

## Frequently Asked Questions for Coaches

*Note: The policies and procedures described here are for VOICES and the Virginia State Finals Tournament. Other associations and even individual Virginia regions may have slightly differing procedures. When in doubt about the long-term problem, send for a clarification. When in doubt about regional procedures, consult your regional director. When in doubt about your coaching sanity, take your team out for pizza ☺.*

### Q. How do I learn more about how to coach at team?

A. Each Virginia Odyssey region holds a training in mid-autumn. To learn where the closest training may be held, check the state website at <http://va.odysseyofthemind.org> and click on Regional Information on the main menu. Then, contact your regional director to be sure you are on his or her mailing list and to get information about regional trainings. You can also find your regional director's e-mail on the Virginia website, under "Board of Directors" on the main menu.

### Q. What, exactly, is "Style"?

A. Style is the third scored component of a long-term solution. Style scores are scaled to 50 points, with each of four categories receiving up to 10 points, and "Overall Effect" also receiving up to 10 points. Each team must fill out three copies of the "Style Form" to give the Staging Area judge(s) at each competition.

So ... what IS style, exactly? Style is the unique elements that each team adds to the basic long-term problem solution. There are one or two "mandatory" elements listed in section F of each long-term problem. Then the team may select other "free choice" elements.

The team should ask itself, "what have we made or done that is not scored in the long term problem specifically, but which enhances our presentation in a unique and 'stylish' way?" The answer may be a creative costume, a clever way of introducing themselves, an unusual use of materials ... almost anything may be listed for style score so long as it is not already included in elements scored in section E of the long-term problem.

### Q. Who reads the Style Form?

Only the officials who are judging style will read the Style Form. The Problem Judges will not see it, and therefore a team should use the space at the bottom of the form to better explain their Style elements, not a summary of the entire theme or script (unless that is a part of what they wish to have scored for Style, of course.)

### Q. My team started out full of enthusiasm, but now they are dragging their feet. What can I do to restore the initial fun and excitement?

A. Every team has periods of frustration: they often learn more from failure than success, but failure requires a time for regrouping and rethinking.

If your team doesn't seem to be happy with working on the problem, then talk to them honestly about it, and ask them: what is making this difficult for you right now?

Listen to their answers, help them identify the problem(s) and let THEM brainstorm solutions to the problem(s). They may need your help in asking the right questions. ("Is there something you worry that you cannot do?" "Do we need to meet longer/shorter time periods?", etc.)

They may need support in abandoning a plan altogether and starting all over again on something. No one likes to admit that something has failed, but you, as the coach, can encourage them to evaluate the vehicle that didn't run/the structure that didn't hold weight/the backdrop that won't stand up/the

costume that just doesn't look like a duck, and lead them to renewed interest in figuring out how to solve the problem.

Q. My team is working well on the problem solution, but is not working well TOGETHER. What can I do to help them get along?

This is a problem for every team once in awhile, and sometimes just a little fun activity and relaxation (like a pizza party or a "game day") will help them relax with one another again.

Sometimes, however, there are more fundamental issues. Team building activities might help these, to encourage them to trust one another. Even spontaneous activities can help build teamwork, but you might also want to look on the Internet or into books to find activities that will help.

Occasionally the problem is even more serious than helping the team to trust each other enough to work with one another. There may be one team member who is creating difficulties for all of the team. In this instance, you will need to step in and help them work this out. It may be necessary to enlist the aid of the parents, teachers at school, or the school counselor in more serious instances. Some Odyssey groups ask the students and parents to sign behavioral contracts. These are useful because they clearly lay out expectations, and enable a coach to request a team member be removed from a team if those expectations are not met without the decision seeming arbitrary.

The primary objective should be to identify teamwork issues before they become too great to solve, and to attempt some resolution.

Q. Why is my team's long-term performance time so long after / close to the spontaneous performance time?

A. It is extremely difficult to schedule a tournament so that every team's times are perfect! Keep in mind that spontaneous groupings may be different. (All of Problem 1 Division I may be grouped with all of Problem 2 Division I for spontaneous, for example. Every team in the same problem and division will have the same spontaneous judges ... but another problem and division may have the same judges as well.) Then, there are the teams who must have earlier or later times because of travel time, band festivals, or other difficulties. Next, there are teams who have siblings on another team and want to watch them, or coaches who coach two teams (and want to be with both teams for both long-term and spontaneous). And lastly, officials' lunch times must be staggered (because everyone cannot fit into the judges' lunchroom all at once). This makes for a number of scheduling difficulties when there are two portions of competition to schedule. (And yes, we use a computer program, but no, that does not always provide easy solutions to everyone's needs.)

