

## OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE

*Guidelines from Carole Micklus and the Odyssey of the Mind International Problem Captains  
with thanks to Tim Theis, who posed the questions ~ reformatted by Magic Center Region*

### **What is Outside Assistance?**

First, let's review the basics: Coaches are responsible to organize the team and maintain order and discipline. They may serve as a team "secretary" (no matter what division) as long as they write only what the team members say. However, for official forms, coaches may write them out only for DI teams.

Coaches should always ask questions that get the team members to think about their solutions and how to improve them. However, they may not ask questions in a leading way — e.g., "Don't you think it would be better to narrate your play, rather than act it out?" Instead, ask, "What are some other ways you could present your play?" By asking broad questions, the coach stimulates the team members to think. This is the heart of the Odyssey program.

Because coaches want to do their job, do it well, and never place a team in jeopardy due to their own misinterpretation of what Outside Assistance is or isn't, the Odyssey of the Mind Association has clarified what does and does not constitute Outside Assistance in various scenarios.

<p><b><u>SCENARIO:</u></b> For a DI team, A parent plugs in a power tool for one of the students as it is a rule in their house that no children are allowed to plug in any appliance.</p>	<p><b>Is it outside assistance (OA) for any non-team member to plug in a power tool that the team uses to complete their solution to the problem?</b></p> <p><i>No, the only prohibition against this would be if it were done during the timed competition period. The parent may not use the power tool to work on the problem solution.</i></p>
<p><b><u>SCENARIO:</u></b> A team decided to revolve its skit around a CELL theme. The coach gives them a homework assignment to come up with words with CELL in them like CELLophone, CELLular phone, etc.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for a coach to give a homework assignment that gets the kids to think more creatively about an initial idea that they came up with?</b></p> <p><i>Although the coach should not give any examples, the assignment is one of the types of things the coach should do.</i></p>
<p><b><u>SCENARIO:</u></b> Judge stops team's performance in long term because the vehicle used is marking the floor. Children are allowed to push. At end of performance parents standing outside the taped area lift the car to spare the floor.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for any non-team member to help with props after the performance has ended?</b></p> <p><i>No, the only time the team may not have help with prop movement is during the timed competition period.</i></p>
<p><b><u>SCENARIO:</u></b> Coach and two team members (nonparticipants) are watching their team's long-term solution performance.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for a nonparticipating team member to point out to the coach that the team forgot to use a prop?</b></p> <p><i>No, so long as no performer hears the remark.</i></p>

<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> Four of seven team members on a team in one Odyssey year build some backdrops for use in their presentation. These same four are on a team the following year with three new members.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the new team to use the backdrops built in the prior year? May a team use props from a prior year in any situation without incurring an OA penalty?</b></p> <p><i>Props may be used from year to year as is ONLY if the team is of entirely the same composition — that is, no new team members and none that are no longer on the team. The work must be that of all the current team members regardless of when it was done.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> Kids put 2 boards together perpendicularly (4th graders) with screws and nails, but it keeps falling apart.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA to ask an adult who is familiar with carpentry what kinds of things in carpentry can be done to brace the boards? (Going on the principle that if it can be found with research, an adult can tell them.)</b></p> <p><i>An adult can tell and show the team members various ways to brace the boards as long as s/he does not show them specifically what to do for their problem solution.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> Team members decide to narrate a good deal of the problem.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach ask them if they can think of other ways to tell a story, rather than reading a piece of paper?</b></p> <p><i>This is part of coaching. The coach is not telling them the solution. S/he is only trying to stimulate their thinking.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> During check-in the coach hands the paperwork to the pre-staging judge.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to hand the paperwork to the pre-staging judge?</b></p> <p><i>Although it is always good to have the team members hand in the paperwork, there is no prohibition against having the coach hand it to the judge.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> As the team deliberates on what their solution will be, the coach asks questions to make sure that their solution is well thought out.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to ask questions as the team is developing their solutions?</b></p> <p><i>NO! That's what a coach is for!</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A DI team is spray painting a prop.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to hold a team member's hand for about 2 seconds (out of a 30-minute job) to show the proper way to spray paint?</b></p> <p><i>Only if s/he is not spraying the item that will be used as part of the problem solution. S/he must use another item (perhaps a scrap piece of paper or wood) to give this lesson.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A DI balsa wood team has a sheet of paper describing the order to put weights on (smaller diameter first then larger, so as to allow hand grip space). Kids composed the form (came up with the idea) but coach actually wrote it.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for a non-team member to write down the instructions used by team members during their presentation? Is this any different than the coach completing the style form for DI?</b></p> <p><i>As long as the team members provided the information, it is OK for the coach to write it out. It is NOT different from the rules for the style form.</i></p>

