

Introduction

The mission of Creative Competitions, Inc. is to provide creative problem-solving opportunities for everyone and to foster original and divergent thinking. Through the Odyssey of the Mind program, we promote creativity by challenging teams to solve divergent problems, that is, those with more than one solution. By working in teams, participants learn teamwork, the appreciation and understanding of others, and that a group is a more powerful thinking force than an individual. They develop a sense of self-respect and respect for others through preparatory activities such as brainstorming and role-playing.

While the ultimate goal for most teams is to present their problem solutions in official competitions, this is not a requirement of participation. The purpose of the program is to provide students with an exciting learning experience that promises to be challenging and fun.

Chapter I

Welcome to the Odyssey of the Mind

Welcome to the Odyssey of the Mind creative problem-solving program. Whether this is your first experience with OotM or if you're a seasoned coach, it's important that you read this guide thoroughly. This guide is updated annually so please pay close attention to all sections, especially the General Rules section since those rules pertain to every team.

What is Odyssey of the Mind?

Odyssey of the Mind is a creative problem-solving competition for students of all ages. Teams of students select a problem, create a solution, then present their solution in a competition against other teams in the same problem and division. There are many nuances of the program that are explained further in this guide, but here are some of the basics of participation:

- ❶ Students work in teams of up to seven members under the guidance of an adult coach.
- ❷ Teams spend weeks or months, at their own pace, creating solutions to long-term problems. This includes Style enhancements described later in this guide.
- ❸ Team members come up with all the ideas for their solution and do all the work themselves. Coaches may help teach skills and educate the team on ways of approaching the problem and of evaluating their solution.
- ❹ Teams work within the cost limit stated in the problem.
- ❺ Teams have 8 minutes to present their long-term problem solution in competition.
- ❻ Teams are scored for meeting the requirements of the problem and for creativity in categories specific to each problem.
- ❼ At the competition teams are presented a spontaneous problem to solve on site.
- ❽ A team's standing in competition is determined by its combined Long-Term score, Style score, and Spontaneous score.
- ❾ To solve a problem, teams must follow the general rules in this guide, limitations in the problem, and clarifications issued during the year.
- ❿ The rules in this guide pertain to all the problems; any conflicting problem limitations supersede these rules, and clarifications issued throughout this program year supersede the rules and the problem limitations.

Getting the Most Out of Your Odyssey of the Mind Experience

The Odyssey of the Mind program is based on the premise that creativity can be taught. Can you think of anyone who fits any of these descriptions . . . the talented student that is “naturally” creative; the student whose talents require nurturing; the student who does not think of herself as creative, but feels she is “different” than her peers; or the student with untapped potential but no outlet for it to thrive? Odyssey of the Mind provides that outlet in an environment where almost every type of student will thrive.

You, as the coach, can provide the experiences for your team to reap the full benefits of participation in OotM. You will find many exercises in the following chapters that will help you to teach critical-thinking and creative problem-solving skills, but the program can provide much more than teaching students how to think: it augments the lessons taught in the classroom and allows students to apply what they’ve learned to different situations. In this time of budgetary cutbacks in the arts and other important areas, students can continue to learn art, music, creative writing, acting, and just about whatever else they’re interested in through incorporating those subjects into their long-term problem solution.

It’s important that coaches recognize the wealth of opportunity that comes with coaching a team. Your time spent with the students will make a difference in their lives. The team will learn more from their time in OotM than they imagined – and they’ll remember the good times they had in the process. And you, the coach, are the one to make that happen.

Good luck, and congratulations on becoming a coach.



Coaches are the driving force behind the team. While the members do all the work themselves, coaches are there to offer encouragement and to keep them on schedule. And when the students do well, the coaches feel just as proud for their accomplishments.

Coaching an Odyssey of the Mind Team

In OotM the coach plays a limited, but important, role. Each Odyssey of the Mind team must have at least one adult, 18 years of age or older, registered as its head coach. Having an assistant coach will lessen the demands assumed by one person. OotM does not assign coaches. The coach of a team is determined by the membership organization.

Who Can Coach?

Coaches come from all professions and from all walks of life. Although teams must have the support of the member school or organization, coaches do not have to be teachers. Frequently, a child's involvement in the program will generate the interest of the parents. Oftentimes, parents will start the Odyssey of the Mind program in their child's school and assume a coaching role as a way to get involved in their child's education.

Role of the Coach

Coaches must remember that Odyssey of the Mind is a “hands-on” activity for students and “hands-off” for adults. It's important that teams create their solutions without the help of others. There is value in letting teams succeed and fail on their own merits, especially when achievement is rated on effort, as much as on results. You, the coach, will offer guidance and encouragement, and teach team members how to explore possibilities, listen to others, learn from failures, and evaluate solutions effectively. However, you are not to give the team ideas or solve the problem for it. You will be amazed at what students can do on their own and, in the end, you'll be proud they did it themselves. And the students will amaze themselves and build self-esteem from knowing they did it on their own.