Tournament directors attempt to allow at least 45 minutes or longer after spontaneous before a team's long-term performance to give time for getting props into the building and to the Check-in area. Less time is necessary between long-term and spontaneous if spontaneous is after long-term, since spontaneous does not require any props. If your team's times are too close together, then you should notify the regional (or state association) director, or tournament director. Less than 45 minutes before a long-term performance (after spontaneous) or less than 30 minutes before a spontaneous performance (after long-term) does not allow for a site's running late, and unless you requested such close scheduling (because of everyone's heading to a Band Festival, for example) you might be able to request a change. Otherwise, any such request will probably not be honored, since it would possibly mean changing the times of up to 10-20 other teams in both long-term and spontaneous (especially if spontaneous groupings are not the same as long-term groupings.) This is next to impossible.

If the times seem too far apart, this may be because of the need to juggle all the teams' times and because of special requests, etc. Take advantage of the break and watch some other teams, practice some spontaneous, or have lunch or a snack. Keep in mind that a tournament is not just two performance times for your team, but is a festival of creativity, and enjoy the day!!

Q. Why do some of the officials seem to be paying no attention to our performance? (If they are scoring us, shouldn't they be watching us?)

A. Fewer than half of the officials at any given tournament are actually scoring elements of a team's long-term performance. About one third of the officials are spontaneous officials (who, of course, don't see any long-term performances at all) and about one third more have positions that are non-scoring, such as Staging Area Judge, Score Compiler, Head Judge, Timekeeper, and so forth. All officials are vital to having a smoothly run tournament, but not all will be watching your team while they perform.

Q. Why can't we have a better long-term performance site with less noise pollution (better lighting, more space, etc.)?

A. It is extremely difficult to find a tournament site that has enough large areas for 8-10 long term sites, plus spontaneous rooms, plus parking and, especially, a space with seating capacity for 2,000 or more people for closing ceremonies. Even at World Finals, we have had performance sites in large universities where there were posts in the room, or small stages, or three performances in one large area with a lot of noise interference (such as the armory at the U. of Maryland.)

In an ideal world, we could build a facility just for Odyssey, but in the real world, we are confined by which school has a large enough gym or auditorium for closing, which school doesn't have a school play in the auditorium on the date in question, which school doesn't have athletics scheduled in the gym on days we want to have a tournament, and so forth.

Each team should be aware that performance conditions may be less than ideal and that they may have to adjust to poor acoustics or a small space: but solving problems and being positive about spontaneous challenges is what Odyssey is all about!

Officials will also know the difficulties teams are facing, and know that it is the same for all teams in their problem/division, and try to help things run as smoothly as possible.

Q. Why doesn't Virginia advance regional Ranatra Fusca winners to State Finals, or even invite second place teams from regionals to state finals?

A. Largely, this has to do with the previous question: very few tournament sites can accommodate more teams than we currently have attending State Finals. For planning and logistics purposes, it would be difficult to have the projected number of teams be unknown until after regional tournaments, as space and time are very constrained already (with about 110 teams projected to attend each year) and the decision on where to hold State Finals made in the fall.

Regarding Ranatra Fusca winners, officials at regional tournaments are encouraged to award as many special awards as may have merit. At State Finals, the policy is to restrict awards to one Ranatra Fusca per judging site (so that the number of teams going forward to World Finals can fall within a predicted range for CCI's WF planning!) The VOICES' board feels that no restriction of this sort should be placed on regional special awards.

Q. My team's solution seemed almost perfect. Why wasn't the long-term score higher?

A. First, you might ask yourself, "what is "almost perfect?" Long-term problems offer teams the opportunity to be very creative, and what one person feels is creative may not be what another considers creative. Officials know that they have an entire range of scores to use. They will generally try to use the entire range as much as possible, in order to truly evaluate the teams' performances in respect to all the scored elements in a long-term problem. Using the full range means that very few times will judges give the highest possible score to any team in any given category. (The exception, of course, is an objective score where something receives either "0 or 5," for example.)

Many OotM scores are subjective. This means that what one person might score 9 out of 10, another person might score 5 out of 10. So long as both judges are consistent in their opinions and evaluations throughout the day, this is OK.

Also, please keep in mind that scores are relative: your team will not know, until final scores are posted, how their numbers compare with everyone else's. Alumni judges, especially, tend to score low (as they have high expectations from having competed and worked very hard themselves as participants). Again, so long as they are consistent, this is fine. The top total, raw score of the day, out of a possible 200, has sometimes been as low as 130. This is why scores are "scaled" by the computer, and why your team should not be discouraged if its scores were not as high as expected. Remember, scores should be viewed more as feedback on how the team met the problem's requirement than as an evaluation of what they have achieved. Every team that successfully solves the long-term problem has won an enormous amount of self-confidence, problem-solving skills and ability to work with others that no score can truly evaluate.

