problems for you. There are many websites that have problems available so you don't have to create your own. Google "Spontaneous Problems" and many of these websites will pop up.

COACH'S NOTE: *If you are caught without a spontaneous problem, use whatever is available around you. For example, pick up a common item such as a ladle or can opener and ask your team what could this be or what could this be used for? Once you've read a few spontaneous problems, learn to change them just enough so they become a new spontaneous problem. It's not ideal to do this all the time, but it's great in a pinch.*

When you first start practicing spontaneous, allow all team members to participate. This will give both you and them a chance to figure out who is best at what. The kids will figure out very quickly what they are good at and this will help them feel comfortable with who is on each spontaneous team.

As you begin to practice, get in the habit of letting your team solve the problem without any assistance from you. Remember that when competition time comes they will be required to go into the competition room without you. They need to learn to rely on themselves to figure out what the problem is asking them for. If you begin giving them advice or begin correcting them at practice it will be harder for them to rely on each other during the competition.

When time is up, or they are done solving the problem, give them feedback. Do this by asking them questions so they learn to self-assess: *What do you think worked with this solution? What would you do differently next time? How could you have used*

your time more effectively? What kind of things could you do to keep from getting “stuck” when giving a verbal answer?

You will find that there are common problems that teams run into when solving spontaneous problems:

1. **VERBAL PROBLEMS:** (1) giving answers that are too long; (2) not speaking loudly enough so the judge has to ask them to repeat their answers; (3) running out of time before being able to use all the responses available to them; (4) getting “stuck” without an answer to give.
2. **HANDS-ON PROBLEMS:** (1) Using too much time to plan and not enough time to build; (2) Having one or two people take over the process without regard for the rest of the team; (3) Not allowing enough time to test the solution before it’s time to do it for real; (4) missing the point of the problem and completely bombing it.
3. **COMBO PROBLEMS:** Since these problems are a combination of verbal and hands-on all of the above applies to these.

COACH’S NOTE: *You can teach your teams to avoid getting stuck when giving verbal answers by: (1) think of previous answers that have been given and changing them slightly; (2) use the example that was given when the problem was read to the team; (3) teach the team to each have a familiar place or theme that they can think about when they feel stuck that will help them come up with an answer.*

One of the most valuable things you as a coach can do when teams run into problems solving spontaneous problems is to simply repeat it! This is especially effective with hands-on problems but it can also work well with verbal. Once you’ve discussed what worked and what didn’t, try it again! Giving your team a chance to be completely successful at solving the problem does two things: It allows the team to walk away feeling good about how they did and it helps them to learn what works! Next time they come across a problem with similar elements, they will have some tools in their toolbox that allow them to be successful.

You will notice over time not only what team members are better at what types of problems but you will also become aware of what types of problems your team solves best. Although it is important to practice all types of problems, make sure you try to focus on the areas where they are lacking and need more practice.

As you get close to competition time and you have a good handle on the spontaneous skills of each member, start practicing the problems with 5 team members. Allow the members sitting out to help you judge the team. It is amazing how this experience can open their eyes to becoming a better spontaneous team

member. There is something about seeing the problem from the outside that broadens their perspective.

Spontaneous Process in Competition

At the tournament, your team will check in 20 minutes before your assigned time and be taken to a holding room where they will wait to be called. The Coach can wait with the team but cannot go to the room for competition.

COACH'S NOTE: *Make sure to warm your team up with a couple of quick spontaneous problems before they go into competition. This will get their minds warmed up for what's coming. This type of warm up is not different than when a sports team warms up before a game. It gets the team in the right mindset.*

The team, without the Coach, will be taken to the competition room where the judges will confirm that they have the right team and then they will tell the team the type of problem they will be given. At this time the team will have 2 minutes to tell the judges which 5 team members will be competing. The other two will be shown chairs in the room but away from the competition area.

As stated earlier, teams should agree on which five members will compete on each problem type before entering the room. This is often based on the type of problem, with the weaker members in each problem type sitting out.

- For example, "Tim" may be great at verbal problems but struggle with hands-on. He would be a candidate to sit out if a hands-on problem is presented.

By the time tournament time comes around, both you and your team will know who the top performers are in each type of problem. It is best if the team decides who sits out (and kids will often volunteer) but the Coach should set parameters to ensure fairness (*e.g. everyone is included in at least one team*).

COACH'S NOTE: *Spontaneous is frequently the ultimate determinate of competitive success at OM tournaments. Given the time and effort required by the long-term problem, new coaches often fail to spend enough time preparing their team for Spontaneous. This is a mistake! Spontaneous problem solving is definitely a learned skill and those skills also translate in the daily problem solving needed in developing your long-term solution.*

IX. Creative Problem Solving Process

When Coaching OM, you will be required to help the team solve problems and make decisions frequently. It will start with problem selection and it will still be happening at the tournament if a problem arises. This section presents some process skills that should be useful.

Ask The Right Questions.

Learn to phrase questions that offer a wide range of creative thinking and not limit your team to accepted ideas.

- For example: 'How can you build a better mousetrap?' would make students picture an already designed mousetrap.
- Instead, ask: "How can you get rid of mice?" This allows more divergent thinking.

Reduce Functional Fixedness.

Functional fixedness is when a person sees only one use for an object, the one it was intended for. This is very important when the team is looking at available resources and trying to decide if they are useful or when the team wants to find a non-traditional way to provide some necessary function.

- For example: A pen is used to write with and some will only see it used this way. Encourage your team to see it as many items: a backscratcher, an ice pick, etc.

***COACH'S NOTE:** this is a great exercise for your team – show them an item and ask what it “could” be used for. Functional Fixedness is also a core part of Spontaneous and a great example of how practicing Spontaneous can help your team overall.*

Brainstorm

Brainstorming is a group problem-solving technique named by advertising executive Alex Osborne. Brainstorming combines a relaxed, informal approach to problem solving with lateral thinking. It encourages people to come up with thoughts and ideas that can, at first, seem a bit crazy. Some of these ideas can be crafted into original, creative solutions to a problem, while others can spark even more ideas. This helps to get people unstuck by "jolting" them out of their normal ways of thinking.

Therefore, during brainstorming sessions, people should avoid criticizing or rewarding ideas. You're trying to open up possibilities and break down incorrect

assumptions about the problem's limits. *Judgment and analysis at this stage stunts idea generation and limits creativity.*

Evaluate ideas at the end of the brainstorming session – this is the time to explore solutions further, using conventional approaches.

Before beginning to brainstorm with your team, it is important to review the ground rules:

Rule 1: Withhold judgment of ideas

An essential problem-solving skill is the ability to conceptualize freely. Conceptualization is the process that creates ideas. Nothing smothers the free flow of ideas like a sharp critical remark or harsh laughter from another person. You want ideas expressed. A judgmental attitude will cause group members to be more concerned with defending ideas than with generating them.