<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A DI team is brainstorming its solution.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to write down their ideas for later review?</b></p> <p><i>This is a good idea. The only rule surrounding this is that the coach may write down only what the team members say.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A DI team needs to move a 4'x8' sheet of plywood from the garage to a workshop area.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for a non-team member to move the plywood for them?</b></p> <p><i>No, this is OK.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A team is working on a structure problem that can be reasonably broken into sub-components. The coach devises and builds a testing apparatus that allows each of these components to be tested.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to devise and build these testers?</b></p> <p><i>No. The team may use any types of devices to TEST their solutions.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A coach prepares a simple, generic demonstration of an engineering concept (e.g., how a truss withstands lateral loads better than a frame), and the kids immediately apply that concept to their structural design.</p>	<p><b>Does the presentation of an engineering concept represent OA in this circumstance?</b></p> <p><i>As stated yes. The coach would have to present several options of construction. S/he could demonstrate how each fails, but the team members must draw their own conclusions.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A coach interprets an “engineering practice” (e.g., the engineering practice of material quality assurance could be translated into inspecting and sorting balsa prior to its use in a structure) to make it applicable to the current problem.</p>	<p><b>Does the interpretation of HOW to apply general engineering practice to a problem represent OA?</b></p> <p><i>No, not as described.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> With proper training, it is possible to examine a structure and determine which element failed first and why.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for someone other than a team member to examine a failed structure and provide this information for the team?</b></p> <p><i>This person may tell the team members what part failed. However, s/he cannot tell the team why it failed or what to do to keep it from failing in the future.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A team member tells the adult who is helping to stack weights that he is going to go help resolve a problem with a prop. The adult verbally acknowledges that statement with the affirmation, “Sure, go ahead.”</p>	<p><b>Does this represent OA?</b></p> <p><i>No. The team member has made the decision to do this. It would be OA if the adult said something like, "Weight placement is more important, just stay here and continue with this" or if the adult initiated the conversation by telling the team member to go help with the prop.</i></p>

<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A younger sibling has been following with interest the experiments, designs and “tricks of the trade” of an older sibling’s team.</p>	<p><b>Can the younger sibling adopt the many lessons learned from following an older sibling’s team around for several years without incurring OA?</b></p> <p><i>This is OK to do as long as the younger sibling does not produce exact thematic copies.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A team is getting ready for spontaneous competition. The coach picks problems for them to work that s/he thinks will be representative of the type they will get. The coach tells them whether they made a good response or a bad one. The team is given constant, direct feedback on the quality or lack of quality of their spontaneous solutions.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to prepare their team for spontaneous competition in this manner?</b></p> <p><i>No, a good coach would always do this.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> An Odyssey team wants to paint some props. There is some paint that was left over from last year, but the colors were mixed by last year's team.</p>	<p><b>Would it be OA for a team to use something that was made by someone else even though essentially the same thing could easily be bought by any team?</b></p> <p><i>This is not OA, as it is not the prop itself.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A team of DI kids gets to WF and is uncrating scenery and props (unscrewing the crates).</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to tell the team what order to do everything in? I know they can help do it, but does a team member have to tell the adult to do it? Can the coach point out things that broke and ask if the team is going to repair them?</b></p> <p><i>It is OK for the coach to tell the team the order in which uncrate things and to point out things that broke and ask if the team wishes to repair them. However, it is up to the team members to decide whether and how to make repairs.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> Coach asks each team member (DI) to read one of the elements of the problem and explain what it means.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to write each element on a piece of paper and ask the team to group the elements so that they now have a bubble diagram that organizes the elements? Once the team organizes the elements, can the coach copy it down, make copies of it and distribute it to each team member?</b></p> <p><i>It is OK for the coach in any division to write down the elements, ask the team to group them and copy the grouping and distribute copies to the team members. The coach may not add or change anything, however.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> Team is brainstorming about all the things that make you think of tropical islands.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to put those ideas on a flip board for everyone to see?</b></p> <p><i>This is OK provided the coach writes only the team members' words.</i></p>

