

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Family

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. Coaches may also have differing procedures, as team meeting time and other decisions are up to the individual team. The following are general guidelines, and “the mileage may vary” from team to team and region to region. Be sure to ask these questions of your coach, school coordinator, or Regional Director for details specific to your team and school.

Q. How much will it cost for my child to participate?

A. For most students, the total cost to participate for the year is no more than \$30.00 - \$50.00, and is often even less. Assessed fees might include a share of the membership application fee, a contribution to purchase supplies for the long-term problem, a tournament fee of approximately \$5 - \$8 per child, and maybe a donation for snacks. Each membership/team assesses dues differently, and each team individually spends varying amounts, of course. Some PTAs/PTOs, schools, or school districts pay membership and tournament fees.

Also, if the team should advance to State Finals, then there may be the cost of shared hotel rooms, depending on the location of the tournament. Again, some school districts absorb part or all of the cost for State Finals. If the team should advance all the way to World Finals, there is airfare and meal & lodging. (See World Finals Frequently Asked Questions for World Finals details.) Many school districts contribute to the cost, and teams may also get corporate sponsors.

Q. How much time does Odyssey take?

A. This is an individual team decision, but most teams meet from October or November until the Regional Tournament in March (and beyond, if they advance past Regionals). Most teams meet once or sometimes twice a week. Many teams meet from 1 ½ - 2 hours per meeting, depending on age and frequency of meetings. Most teams sometimes have a lengthier work session to finish up props, costumes, and so forth. All meetings must be at the convenience of the coach(es), of course!

Q. My child says, “adults can’t help” with the Odyssey of the Mind team at all. Is there anything I can do?

A. Adults may certainly help, but some kinds of help are “OK,” and some kinds are not. A fundamental rule for Odyssey of the Mind is that all the work must be the team’s own, including all the ideas and all the work on a problem solution. The team may have no “Outside Assistance” with the long-term problem. Some students will then assume that parents should not help in any way, but there are some things parents can do, including:

- Teach skills the team may need, such as sewing, woodworking, art, drama, welding ... any skills the team believes might be useful. The only constraint is that you may not teach them a particular method of doing something specifically for their problem solution. For example, you may not show them exactly how to paint the exact sort of tree they want to paint for a backdrop ... but you MAY show them different ways to draw and paint trees. In other words, you may teach general skills and several methods for doing something, but not teach or demonstrate the exact model for what they want to do. They must learn to take the skill and apply it to their own ideas and the team’s solution themselves.
- Encourage your child to be a problem solver and not to give up when the going gets hard.
- Support the coach by offering to take the team to Home Depot or other retailers, or by providing snacks if the coach would like help with those.
- Learn the process for Spontaneous and help the team practice (or practice at home with your family). There is no such thing as Outside Assistance in Spontaneous!
- Help the team get everything to the tournament and help them carry props in IF the team asks you to (but if you break something, the team must be the ones to fix it!)
- Learn to step back and let your child apply his/her own makeup, fix his/her own vehicle, make or repair his/her own costume, and generally be empowered to do all the work by him/herself.
- Volunteer to help for an hour or two at the tournament (at registration or concessions).

- Volunteer to train as an official for the tournament (but be aware you will not be able to see your own child compete, as you will be assigned to a different judging team).
- Most importantly, be supportive of the team's efforts and understand that failure, in Odyssey, is not only an option, but sometimes inevitable, and is an opportunity for growth and for learning.

Q. Is there a place for me if English is my second language?

A. Yes! Every parent may contribute to Odyssey of the Mind! You may help in all the ways listed in the previous question, depending on how comfortable you are with speaking English. Even if you are not entirely comfortable with talking in front of the team (and therefore don't wish to volunteer to practice spontaneous, for example, or to volunteer to be a judge), you may certainly support your child's efforts, and help the coach with snacks, transportation, and so forth.

Q. Why can't I watch the spontaneous competition?

A. Even coaches do not attend the spontaneous portion of the tournament. This is a time for the team to be "all on their own" to solve a problem on the spot. Part of what we want children to learn is how to work as a team to solve a problem quickly that may be totally unexpected. An audience would not only distract them from focusing on the problem (which they only have 5-10 minutes to solve) but also there is not room for an audience, as the problems may take up an entire classroom, with only enough room for the team and judges.

If you are interested in spontaneous, you could ask the coach about watching a team practice, or even offer to learn the process and be a "spontaneous coach." You might work with other parents to offer a spontaneous workshop for all the membership's teams by setting up problems for several teams to come practice. You could also volunteer to be a spontaneous judge at a tournament (but be aware you would almost certainly miss the team's long term performance, depending on the schedule.)

Q. How do I find my child (grandchild, niece, nephew) when I arrive at the tournament? (I never knew there would be this many people and so many performance sites!)

A. Every tournament has a registration/information desk where there are maps of the performance sites and copies of the schedules. You need to know which school your child or relative attends, what grade he or she is in, and you MUST also know the name of the long-term problem the team is solving. One school may have several teams performing at different locations, so knowing the name of the problem - or at least the type of problem it is - is necessary in order for us to direct you.

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

A. Keep in mind that score room personnel check every score for every team. 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: 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 review my answer to your question, and determine whether or not to post it on this list.