Rule 2: Consider All Ideas -- Especially Wild and Zany Ones!

The more ideas generated, the more likely it is that your team expressed some really creative ones. As your team members progress through the problem-solving process, they will need to hypothesize, build, and test their solutions. Effective questioning will lead your team into these areas. It is easier to tame a wild idea than to think of one. Asking for wild ideas encourages group members to be imaginative. Placing a premium on that which initially seems far out encourages group members to expand their thinking.

Rule 3: Go for Quantity

The more creative ideas a person or a group has to choose from, the better. It makes sense that if the number of ideas to be considered is greater, the chance of finding a really good idea is also greater.

Rule 4: Encourage Teams to Piggyback or Hitchhike

Participants are encouraged to build up or modify the ideas put forth by other team members. Creative people tend to be good listeners. Alerting people to the possibility of combining previous ideas ran open vast resources for most people.

One issue that can weaken the impact of brainstorming, particularly among younger students, is “anchoring,” the tendency for the first few ideas that are mentioned to constrain the discussion and inhibit the suggestion of other, more out-of-the-box ideas. To prevent this, you can change the brainstorming to ***Brainwriting***, asking

the kids to first write out their best thoughts and then share these initial ideas with the group. See **Attachment 3** for a description of **Brainwriting** and how it can improve on traditional Brainstorming for some teams.

Questions, Questions...

Problem solving is not a singular event. It is a series -- a sequence -- of solution finding using different techniques, one followed by another. One method may give you part of the answer and then a second or third may finalize your solution. What you're really doing is thinking -- or learning how to think. It is difficult and time consuming. Essentially, you must research and implement multidimensional problem-solving techniques, organize your thoughts, and become great planners.

For example, when examining one of the various long-term problems, you might begin by asking your team:

- What exactly is it that you must do in this problem?
- Can you rewrite/restate the problem in your own words?
- Do you have the skills to accomplish your goals?
- What research would help give you the background you need?
- What additional question(s) will your research generate?

Concentrate on the key points -- those elements of the problem by which the team will be judged. For each point, begin developing questions. Isolate the specific problem you want to solve. Ask many questions, in a series, about the process, subject, thing, etc. Have a team member or coach ask each question.

Don't be too general or too vague. Try to be specific, narrowing the questioning.

Restate questions as statements and hypothesis, if needed. Examples:

- What should be done? Why is it necessary?
- When should it be done? Where should it be done?
- Who should do it? How should it be done?
- What about? What if?
- Can this be tested? What kinds of tests are best?
- What if this were enlarged? What if this were smaller?
- What could be omitted? What could be carried to extremes?
- How about miniatures? What if this were lower?
- How about less length? How could we make this lighter?
- How could this be done faster? How else can this be arranged?
- What if we change the order? What should come next?
- What about cause and effect? What are the opposites?
- What are the negatives? Should we turn it around?

- Why not up instead of down? How about saying it in reverse?
- Suppose we leave this out? Why not fewer parts?
- What could be left unsaid? How can this be streamlined?
- What if this were divided? What can we add?
- Should it be stronger? How about a bigger package?
- How about more time? What if this were done more often?
- What color would be better? What else can we do with sound?
- What idea does it suggest? How about changing the shape?
- Can we combine ideas? What else can be made from this?
- Whose Style can we emulate? What can we substitute?
- How can we improve the appeal? Could we make it cheaper?
- Would an assembly line work? Who else could do this better?
- How can we add more value? How could we make this stronger?

Questioning is your most effective weapon as an OM coach. Use it often!
 Learning to use questioning effectively will also help you avoid giving OA!

See **Attachment 2** for **SCAMPER** – a technique for developing creative thinking.

X. Tournament Day

When you go to your first competition, you won't know what to expect. Hopefully these tips will help prepare you and your team for the big day!

Before You Go...

Have a plan for how you will get your props to the competition. Usually vans or SUV's are sufficient but many teams will require a truck to move their props. Engage your parents early in this planning.

Create a meeting place where the team will assemble. Often the Registration area or the Long-Term site is the best option.

Make sure everyone has a map of the campus and where you will meet as well as a time when you expect them to be there.

Recruit a parent to help you with the logistics and to help you make sure that everyone is on the same page.

Paperwork

Paperwork is more than it appears, it's a chance for your team to sell their story to the judges as well a way to help the judges anticipate and identify the teams scored elements in both long-term (if there is a LT form) and style.

Have your team begin drafting their Style and LT forms about a month **BEFORE** the tournament. This will often cause your team to reevaluate their choices for scored items – do it early enough that they have time to recover!

Make sure to bring copies of your paperwork along with copies of any clarifications. Required forms for the competitions will include:

- Outside Assistance – 1 copy, each member must sign
- Cost – 1 copy; see the cost limit for your problem.
- Style – 4 copies, identify what elements will be scored
- Any other documentation required by your specific problem. Recent years have found it more likely that a TEAM LIST form(s) specific to the Long-term problem is required.
- It is a good idea to bring extra copies of all these forms to the tournament. Typically, no copying services are available on tournament day.

Be clear in defining scored items in the Style and Long-term form (if required). Do not leave it to the judge to interpret!

For Example:

- NOT “The Wizards Costume” but “***The Creative use of marbles to reflect the spotlight in the Wizard’s costume,***” or

- NOT “The Poem” but “***The poem in scene 2, written and performed by the King***”

An item can only be scored once! Therefore, do NOT use an item required by the Long Term problem as a Style item! For Example:

- The creative design of the Structure – NOT OK!!

Lower School coaches can “pen” the forms but make sure the words are the teams. Adults do not compose like 4th graders! MS and US teams must prepare their own paperwork.

Present the paperwork to the Staging Area judge when it’s requested. Keep the clarification papers – they are only need if an issue arises.

COACH’S NOTE: Paperwork is the team’s opportunity to tell the judges their story. Use it wisely. Make sure you clearly and succinctly point out what you are doing, what to look for, how you meet the requirements, etc. Do not let the judges miss the point – use the form to explain it to them **BEFORE** they even see your performance.

Sportsmanship and Common Sense

OM is designed to be kid friendly. At the same time, remember it’s a competition, a very busy environment and can be stressful for everyone. Judges are volunteers and not always OM experts. Coaches should teach their team to be tolerant, helpful, and respectful of everyone. It will make for a better day for all!

Registration and Check-In

Plan to arrive at the site about 90 minutes before your first event. Don’t be rushed – the team will be nervous enough without adding time pressure.

There will be a registration table set up near the entrance for the coach to check in the team(s). (*Kids can wait away from the table!*) Coaches should receive the final tournament schedule, a map of the tournament site, and a certificate of participation for each team member. This paperwork may vary from tournament to tournament.

Check The Schedule

Be sure to re-check the schedule for your Long-Term performance time and your Spontaneous time. In rare instances, there could be a last minute time change. The original schedule is typically made public around two weeks before competition. You will be notified by your Regional Director via an email when the schedule is available.

