

SPONTANEOUS

Too often neglected when props need painted or scripts need polished, spontaneous is a crucial element of Odyssey of the Mind. It is important not only because it is scored at the tournament, but because it teaches the team many of the skills they need for problem solving and because it is FUN! Spontaneous is the soul of teamwork, creativity, risk-taking, and divergent thinking.

Page 6 of this Handbook describes the types of problems. More information is also available in the Spontaneous Guide provided with each membership packet. (This booklet has sample spontaneous problems. Ask your school coordinator about these.)

A practice problem will be posted each week or two on the VOICES website at <http://va.odysseyofthemind.org>

#1 TIP FOR SPONTANEOUS SUCCESS: PRACTICE EVERY WEEK

Some guidelines your team will want to learn are:

VERBAL

- ♦ Listen carefully to the directions. The unspoken rule in Odyssey of the Mind® is, "if it doesn't say you can't, assume you can." However, you must listen for do's and don'ts.
- ♦ Ask questions if necessary, but avoid wasting time asking what you have been told or asking something the judge can't answer.
- ♦ Speak LOUDLY AND CLEARLY. Sometimes the way you answer can give an added meaning, and sounding confident might make a dubious answer credible.
- ♦ Do not repeat an answer. However, you may use the example if one was given.
- ♦ You may not pass, so save one answer to give if you are stuck. If you get stuck again, SAY ALMOST ANYTHING! (Note: some problems have a "pass" card to allow you one pass, but it is still better not to use it and give up an opportunity for a point.)
- ♦ Use your environment or one you can picture in your head to spark an idea.
- ♦ NEVER argue with a judge!
- ♦ Don't elaborate unless it makes an answer creative. One word takes less time than ten.
- ♦ Don't hesitate to give a "common" response, especially if answers are not limited. 3 fast common responses = 1 slow creative one. But also note that if there are **limited answers**, you might want to take time to give a creative one, because you have the time to do so, and each answer is more important.
- ♦ Have a special category about which you are knowledgeable. Use it to generate ideas.
- ♦ Pick up the key word in the problem. Think of all the meanings, synonyms and spellings. Think of book titles, puns, etc. For example, a "base" could be in "baseball," a movie ("Basic Instinct") or be spelled differently (bass guitar.)
- ♦ Analyze in practices what may be considered creative and what may be common responses.

Non-verbal

- ♦ Listen carefully to ALL the directions. Only ask questions if you truly cannot understand what you are to do. Do not ask for help solving the problem; you may only ask for clarifications of the rules.
- ♦ Don't ask permission for every idea you have: if it doesn't say you can't assume you can. DO ask a question if you think your idea might be counter to the spirit of the problem.
- ♦ Try to analyze all aspects of the problem during planning time. Consider materials, time, and potential difficulties. Have a timekeeper (without a beeper on his/her watch.)
- ♦ DO NOT EVER JUMP IN WITHOUT PLANNING. Have each person give his best idea, and then modify it.
- ♦ ALWAYS work as a team. Arguing and lack of cooperation will submarine the best team. Working as a team will help you all to relax and each to do his best.
- ♦ Have one team member responsible for knowing everything you may NOT do, so he can be your "policeman" *during the planning stage* and keep you from doing something illegal. (Hint: pick your best listener)

Characteristic examples of each type of problem are:

VERBAL

1. One word problems (Name things that are blue; Name things that are tall)
2. Two-parters (Name a discoverer and what s/he discovered)
3. Pictures (Give a caption for this picture; what might the person in this picture be saying?)
4. Procedures (Tell ways to clean up leaves)
5. Objects (What might this be used for?)

HANDS-ON

1. Building (Build something that goes across a distance, that will hold weights, that will be scored for height)
2. Communication (Guide a blindfolded teammate to do a task, or non-verbally communicate directions to do something)
3. Target (Get objects into a target area)
4. Pure creations (Make something from materials given)

COMBINATION

1. Object to be demonstrated and discussed (Make something out of aluminum foil, then tell what it might be)
2. Sound/visual combined with verbal (Make sound effects and tell a story about them)

These are only a few examples of the types of problems ... the entire point of spontaneous is for the team to face a problem they have never seen before! These problems could be ANYTHING ... which is, in a way, easier for you to coach, because you can set any group of objects before the team and ask them to do anything with them!

Some techniques for coaching spontaneous are:

- ♦ Work with your team to help them identify their strengths and weaknesses. Encourage them to build their strengths, improve their weaknesses and, most of all, to work together to maximize their strength as a whole.
- ♦ PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE. Creativity is a skill which can be taught. Then, having been taught, it must be used to stay sharp.
- ♦ Teach your team to take risks. Then teach them to judge which risks are worth taking.
- ♦ Learn brainstorming techniques and use them with your team. Remind the team members that criticism is not allowed, and that all ideas, however zany, may lead to a good solution, if only by sparking other ideas.
- ♦ Practice with card-turning, a spinner, dice, whatever you can think of to slow down verbal spontaneous and make them use two parts of their brains at once.
- ♦ Practice saying "duplicate, give another response" or "clarify, explain or give another response" whether an answer was a repeat or unclear or not. They need to be relaxed when that happens. You might say these even when it WASN'T a duplicate answer so your team gets used to hearing it and reacts calmly.