<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> Team is creating the script (DI).</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to write down what they say so they can look at what they already have?</b></p> <p><i>This is OK in any division provided the coach writes only the team members' words.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> DI team is reading the rule book and cannot figure out what will happen if they have printed materials for the judges to read.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA (1) for the coach to help them figure out what the rule book is trying to tell them, (2) if the kids ask what the coach thinks it means and (3) if the team asks the coach what s/he would do if s/he were them?</b></p> <p><i>The coach should help them interpret the rule book. The coach may tell the team what s/he thinks it means. The coach cannot tell the team members what s/he would do unless the answer is "write for a problem clarification." However, s/he should encourage the team to think about what it means first.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> DI team has decided to use what they think is tasteful bathroom humor in their skit. The coach has made sure everyone is aware of the rule about vulgarity.</p>	<p><b>The team doesn't think it's vulgar but does not have a clue what adults think is vulgar. Is it OA for them to tell other adults what their jokes are and ask if they think it's vulgar?</b></p> <p><i>No, this is OK to do.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> The performance has been taped. Four kids think they need to schedule an extra practice, and three don't. (The performance cannot be done with just four members.)</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to decide? Is it OA for the coach to say "majority rules"? Is it OA for the coach to say they must come to a consensus (meaning every person but 1 must agree)?</b></p> <p><i>It is up to the coach to make the decision or to determine how the decision is to be made. Practice schedules are entirely within the coach's purview.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> Team is at competition. They have composed the paperwork (DI), but the coach has prepared it.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to carry the paperwork on competition day? Is it OA for the coach to hand the paperwork to the judge? Is it OA if the coach asks how the team intends to organize the paperwork so they can find it to give it to the judge?</b></p> <p><i>Although it is always good to have the team members hand in the paperwork, there is no prohibition against having the coach carry it and hand it to the judge. The coach may ask the team how it will organize its paperwork.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> DI team is having major problems figuring out how to keep track of information for their cost form.</p>	<p><b>Can the coach ask what information they are trying to track, how best to track it and then prepare some sheets for them to use to write down all the information as they go? (Somewhat like the advanced coaches workbook forms.)¶</b></p> <p><i>Yes, the coach may do this.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> It is summer, and the synopses of next year's problems have been published, but the full versions have not.</p>	<p><b>Are there limitations on what a coach can or cannot do with regard to OA?</b></p> <p><i>The rules are the rules all year.</i></p>

<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A goal for a team was to learn to take a complex problem apart, test each component in a controlled manner and then reintegrate the resulting solution and validate that it performed as expected.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA for the coach to encourage the kids to approach the problem this way? Is it OA to build jigs or testers to facilitate testing the alternatives they come up with for their sub-components?</b></p> <p><i>The coach may encourage the kids to approach the problem in this way and s/he may make any TESTERS needed. However, s/he may not make jigs, as they are construction aids.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A team observed another team dressed in chicken costumes that did very well. The next year, the team decides to dress as chickens.</p>	<p><b>Is it OA (NOT creative) to observe successful performances in one year and copy facets of it in the next?</b></p> <p><i>No, it is not OA.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> A local group of several Odyssey teams convenes to practice spontaneous problems. The coach of each team has prepared a different problem to give to each of the teams.</p>	<p><b>Are the coaches in this instance providing OA? Is it OA if the coaches score the teams? Is it OA if the coach provides the scores to the teams?</b></p> <p><i>None of these circumstances is OA.</i></p>
<p><b>SCENARIO:</b> Same as above, but the purpose is to practice each team's long-term solutions and present them to all of the other teams.</p>	<p><b>As described, is anyone in this instance providing OA? If not, and the teams are scored, is this OA? If not, and the scores are provided back to the teams, is this OA?</b></p> <p><i>The teams may present their solutions to each other and may be scored. They may be given numeric scores but may not be given verbal comments. Numeric scores might give the team direction in what category to improve, but verbal comments — such as “Costumes were colorful, but all were alike so little creativity was exhibited” — would tend to provide more specific direction about items or changes that should be made.</i></p>

**For general information:** The only outside assistance possible in spontaneous is if, during competition, one of the non-participating team members joins in to help the team members who are doing spontaneous. (Or if someone obtained a copy of the problem(s) in advance and gave them to a competing team.)

A coach is supposed to help the team members grow. This means providing a good environment, maintaining discipline, and stimulating thinking.

Regarding penalties, here is how an outside assistance penalty should be considered: First, consider the amount of outside assistance given. For example, in the scenario where the coach holds a team member's hand for 2 seconds to show how to spray paint, if this is done while painting the prop, then a very small outside assistance penalty should be given. The question the judge should ask is, “If the coach did not help spray this part of the prop, would my score have changed? How much did it help the team?”

The assumption is made that if the coach did not spray that part, s/he would have taught the team member to spray paint using another item. The answer to the question is that the score would not have changed or not have changed significantly. If the coach helped paint the entire prop, a larger penalty would be

assessed. If the coach made the entire prop, a larger penalty. and if the coach had the idea for the prop and made it, an even larger penalty.

However, there is a second consideration: How much is the prop worth to the team? If the team did not have this prop, what difference would it have made? For example, assume the coach designs and makes an elaborate background set. The team is in the Structure problem and the set is one of the free choice style categories. The most points that the team can earn for this set is 10 plus whatever of the 10 overall effect points might add — no more than 20 points total. Therefore, the penalty should not be the maximum. However, suppose that the team is in the Classics problem. The set is paramount to the play and is the focal point for the performance. The penalty should be much greater. In the first instance, the Structure problem, the judge should ask: “If I give this amount of penalty for a style item, what penalty would I give if the coach designed and made the structure?” This obviously would be a maximum penalty since it is the whole long-term problem solution.

Remember: A coach helps the team members grow. This means providing a good environment, maintaining discipline, and stimulating — not influencing — its thinking.