Find Your Competition Areas

Having your team physically view the performing areas can help reduce their anxiety.

In the Long Term area find the Staging Area; check out the stage orientation in the performance area; where the judges will be, where the audience will be sitting, etc. Remember, the team performs for the judges first, the audience second! If time permits, have the team watch a performance and then discuss how they might need to adjust their performance (i.e. speak louder) or prop placement (i.e. facing the judges) to the venue. Don't forget to allow your team to make the decisions about how to proceed. OA can be an issue.

In the Spontaneous area, find the check-in table. Try to arrive 20 minutes prior to your competition time.

Be aware that it is important to be quiet when you are near the Long Term and Spontaneous competition areas, so that you do not disturb teams that are competing.

Costumes and Props

There will be a 'drop off' area for props as well as a "staging" area where they can be assembled and organized.

You need to find a parking place to unload your props from your vehicle(s), and where you can leave personal items/things not brought onstage during your Long Term performance.

A judge will be monitoring the Staging area. Be extra careful about Outside Assistance.

- Parents/Coaches **can** help bring props *as far as the Staging Area* and can assist the team in removing their props for the performance area after the performance is completed.
- Parents/Coaches **cannot** help with costumes, make-up, assembly of props, etc. *Do not even hand someone a piece of duct tape – make sure they know where things are and can get it themselves!!*

Find a place (usually it's a restroom) near your Long Term performance area where team members can change into their costumes and do their hair/make up/etc. *(Remember, team members must do their own hair and make up.)*

Structure Problem

If you are doing the Structure Problem, there will be an extra step. Each team will have a determined "weigh-in" time when they must present their structure to be weighed and reviewed for compliance with the rules. This will be specified in the official schedule and is generally about an hour before performance.

Teams are generally allowed some time to fix any problems identified in the weigh-in. Bring sandpaper or heat (a hair dryer will do – it removes water from the wood)

if you are concerned about your structures height or weight and always have a back-up structure. *(One team used a pottery oven to dry out their structure. They confused Fahrenheit and Centigrade when setting the temperature and burned down the structure. The backup really helped that year!)*

Surprises

Have a plan for any surprises. Props will break, items won't work, etc. Talk about this before the competition so the kids will be expecting it.

For the task-oriented aspects of a problem, the Team should spend a fair amount of time considering what might go wrong, how they can guard against these events and what they might do to recover from them. One of the most empowering feelings a Team can have is to overcome some minor catastrophe.

- Make an Emergency Kit with extra parts, duct tape, tools, etc.
- Work with the team to develop a contingency plans for each likely issue
- Review your "what-ifs" -- agree on who is the responsible for each contingency (*e.g. Sarah is in charge of the Emergency Kit, Billy and Janette know how to reassemble the backdrop, etc.*) both before and during the performance.
- Discuss what they should do when things go wrong during the performance. Remember, the judges do not know what is supposed to happen. If it's not related to a scored component, sometimes it's better just to move on and ignore the failure; especially if it is not related to a scored item.

Being prepared lowers anxiety and prevents panic. One of the most deflating experiences is to have something pop up that leaves them "dead in the water" in the middle of their presentation at the competition. Even if nothing goes wrong, having contingency plans to allow for the "*show must go on*" in spite of equipment failures will help a Team to feel that much more confident.

Remind them that one issue won't ruin their day (*and do not let it ruin yours!*) Things happen when kids are involved – roll with it.

At the Last Minute...

Assign a team member to review the "last minute list" with the team in the final moments before they go on-stage. Do they have all the props, especially small pieces? Are they all agreed on the response to "*Team, are you ready?*" Are they clear on any last minute changes they may have made? Etc.

Long-Term Process

1. Team drops off props etc. and delivers to Staging Area. The staging judge will direct you and explain the process. When in doubt - ask questions!
2. Once you are “next up to perform” be ready to move your props into the performance area. Have assignments about who carries each prop and where it will be placed.
3. Generally, you will move your props directly from the staging area to the performance. However, some sites will require an interim step. For example, a large gym may have a staging area in the hallway and an interim holding spot inside the gym.
4. When directed by the Judge, the team will move its props to the edge of the performance area and prepare to perform.
5. After the introduction, the team will be asked, “*Team, are you ready?*” The team responds with a Group response – make it funny and appropriate to your skit or problem (*e.g. if your skit is set in Flintstone like pre-historic times, you might say “We are ready to rock!!”*)
6. The Judge announces “Begin.” The time clock will start on your eight minutes and the team should begin moving props on to the performance area and can begin performing. (*Remember, time starts at “Begin,” not when the team begins performing. Include the set up time in your practices*)
7. Once the performance is completed, the judges will engage the team in conversation and ask questions about the performance. Although this can be stressful to some kids, others will enjoy talking about their accomplishments and the judges try hard to make it enjoyable.

Prepare the team – it’s best to have the person who had the idea or built the prop to answer any questions about it. Teach the team to steer the judges to that person – “*Oh, Mariah built that, let’s go talk to her and she can explain it the best.*” The judges expect this and aren’t concerned with it.

Do the little things well... clean up the area after you compete, move your props (Parents can help) promptly out of the way to make room for the next team, etc. It gets noticed!

Getting Scores

Coaches will be told how long to wait before returning to the Long Term area to pick up their scores. The Head Judge will release the scores only to the team coach.

Coaches have 30 minutes after receiving their scores to return to the judge with any questions. Remember that the scores are relative – you won’t know how the judges scored other teams so try not to make assumptions about your score before the ceremony. (*A local team once received a 35-point penalty in Long-Term due to misunderstanding the problem. The kids wanted to go home but they stayed for the Awards Ceremony. Despite the penalty... they won both Spontaneous and Style by wide margins and finished First anyway!*)

Style scores and Spontaneous scores are not given out until after the Awards Ceremony. Tournament officials get the scores posted as soon as possible on the OM website.

OM Scoring

OM uses an approach to scoring using raw scores (*numbers given by judges*) as a relative measure. The raw scores are then translated into final scores that give the team with the highest raw score the maximum points available (e.g. 50 for Style) and then re-scores the remaining team on a pro-rata basis.

For example, if your team scores a 40 in Style and the top team scores a 44 (or ten percent higher), that first place team scores will adjusted to 50 (the maximum) and your team would be adjusted on a pro-rata basis to 45 ($40/44*50$).

If There Is a Rule or Scoring Problem

Remember, judges are human and many are judging for the first time (especially at a Regional Competition). Problems, misunderstandings or other issues may arise that surprise or disappoint your team. Handle them calmly – in most cases there are mechanisms to deal with them.

If an issue arises with your performance, for example a penalty, the Coach can talk to the Head Judge to understand the reason for the penalty and present any clarification or explanation that might address it.

The Head Judge works for a Problem Captain who oversees this problem for all three divisions. They may also be helpful in resolving issues so don't hesitate to ask to speak with them.

