

# Odyssey *STYLE* Overview

**Style** – that sometimes subtle quality that separates the superior Odyssey of the Mind team from the others 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! What 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.

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

- ⌚ costumes
- ⌚ scenery
- ⌚ dance
- ⌚ foreign accents
- ⌚ integration and/or synchronization of music (live or recorded)
- ⌚ special effects (lights, sound effects, media)
- ⌚ membership sign (related to theme)
- ⌚ appearance of (character of choice)
- ⌚ props – quality and use of
- ⌚ songs – original or parodies
- ⌚ narration of activity (great for technical problems)
- ⌚ introduction of characters (curtain call)
- ⌚ original poetry (choral reading)
- ⌚ puppets – integrated into a skit
- ⌚ skit
- ⌚ mime
- ⌚ playbill
- ⌚ use of color

Costumes and scenery are often part of a team's style. Four important aspects to consider are size, dimension, color, and movement. Large items really seem to catch the judges' eyes, particularly when attractive color schemes are chosen. If it moves or lights up, it demands to be watched. Three-dimensional objects are also eye-openers. One successful team of mine constructed a 2 ½ foot rotating pyramid for their membership sign.

The team can be master designers, but if they don't construct their costumes, scenery and props with care, their scores will not be as high as they could be. Another area of consideration is to design the solution for easy assembly and disassembly to allow for convenient transportation.

Once a solution is realized, it is time to practice! Dramatic training is invaluable, particularly if students have had experience in both acting and directing. Every fall, in my gifted and talented program, a Shakespearean play is produced. This training spills over in the Odyssey teams, giving the students poise, and it improves their acting abilities.

Taping the practice sessions is also useful. Students can critique their performances, both technical and dramatic. Be careful not to over practice, though. It is possible to reach a peak too early, before a crucial competition, or worse, to burn out altogether. If all this sounds time-consuming, it is!--brainstorming, creating, evaluating and revising demand many hours of efforts. Start as early in the year as you can. If such effort is coupled with a team of creative and committed kids, then they will have the winning style!

## SO WHY IS IT SCORED?

- It is a team's **STYLE** that makes its problem solution unique
- It is a team's **STYLE** that demonstrates its creative thinking outside the problem constraints
- It is a team's **STYLE** that ties all the elements of a problem solution together

## WHAT, EXACTLY, IS SCORED?

- Each long-term problem has 1- 2 mandatory and 2-3 "free choice of team" elements
- Each long-term problem has an "overall effect" element – how well first 4 fit together and enhance long-term solution
- Each category is valued at 10 points, for a possible "perfect score" of 50 Style Points
- Each team is scaled relative to the top team, whose raw score is scaled to 50

## WHAT IS NOT SCORED?

- Nothing scored in the long-term problem (under "Scoring") may be chosen for Style score.

## WHO SCORES STYLE?

- Style** judges are two/three specially trained officials who receive Style Forms for each team and score all Style categories
- Style** judges score independent of each other and independent of the problem judges
- Style** judges score only the Style elements

## WHAT IS A STYLE FORM?

- form is a sheet found in the appendix of the Program Guide
- form is completed by team and duplicated to provide 2-3 copies (as required by your tournament director)
- form must be filled out by the team (or, in Div. 1, may be dictated to the coach to write)
- forms (2-3 copies) are given to Staging Area Judge to give to Style Judges before team's performance
- forms become the judges' score sheets (so you won't get them back)
- forms tell the judges exactly what the team wants scored
- forms tell the judges how the elements combine for "overall effect" (in the paragraph)

## HOW DOES A TEAM SELECT STYLE ELEMENTS?

- Some teams choose the elements at the very beginning of their journey and plan them carefully
- Some teams identify and choose the elements in the middle, after they've begun working
- Some teams identify the elements – especially "free choice" – after they are almost done (and they have a number of items from which to choose)

# STYLE - GENERAL STRATEGIES

Each team approaches **Style** somewhat differently ... according to their problem-solving **STYLE!** There is no right or wrong method, although there are some approaches that work well for most teams. Some of the useful basic strategies might include:

## Advance planning and brainstorming

A team that combines long-term problem discussion and brainstorming with Style brainstorming may find it easier to integrate all the elements. This may be the result of taking one good idea and letting others flow from it. (For example, with “Shrinking Structure” many teams brainstormed things that shrink and this led to a number of interesting Style themes.) Brainstorming long-term and Style together often leads to a more detailed, sophisticated solution. While a coach may not suggest ideas to a team, he or she may certainly suggest (strongly, even) that the team discuss questions such as the following:

- What parts of the problem solution might the team treat as a verbal spontaneous problem in order to make a list of creative ideas? (Let the team choose phrases/ideas/words to brainstorm and have a team member write down the creative answers he or she hears. Division 1 coaches may write for the team, but the team’s own words, please, to avoid Outside Assistance!)  
EXAMPLE: A spontaneous problem for vehicle problem might be “Name everything that travels!”
- What could the team do that would be unique or unusual? (Let the team get wild and crazy with their ideas ... one idea, even an unworkable one, leads to others!)  
EXAMPLE: A team might decide that we can’t pull a rabbit out of a hat (live animals are not allowed). But could there be some other surprising thing that we might be able to do? What are the elements of magic?
- What are all possible meanings/examples of \_\_\_\_\_? (Fill in the blank with words or phrases from the long-term problem or from team lists or discussions. )  
EXAMPLE: A team studying *The Old Man and the Sea* might ask themselves, “What are all the meanings/examples of conquer?”
- Who will your audience be? (Would anything hurt someone’s feelings, be offensive, or not be understood by adults? (Remember, coaches, teams must answer these questions themselves, and you must allow them their choices, whether you agree or disagree).