Q. OK, so I know scores are relative, but every parent on my team saw the top long-term performance and we all know our team should have scored higher. What if we truly believe there was a scoring error?

A. When the coach receives the scores from the Head Judge, that is the time to ask questions if you truly believe a score was inappropriately low. For example, if your team received a "zero" score for something that was present in its performance, you should discuss this with the Head Judge and ask him/her to review the scores with the other officials on site. Once scores are posted at the end of the day, however, if another team scored higher in long term, and you feel that was not appropriate, you will just have to remind yourself and the team that some scores are subjective, and while YOU may not have scored the other team higher, the officials on this day did, and questioning another team's scores would be unsportsmanlike.

On the other hand, if you have a legitimate reason at the end of the day to believe that an error was made in YOUR OWN TEAM'S scores, such as your team's posted score does not match what you were given, or a penalty suddenly appears that you about which you were not informed, then it would be appropriate to inquiry politely that the tournament director look into this and let you know the results.

Q. Why is my team's long-term raw score just 1-2 points higher (or lower) on the posted scores than what I was given by the Head Judge?

A. Sometimes rounding errors are corrected in the score room. Keep in mind that at least 3-4 officials check over scores, and since we are all human, an error may occasionally be found. Usually it is only a rounding error (such as .6666 needing to be corrected to .67) but sometimes the on-site Score Compiler may have made a greater mistake that is caught when all scores are checked and verified in the Score Room before computer entry.

If the change is greater than one or two points, a score correction report is sent to the Head Judge. When possible, the Head Judge will find the coach to explain, but this can be difficult at a busy tournament. If you have not been informed about it, and there is a wide discrepancy in what you were given and what is posted, this would be the appropriate time to inquire politely of the tournament director about what happened. The Score Room Problem Captain will have a record. Keep in mind that scoring errors seldom occur, and when they do, they are just as often in a team's favor as not.

It is also certainly a good idea for you to "check the math" yourself within the 30 minute time period in which you may return to the Head Judge and ask questions about the scores, before they are sent to the Score Room.

Q. How are scores checked; how do I know the scores I see are really my team's; and how can there be errors if a computer calculates the scores?

A. There cannot be errors in the scaled (percentaged) scores, since a computer does calculate those. But humans may make errors up to the point of data entry.

However, we have several checks against that happening.

- Each team in a given problem and division has a unique identification number (which may include the TM A or TM B designation ... so it is important to have that on all paperwork if you have more than one membership)
- Each official makes sure that the label on the score sheet matches that number, name and TM A or TM B designation (and the team's membership sign)
- Scores are entered by each official and then given to a Score Compiler
- The Score Compiler transfers the scores onto a master sheet and adds each official's scores and then averages them according to the number of officials
- The scores are transferred to the NCR form and a calculator tape is made to check the math (For Style and Spontaneous, scores are transferred to a Master Score Sheet)
- The score sheets – masters and individual officials' sheets - and the calculator tape are sent to the Score Room
- Score Room officials double check all the math, running a second calculator tape
- The membership numbers on all score sheets are again checked to be certain they all match
- Penalties are checked and it is verified that all officials agreed on the same penalty amount/reason
- The raw scores are entered into the computer; penalties are entered into the computer
- After all scores for long term, spontaneous and style have been entered for a problem/division, the computer scales the scores. If there is not a score for a team, the computer tells us and does not calculate until all are entered
- After scores are printed, someone once again checks to be sure that the scores on the printout match the master score sheets for each team and that the individual score sheets also have the same membership name and number

Errors can still happen, but they are rare. Most errors are math errors caught in the score room, and are usually rounding errors or averaging errors that happened on site.

To help prevent errors, please be sure you ALWAYS use your correct membership name and number (including TM A or TM B or TM C designation) on all paperwork so programs and printed score sheet labels will be correct and in agreement.

Q. Why can't the Closing Ceremonies begin earlier at our tournament?

A. Read the description of how scores are checked. Then think about the fact that the last team of the day has 30 minutes to return to discuss any scoring issues. If the last team performs at 4:00, that team finishes at about 4:15; those scores don't usually reach the score room until 5:00. Then they must be checked, verified, and entered into the computer before ANY scores for that entire problem/division can be calculated and printed out. Verification takes some time; printing takes some time. And there are scores coming in after 4:30 for other problems (probably) and possibly for spontaneous. By the time all of those are checked and associated, membership numbers and math verified, and so forth, it is usually about 5:45 or later ... IF no sites are running late and there have been no tribunals. Most tournament directors will allow at least 2 hours after the last team finishes to be confident of having scores printed before starting Closing Ceremonies.