If the Judge/PC cannot help resolve the issue, and your team feels strongly that they are correct in their approach, the Team can request a Tribunal. In a Tribunal, the team presents their argument and a panel of officials (not the original judges) makes a determination. This is designed to be a fair and “kid-friendly” process. Just remember – the goal of the Tribunal it to be fair to your team and to ALL teams. Tribunal members may be sympathetic to your team's situation but cannot easily remedy it while being fair to all the teams competing.

Other Important Stuff

Give the team time to check out the Odyssey souvenir tables. They may want to buy their items early — popular items sell out fast!

There are usually snacks/drinks and sometimes lunch items available for purchase at the tournament, though some teams bring their own food and have a picnic with parents and team members.

One of the best things to do with your “down time” is to go and watch other teams perform their Long Term solutions. It's fun to see some problems other than your

own, and to see different divisions than your own. Watching other teams perform can be an eye opening experience. This all becomes part of the learning process of participating in OM. Team members can really appreciate the efforts of other teams while they watch their creative solutions!

Awards Ceremony

Teams, coaches, family, and friends all feel the excitement when they come to the Awards Ceremony! It is best to get there early, so you can all sit together. Remind everyone that scores can be delayed for many different reasons, so it's important to be patient.

The Awards Ceremony will have some general announcements, *OMER Awards* and *Ranatra Fusca Awards*, as well as the tournament results. *(It always seems like the results of your problem/division are announced last!)* Teams that win a *Ranatra Fusca Award* for exceptional creativity automatically move on to the next level Tournament!

Please stay until all results are announced — everyone deserves your applause.

If Your Team Advances...

Teams that finish in either First or Second place advance to the next level – either the State Tournament or World Finals! There is usually a short meeting for teams advancing from the State Tournament to World Finals, right after the completion of the Awards Ceremony to explain the steps necessary to position your team to move on. All coaches that have teams advancing to World Finals should attend this meeting.

Getting ready for States (or better yet, Worlds) is also a time when a Coach can provide leadership to the team. Take a hard look at your scores. Earlier, we emphasized coaching to the problem scores and now you will have direct feedback on how well your team focused on the points.

- Look for area where you lost points and identify how you might improve. Replace a prop, reinforce important points in your solution, be more obvious in pointing out required steps or items, etc.
- Determine if your named Style items are the correct choices or if they can be improved. Remember - recycled materials always help.
- Look at your Style Form – does the team's input to the Judges point them at the right elements? Do you lead the Judges to what's important? Is it specific *(the accent the character uses... the use of recycled materials...)*
- Do not forget Spontaneous. States and World competitors are all top-notch teams – a few points in Spontaneous can be the difference.

The changes your team decides to make, and the level of work they decide to put, can make the difference!

Odyssey of the Mind Coaches Guide

Attachments

These Attachments are meant to supplement the information provided in the base document. Some are stand-alone OM articles found on the web and adapted for use here. Therefore, although there may be some redundancy in the detail, we hope you find these to present a valuable view of the topics covered

1. SCAMPER – Creativity Technique

Substitute

What can you substitute? What can be used instead? Who else instead? What other ingredients? Other material? Other process? Other power? Other place? Other approach? Other sounds? Other forces?

Instead of ... I can ...

Combine

What can you combine or bring together somehow? How about a blend, an alloy, an assortment, an ensemble? Combine units? Combine purposes? Combine appeals? Combine ideas?

I can bring together ... and ... to ...

Adapt

What can you adapt for use as a solution? What else is like this? What other idea does this suggest? Does past offer a parallel? What could I copy? Who could I emulate?

I can adapt ... in this way ... to ...

Modify

Can you change the item in some way? Change meaning, color, motion, sound, smell, form, shape? Other changes?

Also: Magnify: What can you add? More time? Greater frequency? Stronger? Higher? Longer? Thicker? Extra value? Plus ingredient? Duplicate? Multiply? Exaggerate?

And: 'Minify': What can you remove? Smaller? Condensed? Miniature? Lower? Shorter? Lighter? Omit? Streamline? Split up? Understate?

I can change ... in this way ... to

Put to other uses

How can you put the thing to different or other uses? New ways to use as is? Other uses if it is modified?

I can re-use ... in this way ... by ...

Eliminate

What can you eliminate? Remove something? Eliminate waste? Reduce time? Reduce effort?

Cut costs? I can eliminate ... by ...

Rearrange

What can be rearranged in some way? Interchange components? Other pattern? Other layout? Other sequence? Transpose cause and

What can be rearranged in some way? Interchange components? Other pattern? Other layout? Other sequence? Transpose cause and effect? Change pace? Change schedule?

I can rearrange ... like this ... such that ...

Example: I want to invent a new type of pen.

Substitute - ink with iron, nib with knife

Combine - writing with cutting, holding with opening

Adapt - pen top as container

Modify - body to be flexible

Put to other uses - use to write on wood

Eliminate - clip by using velcro

Rearrange - nib to fold outwards

2. What Makes a Successful Team?

OM cannot be about winning. Only two teams advance from the Regional's to the State Tournament. Only two more advance to Worlds. OM should be about learning, making friends, having fun and discovering new things about yourself.

At the same times, everyone wants to win. Despite the saying, in OM winning isn't "everything" and it's certainly not the "only thing" – the program provides too much of a learning experience for that to be true. However, kids certainly want to win and nobody can deny that winning is fun! Based on 20 years of OM tournaments, here are some characteristics of teams that are successful at competition so that you, as a Coach, can understand how to help your team be in a position to win. The results will take care of themselves.

Successful teams....

Like each other. Teams with chemistry work better together and that shows in their performance. Make team building a priority.

Go the extra mile. Most OM competitions are close and teams advance or stay home based on just a few points. Winning teams look for, and find, those last few tweaks that make the difference. Good coaches teach kids to pay attention to details, details, details!!

Pay close attention to the problem. So often teams work hard on their performance and lose sight of what the judges will be scoring. It's true that the overall effect of the performance will impact the judges. However, judges sit with a scorecard that requires them to look for and score the required elements. Adapt your effort accordingly – focus on scored items.

Do well in Spontaneous. Among OM veterans, it's a truism that Spontaneous is the deciding factor in most competitions. There is a random element to Spontaneous. You do not know what the problem will be or if it's one that your team will respond well to -- but you do want to know that your team is well prepared.

Are truly outside the box. Judges sit all day watching teams. They are looking for creativity. To get them to sit up and take notice the best teams take risks, push the envelope and force judges to think and notice them. This can be done with the inventiveness of the skit, use of recycled or unusual materials, humor, over-the-top acting, clever dialogue or any number of other ideas.

Do not accept the problem as written. Teams learn over time to look for what the problem doesn't say, reinterpret what it does say and find ways to make the judges stop and think about what they just witnessed. If you make the judge think, they become engaged and energized about your team. Great solutions are often on the edge of the rules – use clarifications to make sure you do not go over the edge.