## Analysis of strengths

Every team has a different chemistry, and a different compilation of talent. Working together as a team should be one of the major goals of the group. Identifying different abilities may help to determine where the team wishes to put their time. Does someone have artistic talent? Gymnastic talent? Choreography experience? Interest in magic tricks? Knowledge about Irish history? Identifying team members’ interests and talents may spark discussion of unusual approaches – and a team’s unique **STYLE!** (Remember that talent alone is not a goal. Judges reward creativity above all else, but talent may be combined with a novel idea to produce a creative element or solution).

# STYLE (and long-term) - SPECIFIC TACTICS

OVERALL, TEAMS NEED TO:

- Make connections in unusual and creative ways. Practice this with spontaneous
- Choose motif/theme/mood for problem solution and try to keep this as a basis for all parts of solution.
- Read problem and rules. Then read them again. Then brainstorm awhile and then read them again.
  - *Do you know:* what you can use that is exempt from the materials value form? What materials are not allowed? What audio-visual equipment you may use? What all the limitations of the problem are? What the creative emphasis of the problem is?
- Be sure all Style elements can be seen or heard during the 8 minute presentation. Style judges will examine Style elements more closely during the time they talk to the team afterwards, but there is only on first impression!
- Remember that old axiom: “Good, better, best; don’t let it rest, ‘til your good is your better and your better is your best.” “Pretty good” may also be “pretty mediocre.” Teams should not aim for perfection – that will lead to only frustration! – but *should* aim for their very best, or at least their VERY good! Odyssey of the Mind™ is about stretching your imaginations, your abilities, and your goals, to surpass even what you first thought you could do!
- Consider as many possible Style categories as they can dream up, including, but not limited to: team sign, artwork, props, costumes, script, poems, dance, music, movement, mime, lighting ... the list is almost limitless! Write them all down and then brainstorm the ones the team likes best. How can we ... modify it? Enlarge it? Turn it upside down? Reverse it? Substitute another method or material?
- Be as specific as possible on the Style Form. Identify the exact portion of an element which the team wants scored, and be sure the paragraph at the bottom explains how everything relates to a theme or effect. Use that paragraph to elaborate on individual elements.
- Have FUN with the Style elements! The team is going to live with these creations for some while, and if they don’t like them/don’t want to work on them, then regardless of score, this will not be a great Odyssey year! A team should really like its ideas and be enthusiastic about seeing them come to fruition. If interest is lagging, they might be better off going back to the drawing board!
- On the other hand, never allow failure to put an end to a good idea if the team really likes it. They should find another way to implement it, another connection to transform it, or another perspective from which to view it. This is how ideas go from good to great!**

In other words ... Plan carefully, but think **crazily**,  
Mind the **Rules**, but push the envelope,  
Work hard, but have **FUN!**

Style is defined as “*that which is added to the solution of a problem and relates to the nature of the problem, but is not required to solve the problem*”. Any aspect of the problem or solution may be expanded upon to become part of the style presentation. Note that it is the expansion which is style, *not* the required parts of the problem or any part of the solution which will receive points as part of the long-term problem. Some of the things that might be included as part of style are:

### **Possible Style Areas\***

#### **Painting Patterned or controlled movement**

- |                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| a. on things     | a. Dance (various types) |
| b. on back drops | b. Exercise              |
| c. on people     | c. March                 |

#### **Costumes Descriptive prose**

- |            |              |
|------------|--------------|
| a. Drama   | a. Story     |
| b. Humor   | b. Play      |
| c. Tragedy | c. Narrative |

#### **Auditory Accompaniment Created Equipment**

- |                                     |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. Song                             | a. Things that do things    |
| b. Music                            | b. Props                    |
| c. Rhythm                           | c. Scenery                  |
| d. Sound effects                    |                             |
| e. Poem Decorations on things       |                             |
| f. Chant Make-up on people          |                             |
| g. Rhyme Details on required things | Coordination between people |

#### **\*Except when scored as part of the long-term problem**

You should encourage the team members to evaluate and re-evaluate their practice sessions always asking themselves, “How else might we improve our performance?” and “What else does the performance need to really look and sound nifty?” As the style presentation develops, you may wish to help the students to see themselves as the judges will see them. This is best done with a video recording of a practice style presentation. Put the camera at approximately how far the judges will be from the performance and under what lighting you think will be available. Turn volume down on the microphone since *most* students are not loud enough. Then have them perform.

#### **What to Look For**

- Can each and every voice be heard?
- Can the sound effects, music, etc. be heard?
- Can the school sign be easily read?
- Can crucial details in the scenery/props be seen?
- Are there visual distractions which detract from the performance?
- Are there auditory distractions which detract from the performance?
- Is the presentation smooth with good transitions from one segment to another?
- Is the humor funny?
- Does the action show up and show what it is designed to show?
- Can the performance be accurately replicated (is there a script)?

#### **Guidelines for Selecting Free Choice Style Area**

Whatever it is, the judges have to be able to see it. The more unique and creative the area the more likely it is to be remembered. Attention attracting areas are better than those that do not! Humor is likely to be remembered, as it parody. The more elaborate it is the more likely it is to be noticed; same goes for Gaudy! Do not include things that are evaluated as part of the long term problem solution. Unexpected things are likely to be remembered, surprise is usually good. Style areas should be chosen so that they will have maximum impact when compared to other teams. They must also be areas of strength from the performance. The final thing to share with the children and for the coach to think about is the facility in which the performance will be given. Large halls or gyms will have, probably, several things going on at the same time. The lighting will be different from where they have practiced. Last but not least, it will be noisy and confusing. The more your team can practice, the easier time they will have.