Try some of the following variations on brainstorming:

Break into pairs. Partners in each pair then take turns suggesting ideas to each other, keeping track of them to bring back a list to the whole group.

Each person in the group (in turn) selects a random object out of a bag or box filled with miscellaneous items. The group then takes two or three minutes to make new connections for a given scenario or problem from each new object.

Give each group member a stack of small slips of paper and a pencil. Each one writes as many ideas about a problem as possible. Then, combine the results. Discuss fluency and flexibility. (How many answers did they have? How many DIFFERENT answers did they have?)

Create a time for individuals to encourage visual images to "stream" into their vision. Encourage them to capture any images, signs, or symbols that appear, without judging them, and to try to manipulate images and play with new possibilities. Ask them to record their images.

Let team members keep score in practicing spontaneous. They will be better able to judge what is common and what is creative. They will also get an appreciation for how subjective the scoring is, and realize that they can only do their best and hope for judges who appreciate their answers!

Tape record (or video) the team in action. Let them critique themselves.

Use Spontaneous skills to solve Long-Term Problems.

Teach the team how to S.C.A.M.P.E.R. - **S**ubstitute one part of something for another, **C**ombine things to make a something new, **A**dapt something to another use, **M**odify the size or shape (mentally), **P**ut to other uses, **E**liminate part of the whole, **R**everse the idea or object. Above all, have fun with Spontaneous. This should be an enjoyable and exciting way for everyone (including YOU) to expand his (her) thinking skills.

#1 TIP FOR IMPROVING VERBAL SPONTANEOUS: Have the team bring in interesting articles or things they've read and discuss them. The more their "database" of knowledge, the more likely they will have divergent thoughts from which to pull answers. You could, for example, discuss the American West, and then say "name things that are red ... in the American West".

SUGGESTIONS FOR A "MAGIC BOX 'O SPONTANEOUS" SUPPLIES TO KEEP AROUND THE HOUSE

Sticky Labels	Paper Clips	Spaghetti	Toothpicks
Envelopes	8 ½ x 11 " paper	Chalk	Scissors
String	Masking Tape	Ping Pong Balls	Golf Balls
Rubber Bands	Small containers	Unsharpened Pencils	Clay
Pencils and Pens	Marbles	Plastic Cups	Scotch Tape
Clothespins	Turkey Baster	Other kitchen gadgets	Tissue Paper
Tinker Toy Parts	Straws	Washers	Nails
Jar Lids	Markers	Empty toilet papers rolls	Band-Aids
Miniature Marshmallows	Cotton Balls	Plastic Spoons	Colored Yarn
Wooden Molding	Dowels	A Brick	Balloons
Pins (older teams)	Paper Plates	Aluminum foil	Ribbon
Corks	Plastic Lids	Twist Ties	Deck of cards
Spinner	Dice	Stopwatch or timer	Imagination

A Belief That Kids Will Have Fun with Whatever You Give Them!

PROCEDURES FOR SPONTANEOUS PROBLEMS AT TOURNAMENTS

1. All team members and one adult report to the Spontaneous Holding Room if one is being used.
2. When the team is called, ONLY team members may go to the Spontaneous Problem Room.
3. Upon entering the Spontaneous Room, a judge will tell the team the type of problem.
4. The team members will be given one minute to decide which five team members will participate. (If there are only five the ALL must participate, if they are present at the tournament.)
5. The non-participating team members may stay in special seats set aside for them in the room. If they choose to stay, they must remain quiet and serve as observers only. It is recommended that all team members stay, since they are still part of the team, whether speaking or not.
6. All team members should be certain they are not wearing a watch or other item that could beep. Teams may keep track of the time, but not have a stopwatch or timer or a watch with an alarm set.

7. There will be NO PENALTY for not sending more than five team members. However, **if a team has only five or fewer team member, all must report.**

8. The five team members participating will be given two written copies of the problem in order to be able to read along as a judge reads the problem.

Any interference from the non-participation team members will be penalized by removal of the non-participating team members.

If a coach does not choose to send all team members to spontaneous (either to the holding room or to the problem room,) it is perfectly acceptable, so long as at least 5 report (or all report if a team has fewer than 5 members).

REMINDERS:

To avoid congestion, usually only 1 coach may accompany the team to the spontaneous holding room.

If materials are used for manipulation in a verbal or combination problem, the team should listen carefully to how they are to be used. (For example, if you are to put a lima bean into a container every time you answer, make sure you do that before the next person may give an answer.)

Materials for a VERBAL spontaneous may not usually be altered unless officials tell the team they may do so. If in doubt, the team should ask during thinking time.

Be sure all team members know they MAY NOT, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES discuss or reveal the nature of the spontaneous problem until after the competition is ended! (Wait for the awards ceremony to talk about it – and even then only in private, as other regions/states may be using the same problem! Problems should remain secret until after the last US/international tournament prior to World Finals.)

A team that has fewer than five team members should have all team members participate, but the team might be at a disadvantage in some spontaneous problems.

PRIMARY ONLY: In some regions or associations, primary does NOT participate in spontaneous. In most regions, if primary does participate, all team members may participate. Check with your regional director to find out how this will be handled in your particular region. If spontaneous IS offered to primary, the coach should relax ... the problem will be age appropriate, and the officials will be very nurturing and supportive of the team's efforts!