Find a hook. Use music or art or an amazing character to capture attention. Great OM performances can be described in a sentence – “*The team with the _____ was amazing!*”

Here are some great examples of creative OM teams:

Team that performed their entire skit as a silent movie - no dialogue at all. They became World Champions.

Team that was required to build a vehicle that “included wheels.” Built a vehicle that moved on rotating rails and was powered by rowing. It used “wheels” as decoration so it did “include” wheels! Won a Ranatra Fusca.

Team that was required to build a “human powered” vehicle – the team built a bicycle style vehicle that ran on batteries that the team built. A “human” team member peddled the bike to charge the batteries before the performance. (Note – a clarification was critical for this out of the box solution.) Finished 2nd at Worlds.

Team that noted that the Structure rules mandated an 8-inch-tall structure at weigh-in but did not specifically require that it remain 8 inches tall during the competition. They built a structure that would shrink when used in the performance (shorter structures are stronger). Unfortunately, they did not get a clarification and significant judging issues arose. However, they eventually competed at Worlds. The worldwide rules for structure were changed the next year – all due to one team pushing the envelope by looking at what wasn’t said.

Team that build a backdrop as a box that could be rotated, opened and closed to present multiple different sets. It even had one side that was a restaurant with two team members inside taking orders through a window! The team won a Ranatra Fusco award for creativity and finished 2nd at Worlds.

Team that.... (PUT YOUR TEAM HERE!)

3. If Brainstorming Doesn't Work...

***EVER BEEN IN A MEETING WHERE ONE LOUDMOUTH'S
MEDIocre IDEA DOMINATES? THEN YOU KNOW
BRAINSTORMING NEEDS AN OVERHAUL.***

Brainstorming, in its current form and by many metrics, doesn't work as well as the frequency of "team brainstorming meetings" would suggest it does.

***EARLY IDEAS TEND TO HAVE DISPROPORTIONATE
INFLUENCE OVER THE REST OF THE CONVERSATION.***

Sharing ideas in groups isn't the problem; it's the "out-loud" part that, ironically, leads to groupthink, instead of unique ideas. *"As great as brainstorming is, with people popping like champagne with ideas, what actually happens is when one person is talking you're not thinking of your own ideas,"* Leigh Thompson, a management professor at the Kellogg School, told Fast Company. *"Sub-consciously you're already assimilating to my ideas."*

That process is called "anchoring," and it crushes originality. *"Early ideas tend to have disproportionate influence over the rest of the conversation,"* Loran Nordgren, also a professor at Kellogg, explained. *"They establish the kinds of norms, or cement the idea of what are appropriate examples or potential solutions for the problem."*

Because brainstorming favors the first ideas, it also breeds the least creative ideas, a phenomenon called conformity pressure. People hoping to look smart and productive will blurt out low-hanging fruit first. Everyone else then rallies around that idea both internally and externally. Unfortunately, that takes up time and energy, leaving a lot the best thinking undeveloped. We've all been in meetings like this: Some jerk says the obvious thing before anyone else, taking all of the glory; everyone else harrumphs. Brainstorm session over.

To avoid these problems, both Thompson and Nordgren suggest another, quieter process: ***brainwriting***. The general principle is that idea generation should exist separate from discussion. Although the two professors have slightly different systems, they both offer the same general solution: write first, talk second.

Brainstorming works best if before or at the beginning of the meeting, people write down their ideas. Then everyone comes together to share those ideas out loud in a systematic way. Thompson has her participants post all the ideas on a wall, without anyone's name attached and then everyone votes on the best ones. *"It should be a meritocracy of ideas,"* she said. *"It's not a popularity contest."* Only after that do people talk.

This write first, discuss later system eliminates the anchoring problem because people think in a vacuum, unbiased by anyone else. Of course, people still jot down the most obvious ideas, which aren't necessarily bad ideas. But in brainstorming the goal is quantity, not quality. To avoid spending too much time on repetitive suggestions, people using Candor only present ideas someone else hasn't already said.

***IN MOST MEETINGS WITH TRADITIONAL BRAINSTORMING,
A FEW PEOPLE DO 60-75% OF THE TALKING. WITH
BRAINWRITING, EVERYONE GETS A CHANCE.***

In studies, brainwriting groups generated 20% more ideas and 42% more original ideas as compared to traditional brainstorming groups, she writes in her book *Creative Conspiracy*. "I was shocked to find there's not a single published study in which a face-to-face brainstorming group outperforms a brainwriting group," she said. In Nordgren's research he has found that the process leads to more diverse and candid ideas.

Discussion still has its merits, but should only take place after the group has generated a variety of distinct ideas with which to work. Raw ideas rarely work. It's the permutation and combination of the outlandish and banal that lead to the best proposals. "Usually the best idea that is selected at the end isn't exactly what anyone came up with at the beginning; the idea has been edited," Nordgren added.

The best part of introverted thinking, however, is that it cuts down on what I'll call the "loudmouth meeting-hog phenomenon." You know the type: the person who, along with one or two other people, dominates the conversation. Studies have found that in most meetings with traditional brainstorming, a few people do 60-75% of the talking. With brainwriting, everyone gets a chance.

4. Creating a Successful Style Presentation

1. Treat the creation of the style performance as a "spontaneous" problem.

For example, for the structure problem called "A New Twist," think of everything that could twist, including licorice, the dance, Oliver Twist. Perhaps you could perform a story that was filled with twists and turns.

2. Think about the strengths and weaknesses of the team.

Have them list their individual strengths, then have the rest of the team talk about what each person can do well. You may discover that someone has a vast knowledge of the Civil War - can that be used in the style presentation? Can someone compose original music? Can they write poetry? If a member is a gymnast, think about whether their skill can be incorporated. Conversely, if painting is not a strength, you may want to think about working with other media. If the team wants music but no one sings well, can they talk or rap the song? Although you cannot suggest these uses, the questions "How could we use Billy's talent?" or "How can we get around our lack of musicians?" may bring the team to some creative solutions.

3. Have the team get an image of what they would like their performance to look and feel like.

Do they want it to be funny? Poignant? Dramatic? Colorful? Stark? Use this as an opportunity to set goals for the team, and refer to the list as you go about creating the style presentation. If the team says they want their style to involve large props, items that move and a black & white motif, is that what they are developing? They may want to refine the list as they go on, but prominently posting the list can help in guiding the creation of the style presentation.

4. Pay attention to details.

Practice setting up... practice again. Then practice again. A refined set-up creates a good tone for the performance and gives it polish. Each team member should know what their job is and where they should be. Who will plug in the extension cord? When will the background be brought in?

Add special touches that reflect care and elaboration. If you are using music, does it relate to the style or is it just "there"? Are the props on the stage for a reason or just to fill space?