As the coach you will provide supervision and handle logistics such as scheduling meetings, making sure paperwork is done properly, getting the team to competition, teaching them how to solve differences, and so on. You may be responsible for recruiting and selecting team members. You'll want to make sure the team understands the limitations of its long-term problem and oversee brainstorming and spontaneous practice sessions. When team members get an idea, you can make sure they obtain the skills required to carry out that idea. You'll provide moral support. And . . . if something goes wrong, the team might need to rely on your guidance to *help them* make things right without actually fixing the problem for them. Be sure to read and re-read the problem and clarifications. Make sure the team reads them as well and recognizes what is being scored.

Getting Started

Sometimes, students will organize a team and then find an adult to coach. However, if you're a coach who is trying to put together a team, there are several ways to do this.

First, Generate Interest

Make sure you are familiar with the current year's long-term problems so you can present the ideas to the students. Duplicate and hand out the synopses found in the membership packet or at www.odysseyofthemind.com.

Ask teachers, school administrators, and/or parent groups to help identify students who are creative thinkers, who might enjoy being on a team, or who might benefit from a hands-on approach to learning. You may also choose to present an Odyssey of the Mind awareness session to the entire student body in an assembly and ask those interested to sign up to participate.

Another way to stimulate interest in the program is to ask teachers to conduct classroom lessons using Odyssey of the Mind materials. This will introduce a large number of students to the creative problem-solving process and bring new methods of learning into the classroom. Curriculum Activities found online are ideal for this and can be downloaded by anyone from www.odysseyofthemind.com.

Second, Form a Team

Ultimately, each membership is controlled by the school's or organization's administration, but the coach is responsible for selecting the best students for the team under the guidelines set by the administration. It's important to recognize that all students can benefit from participation in Odyssey of the Mind, and that performance in the classroom does not directly correlate with success in the program.

Many students have highly developed creative problem-solving abilities but do not have the opportunity to apply them in the classroom. Participation in Odyssey of the Mind removes the apprehension and self-consciousness that may inhibit students from becoming more involved in the classroom. Students who are not high achievers often discover, through solving Odyssey of the Mind problems, that the knowledge attained in school can be applied to many real-life situations, and they become more involved in the classroom as a result.

It's a good idea to involve students with different skills and abilities, so the team has a wide talent base to draw upon. This helps to build teamwork, because the members will learn to recognize and appreciate the abilities of others.

Whether you're trying to generate interest in the program or choosing from a well of eager students, here are a few suggestions on making that final decision of who should be on your team:

- Recruit as many students as possible, and allow them to form their own teams. When tournament time comes around, have teams compete against each other to determine who will represent the school. Of course, you can always purchase additional memberships and send all your teams to your tournament.
- Hold a creativity “play-off,” where candidates are presented with problems that require creative thinking. Those who enjoy the activity will enjoy being on a team.
- “Compose” each team with a selection of students with varying skills — for example, an artist, musician, computer expert, writer — depending on the nature of the problem.

Third, Meet the Parents

It's always a good idea to hold an initial meeting of team members and their parents. Most likely, the parents will support their child's involvement in the program and will want to help. It is very important, however, that you let them know their limitations. Make clear the rules for outside assistance. Stress that their children will reap the full benefits of creative problem solving if they create their solution themselves.

Parents need to understand what will be expected of them regarding money, time, transportation, and so on. Find out what days and times are convenient from a family perspective and develop a practice schedule accordingly. Make sure you inform the parents of the competition dates well ahead of time so they don't schedule activities that conflict with those dates.

Getting to know the parents is a way to learn about the resources, skills and facilities that they have to offer. Parents may be willing to teach skills that team members need to execute their solution — carpentry, sewing, dancing, etc. Parents can also supply general information on subjects such as engineering and scientific principles, and they are a good resource to serve as judges, scorekeepers, or tournament assistants.

You might want to have parents solve a hands-on spontaneous problem during the meeting to “break the ice” with each other and to demonstrate what their kids will be doing.

Fourth, Make a Schedule

After you’ve met with the parents and discussed time constraints and what they’re willing to contribute, set a schedule of team meetings that you’ll stick to as best as you can until the competition date approaches. You might want to meet one day during the week and on Saturday mornings for a couple of hours. As competition season draws near, you’ll probably want to increase the frequency of your practice sessions. Try not to have your meetings conflict with any of the team members’ curricular activities.

If you can meet as a team only once a week, make this a planning session where all team members give input into the solution, then assign different tasks to specific team members that they can work on at home. Make sure each team member has equal responsibilities. For example, one could write one scene of a skit and another team member could write another. One could make a costume, another could build a prop, and still another could create music.

Fifth, Train Your Team

Once you get the logistical matters in place, it’s time to start training your team on what the program is all about. Because students work in teams, they’ll need to learn how to work cooperatively. They will solve problems using their creativity, so teach them how to think more creatively. The following section gives an overview of team-building and creative-thinking techniques that you should employ in your team meetings and practice sessions.



Problem 3 judges discuss a team’s performance at World Finals.