Q. Why can't we ask for clarifications after February 15? Our team got a wonderful idea after that, but now we can't ask if it is "legal!"

A. Some states hold regional tournaments and even state finals tournaments in February. In order for the rules to be the same for all teams, and to avoid "surprise" interpretations of the rules for teams about to compete, it is necessary to have all clarifications clearly stated in advance of all tournaments. This has been determined to be February 15. Of course, because issues may arise AT these tournaments, there will continue to be the possibility of clarifications posted all the way up until World Finals. When you leave the door open for creativity, you are likely to have teams interpret the problem in ways that surprise even the people who wrote the problem ... and it is occasionally necessary to clarify the problem after something arises at a tournament to make the playing field level for all future tournaments even though teams themselves may no longer ask questions about their solutions.

Q. What if the team gets a really creative idea AFTER the clarification cut-off date?

A. This is one of the toughest questions in Odyssey of the Mind. OotM IS about risk-taking, but you generally want to take risks in your thinking about how to solve the problem and not with the problem limitations or rules. Once the clarification deadline has passed, your team needs to discuss all of the ways other people (mainly officials) might interpret the issue at question, and then discuss what risk they might be taking with how officials would interpret the issue. It must be the team's decision, at that point, whether to continue with a solution they feel may be risky. They must understand that officials (who can only interpret the problem according to the same information teams have available, and sometimes "officials clarifications" that explain solutions to officials that may be allowed) will have to make an on-the-spot decision at a given tournament and that decision is final.

It does sometimes happen that officials who must make a judgment call at a given tournament will make it differently than officials in another state or even at a later tournament in the same state or at World Finals. This is part of the risk the team must take, and they should take it knowing that this is their choice. It has even happened that different sites of the same long-term problem at World Finals have allowed different things (although that is NOT something anyone wants to have happen.) What is important is that the team knows it is the TEAM'S decision whether or not to take a risk with an interpretation, and to know that it is a risk they have agreed to take. You should tell them that they should be prepared to defend their interpretation of the problem, but also that they should be prepared to accept that officials might not accept the interpretation.

Odyssey of the Mind teaches life skills, and one of those is the ability to make tough choices (which may or may not work out in your favor!)

Q. Can we ask the state or regional Problem Captain a question?

Yes, but only a question about problem procedures or the tournament site. A question requiring a clarification must be sent to CCI, as state and regional Problem Captains are not certified to issue clarifications (and would be in trouble and feel bad if they told a team something that was not the same as what the national clarifiers would rule.) You can find the State Problem Captain contact information on the state website. If you have a concern, it is always OK to ask ... but you may be told that the question is not one a PC is allowed to answer.

Q. Do all teams have the same spontaneous problem at a tournament?

A. No, that almost never happens. Each Spontaneous Problem Captain at a tournament is sent 8-10 problems from which to choose. Sometimes choices depend on the sites (is there enough space for a wide-ranging hands-on?) and sometimes choices depend on the amount of time allowed in the schedule (is there enough time to do problems that require more than 12-15 minutes?) Sometimes all the teams in a given problem will all have the same spontaneous problem, and sometimes they will not. The only rule you can count on is that ALL teams in a GIVEN PROBLEM AND DIVISION MUST have the same spontaneous problem and the exact same judges. (So what happens if an official gets ill in the middle of the day? We go back and remove all of that official's scores for all teams. And the score room officials will deserve a vacation after that tournament!)

Q. Why don't you use the school's PA system at a tournament to make announcements about a lost camera, wandering team member, etc.?

A. If a team were in the middle of a spontaneous problem, the interruption of the PA system might cause them to perform poorly, or, at the very least, would be an unfair disadvantage for something closely timed. For that reason, we cannot use the PA system at all, as spontaneous problems are being performed continuously. (An interruption would also not be welcomed in long-term performances, of course.)

The exception would be a serious emergency, or fire alarm. If the building must be evacuated, all teams with performances in progress will begin again when readmitted to the building.

Q: I have another question that I'd like to see answered and posted here. Where do I submit my question?

A. E-mail your question to Lisa Love (former VA AD) at nova4kids@att.net. Note in your subject line that this is an "OotM FAQ," please. The Association Director will then review the answer to your question, and determine whether or not to post it on this list.