5. Plan... plan... plan...

Look at "what-if" situations. What if the scenery falls down? What if someone gets laryngitis? What if the structure doesn't break? What if the vehicle runs into an obstacle? Thinking about these possibilities ahead of time can make the team more relaxed if something should actually happen.

The most important part of the planning is reading the problem and the rules. Every year teams are penalized because they did not read the problem or did not understand the rules.

6. *Style presentations should be seen and heard.*

Can the judges hear the actors? Practice projection by standing in the back of the room and seeing if you hear what the performing members are saying. Can your props be seen? Detail is great but make sure that the value in your props can be recognized at a distance. Do specific, noticeable physically or vocal things that call attention to aspects of the performance you want noticed.

7. *Make sure the forms are filled out in advance and tell your story.*

Think about the items you want the judges to score. In each problem this year, the team has the choice of two items, there is overall effect, and two items are predetermined. Have the team think critically about their presentation. Remember that the judges are looking for creativity. A team member may play the violin very well, but this is considered "talent" and not creativity. If, however, they write the composition that will be played, or the violin is creating "noise" essential to the skit, judges will see this as being more creative. (*Point that out - "The use of the violin to create the sound of traffic in the street scene."*) Each year there are teams that score very well or very poorly in style, often because of the way they have completed their style forms. Call attention to your strengths. If there is a known weakness to your performance, do not ask to have it judged.

Remember that judges only have a few moments to read the section about how the style relates to the problem solution. They shouldn't have to wonder what your performance means or what you were getting at. Make it clear.

8. *Be unique.*

Ask the team if they think their theme will be unusual or if everyone else will think of it. Some of our best ideas came from looking at our brainstorming list and putting together parts that do not seem to go together.

Common themes are okay if they can be handled in a novel way. Novelty, however, is the key. Some themes that the judges will see a lot: Star Trek, Star Wars, Harry Potter, popular Game shows, Reality shows, Disney themes, etc.

If the team is very clever in its presentation (e.g., through satire or parody) these can work, but think about whether this is really going to be unique.

9. *Remember who the judges are.*

Judges are adults. Ask the team if adults will find what they are doing funny. Adults usually do not find toilet jokes funny, although fourth graders may think they are hysterical. Beware smacking each other and running around aimlessly. A talented team can pull off a Keystone Kops routine with style, but this can run the risk of looking disorganized (and knocking down props along the way).

10. Be sensitive.

Humor is subjective. Think about whether what you do and say may offend someone. Ask the team whether anyone's feelings might be hurt by this presentation.

Be aware of language. Are there potential slurs or words adults consider swears in the performance? This may work against your performance. Many judges are also offended by gratuitous violence. If a "fight" helps tell a story or establish a character, look for alternatives or a way to make the fight comedic or satirical.

It is the team's choice as to how they present themselves, but you can reasonably ask if anyone might be offended by their performance. They may still choose to proceed in the same way, but they have been forewarned. However, draw the line if it's clear the team is doing something truly offensive, even if their intent is innocent.

11. Watch other performances.

YouTube is a great source of old OM performances. Appreciate what teams have done well. Watch teams that are competing in different problems as well as your own; it will help in establishing the criteria for what makes something creative.

12. Keep a lot of stuff in your house.

You never know what you'll need. Go to your local recycling center and collect up assorted "junk". You can never tell which items will become just the right treasure. Some supplies that you might want to have handy are:

- refrigerator and other cardboard boxes
- duct tape
- Velcro fasteners
- paint brushes,
- primer paint
- drop clothes (*your garage floor will thank you!*)
- standard workshop tools: screwdrivers, hammer, pliers
- glue gun and glue sticks,
- tape measure,
- nails and screws, hooks and eyes,
- band or fabric,
- saws, utility and x-acto knives
- paper towel rolls,
- aluminum foil,
- pie pans
- poster board
- markers
- masking tape
- newspapers (to protect work areas and for paper-mache)
- white and carpenter's glue
- old white sheets

- And, most importantly, pizza!

13. Read all program materials carefully.

Make sure that the team understands what they are to do. Read and be familiar with this year's program guide. Read and re-read the problem. Don't lose points because of carelessness in following rules.

14. Be wary of things that are "good enough".

Think high quality. Ask the team repeatedly, "Is there anything you can do to make this better?" Encourage them to stretch and surpass what they ever thought they could do. Have them evaluate what they think they might score on each element; it may point up their strengths and/or shortcomings and encourage the team to put that little extra into their performance.

5. Examples of Outside Assistance

The following are **EXAMPLES** of possible Outside Assistance along with the determination if such an event would in fact be OA. They are taken from the Odyssey of the Mind web site.

SCENARIO For a Division I team, A parent plugs in a power tool for one of the students as it is a rule in their house that no children are allowed to plug in any appliance.

QUESTION: Is it outside assistance (OA) for any non-team member to plug in a power tool that the team uses to complete their solution to the problem?

ANSWER: No, the only prohibition against this would be if it were done during the timed competition period. The parent may not use the power tool to work on the problem solution.

SCENARIO: A team decided they would revolve their skit around a CELL theme. The coach gives them a homework assignment to come up with all of the words they could with CELL in them like CELLophane, CELLular Phone, etc.

QUESTION: Is it OA for a coach to give a homework assignment that gets the kids to think more creatively about an initial idea that they came up with?

ANSWER: Although the coach should not give any examples, the assignment is one of the types of things the coach should do.

SCENARIO: Judge stops team's performance in long term because the vehicle used is marking the floor. Children are allowed to push. At end of performance parents standing outside the taped area lift the car to spare the floor.

QUESTION: Is it OA for any non-team member to help with props after the performance has ended?

ANSWER: No, the only time the team may not have help with prop movement is during the timed competition period. (You asked me to cite the pertaining rules -- I would ask where a rule exists that prohibits this.)

SCENARIO: Coach and two team members (nonparticipants) watching their team's performance of long-term solution.

QUESTION: Is it outside assistance for one of the nonparticipating team members to point out to the coach that the team forgot to use a prop?

ANSWER: No, so long as none of the performers hear the remark but YES if the judges rule the remark was intended to be heard by the performers.

SCENARIO: Four of seven team members on a team in one Odyssey year build some backdrops for

use in their presentation. These same four are on a team the following year with three new members.

QUESTION: Is it OA for the new team to use the backdrops built in the prior year? May a team use props from a prior year in any situation without incurring an OA penalty?

ANSWER: Props may be used from year to year as is ONLY if the team is of entirely the same composition. -- That is, no new team members and none that are no longer on the team. The work must be that of all the current team members regardless of when it was done.

SCENARIO: Kids put 2 boards together perpendicularly (4th graders) with screws and nails, but it keeps falling apart.

QUESTION: Is it OA to ask an adult who is familiar with carpentry what kinds of things in carpentry can be done to brace the boards? (Going on the principle that if it can be found with research, an adult can tell them.)

ANSWER: An adult can tell and show the team members various ways to brace the boards as long as s/he does not show them specifically what to do for their problem solution.

SCENARIO Team members decide to narrate a good deal of the problem.

QUESTION: Is it OA for the coach to ask them if they can think of other ways to tell a story, rather than reading a piece of paper?

ANSWER: This is part of coaching. The coach is not telling them the solution. S/he is only trying to stimulate their thinking.

SCENARIO: During check-in the coach hands the paperwork to the pre-staging judge.

QUESTION: Is it OA for the coach to hand the paperwork to the pre-staging judge?

ANSWER: Although it is always good to have the team members' hand in the paperwork, there is no prohibition against having the coach hand it to the judge.

SCENARIO: As the team deliberates on what their solution will be, the coach asks questions to make sure that their solution is well thought out.

QUESTION: Is it OA for the coach to ask questions as the team is developing their solutions?

ANSWER: NO--that's what a coach is for!!

SCENARIO: A Division I team is spray-painting a prop.

QUESTION: Is it OA for the coach to hold a team member's for about 2 seconds (Out of a 30 minute job) to help show the proper way to spray paint?

ANSWER: Only if s/he is not spraying the item that will be used as part of the problem solution. S/he must use another item (perhaps a scrap piece of paper or wood) to give this lesson.

SCENARIO: A Division I balsa wood team has a sheet of paper describing the order to put weights on (smaller diameter first then larger, so as to allow hand grip space). Kids composed the form (came up with the idea) but coach actually wrote it.

QUESTION: Is it OA for a non-team member to write down the instructions used by team members during their presentation? Is this any different than the coach completing the style form for Division I?

ANSWER: As long as the team members provided the information, it is okay for the coach to write it out. -- It is NOT different from the rules for the style form.

SCENARIO: A Division I team is brainstorming their solution.

QUESTION: Is it OA for the coach to write down their ideas for later review?

ANSWER: This is a good idea. The only rule surrounding this is that the coach may only write down what the team members say.

SCENARIO: A division I team needs to move a 4'x8' sheet of plywood from the garage to a workshop area.

QUESTION: Is it OA for a non-team member to move the plywood for them?

ANSWER: No, this is OK

SCENARIO: A team is working on a structure problem that can be reasonably broken into sub-components. The coach devises and builds a testing apparatus that allows each of these components to be tested.

QUESTION: Is it OA for the coach to devise and build these testers?

ANSWER: Yes, the team may use any types of devices to TEST their solutions.

[Editor Note. The above answer appears confusing saying that "Yes" it is OA, but follows saying it is OK to use any types. There is a similar question later on that would imply this answer was meant to say it is not OA and "Yes" the team may use these testers.]

SCENARIO: A coach prepares a simple, generic demonstration of an engineering concept and that concept is immediately applied by the kids into their structural design (i.e. a simple demonstration of how a truss withstands lateral loads better than a frame).

QUESTION: Does the presentation of an engineering concept represent OA in this circumstance?

ANSWER: As stated yes. The coach would have to present several options of construction. S/he could demonstrate how each fails, but the team members must draw their own conclusions.

SCENARIO: If an "engineering practice" is interpreted by a coach to make it applicable to the current problem (i.e. the engineering practice of material quality assurance could be translated into inspecting and sorting balsa prior to its use in a structure).

QUESTION: Does the interpretation of HOW to apply general engineering practice to a problem represent OA?

ANSWER: No, not as described.

SCENARIO: With proper training, it is possible to examine a structure and determine which element failed first and why.

QUESTION: Is it OA for someone other than a team member to examine a failed structure and provide this information for the team?

ANSWER: This person may tell the team members what part failed; however, s/he cannot tell the team why it failed or what to do to keep it from failing in the future.

SCENARIO: A team member tells the adult who is helping to stack weights that he is going to go help resolve a problem with a prop. The adult verbally acknowledges that statement with the affirmation "sure, go ahead".

QUESTION: Does this represent OA?

ANSWER: No. The team member has made the decision to do this. It would be outside assistance if the adult said something like, "Weight placement is more important, just stay here and continue with this" or if the adult initiated the conversation by telling the team member to go help with the prop.

SCENARIO: A younger sibling has been following with interest the experiments, designs and "tricks of the trade" of an older siblings team.

QUESTION: Can the younger sibling adopt the many "lessons learned" from following an older siblings team around for several years without incurring OA?

ANSWER: This is OK to do as long as the younger sibling does not produce exact thematic copies.

SCENARIO: A team is getting ready for spontaneous competition. The coach picks problems for them to work that s/he thinks will be representative of the type they will get. The coach tells them whether they made a good response or a bad one. The team is given constant, direct feedback on the quality or lack of quality of their spontaneous solutions.

QUESTION: Is it OA for the coach to prepare their team for spontaneous competition in this manner?

ANSWER: No, a good coach would always do this.

SCENARIO An Odyssey team wants to paint some props. There is some paint that was left over from last year, but the colors were mixed by last year's team.

QUESTION Would it be outside assistance for a team to use something that was made by someone else even though essentially the same thing could easily be bought by any team?

ANSWER This is not outside assistance as it is not the prop itself.

SCENARIO Kids get to WF and are uncrating their scenery and props (unscrewing the crates).

QUESTION Is it OA for the coach to tell the team what order to do everything in (I know they can help do it but does a team member have to tell the adult to do it?). Can the coach point out things that broke and ask if the team is going to repair them? I don't know if it makes a difference, but this is a Div 1 team.

ANSWER It is okay for the coach to tell the team what order to uncrate things. It is also okay for the coach to point out things that broke and ask if the team wishes to try and repair them. However, from that point on it is up to the team members to decide whether and how to make repairs. (This is true for any division.)

SCENARIO Coach asks each team member to read one of the elements of the problem and explain what it means.

QUESTION Is it OA for the coach (Div 1) to write each element on a piece of paper and ask the team to group the elements so that they now have a bubble diagram which organizes the elements? Once the team organizes the elements, can the coach copy it down, make copies of it and distribute it to each team member?

ANSWER (Any division) It is okay for the coach to write down the elements, ask the team to group them and copy the grouping and distribute copies to the team members. The coach may not add or change anything however.

SCENARIO Team is brainstorming about all the things that make you think of tropical islands.

QUESTION Is it OA for the coach to put those ideas on a flip board for everyone to see.

ANSWER This is okay provided the coach writes only the team members' words.

SCENARIO Team is creating the script (Div 1).

QUESTION Is it OA for the coach to write down what they say so they can look at what they already have? (3rd and 4th graders simply can't write, yet.)

ANSWER This is okay in any division provided the coach writes only the team members' words.

SCENARIO Div 1 team is reading the Program Guide and cannot figure out what will happen if they have printed materials for the judges to read.

QUESTION Is it OA for the coach to help them figure out what the rule book is trying to tell them? Is it OA if the kids ask what the coach thinks it means? Is it OA if the team asks the coach what s/he would do if s/he were them?

ANSWER The coach should help them interpret the rule book. The coach may tell the team what s/he thinks it means. The coach cannot tell the team members what s/he would do unless the answer is "write for a problem clarification." However, s/he should encourage the team to think about what it means first.

SCENARIO Div 1 team has decided to use what they think is tasteful bathroom humor in their skit. The coach has made sure everyone is aware of the rule about vulgarity.

QUESTION The team doesn't think it's vulgar but does not have a clue what adults think is vulgar (TV examples abound in the arguments as examples of what adults think is acceptable). Is it OA for them to tell other adults what their jokes are and ask if they think it's vulgar?

ANSWER: No, this is okay to do.

SCENARIO The performance has been taped. Four kids think they need to schedule an extra practice; 3 think they do not. (Performance cannot be done with just 4.)

QUESTION Is it OA for the coach to make the decision? Is it OA for the coach to say 'majority rules'? Is it OA for the coach to say they must come to a consensus (meaning every person but 1 must agree)?

ANSWER It is up to the coach to make the decision or to decide on how the decision is to be made. Practice schedules are entirely within the coach's purview.

SCENARIO Team is at competition. They have composed the paperwork (Div 1) but coach has prepared it.

QUESTION Is it OA for the coach to carry the paperwork on competition day? Is it OA for the coach to hand the paperwork to the judge? Is it OA if the coach asks how the team intends to organize the paperwork so they can find it to give it to the judge?

ANSWER Although it is always good to have the team members hand in the paperwork, there is no prohibition against having the coach carry it and hand it to the judge. The coach may ask the team how it will organize its paperwork.

SCENARIO Div 1 team is having major problems figuring out how to keep track of information for their cost form.

QUESTION Can the coach ask what information they are trying to track, how best to track it and then prepare some sheets for them to use to write down all the information as they go? (Somewhat like the advanced coaches workbook forms)

ANSWER Yes, the coach may do this.

SCENARIO A goal for a team was to learn to take a complex problem apart, test each component in a controlled manner and then reintegrate the resulting solution and validate that it performed as expected.

QUESTION Is it OA for the coach to encourage the kids to approach the problem this way? Is it OA to build jigs or testers to facilitate testing the alternatives they come up with for their sub-components?

ANSWER The coach may encourage the kids to approach the problem in this way and s/he may make any TESTERS needed. However, s/he may not make jigs as they are construction aids.

SCENARIO It is summer time and the short version of next year's problems have been published, but the full version has not been published.

QUESTION Are there any limitations on what a Coach can or cannot do with regard to OA?

ANSWER No--The rules are the rules all year.

SCENARIO A team observed another team dressed up in chicken costumes that did very well. The next year the team decided to dress up as chickens.

QUESTION: Is it OA (NOT creative) to observe successful performances in one year and copy facets of it in the next?

ANSWER: No, it is not Outside Assistance.

SCENARIO A local group of several different Odyssey teams are convened for the purpose of practicing spontaneous problems. The coach of each team has prepared a different spontaneous problem to give to each of the teams.

QUESTION Are the coaches in this instance providing OA? If not, and the coaches score the teams, is this OA? If not, and the scores are provided back to the teams, is this OA?

ANSWER: None of these circumstances is outside assistance.

5. OM Resources

OM SITES ON THE WEB:

National Web site: **<http://www.odysseyofthemind.com>**

The National site has links to Odyssey sites all over the world, and materials you can order, plus downloads of forms and the Program Guide and a lot of other information! General Clarifications are posted here as well - make sure you don't miss them!

North Carolina Web site: **<http://ncom.org>**

The North Carolina OM website has links to regional web pages and other information. It's also where you register your team, have your Judges and Volunteers register and obtain tournament schedules and other important information.

It also includes links to each Regional NCOM organization. You'll use these links for Regional Tournament information!

STRUCTURE PROBLEM - BALSA WOOD

Balsa wood for the Structure Problem can be ordered on-line from multiple sources:

- Creative Competitions, Inc. (www.odysseyofthemind.com)
- SIG Manufacturing, 1-800-524-7805
- USA, 1-800-225-7287
- And other sources you may find on the Internet

Be sure you have a micrometer (or calipers) and scales for the team to use to measure and weigh wood. Be sure your team checks for itself to be sure wood meets specifications.

BOOKS on OM:

Books may be ordered from CCI on the Internet or by calling 1-856-256-2797

Some regions/states will have books available at Coaches' Trainings

Other helpful books can be ordered from Fox Imaging

(<http://foximaging.com/store>)

MATERIALS

One interesting way to find unusual resources is to do a "Scavenger Hunt" at second hand stores or other "interesting stores that sell used or unusual items. One great place is:

www.ScrapExchange.org 923 Franklin St. Durham, NC 2770, (919) 688-6960

HUMAN RESOURCES:

Beyond the various opportunities for Coaches to get support noted earlier, your Regional Directors are always available to answer questions. Their e-mail addresses may be found under "State Board" on the state website <http://ncom.org> .

6. Primary Problem

The Primary Problem is available for kids from Grades K-2. Teams present their solutions at tournaments in a non-competitive showcase where they interact with judges who provide feedback. Primary problems are designed to provide younger OM'ers with a comprehensive, fun, and instructional experience that helps introduce them to Odyssey of the Mind.

Coaching Primary is similar to Coaching any OM team – the difference is in the kids! Younger kids have shorter attention spans, less understanding of OM components like rules and processes, fewer experiences working in teams...and on and on. Joining a Primary team gives kids an opportunity to learn about such things in a low stress environment. Keep it that way – adapt your coaching to match the purpose of Primary – great experiences!

The key differences for Primary Coaches include:

- Problems are not scored at Regional Tournaments.
- The tournament is considered an exhibition where team can show what they have accomplished. It is not a competition.
- Some Regions may not include Spontaneous.
- Forms are optional and may be helpful but are not required.
- Feedback from Judges comes in the form of comments from Judges trained to be positive and encouraging.

The purpose of Primary, beyond fun for the team members (and Coaches!) includes:

- Learning about Odyssey and the OM process
- Experience planning a solution and creatively solving problems
- Experience understanding and following OM rules
- Spontaneous practice is a great learning experience for kids – and it's fun, too!

Some tips for Coaching Primary:

- Keep your meeting short and your expectations (and your Parent's) low.
- Involve parent more directly – it will help with small group projects.
- Focus on behavior – working in teams, speaking up, helping their teammates, listening, sharing, being creative, etc. These are the life lessons OM can build.
- Short, simple units of work will help. You have little attention spans at hand!
- Provide lots of materials and options – the learning is how to use these materials to solve the problem.
- Despite their age, the work should be the kids alone. Learning the premise of Outside Assistance (that the work must be from their ideas, done by them) will help them experiment and become willing to try new things. It's OK if its messy or the tree is pink!! It's their work – not yours or their parents.

And remember, in Primary OM, SNACKS are the best part! Good luck!!!