

Spontaneous

Table of Contents - Spontaneous

What is Spontaneous	22
Getting Started	22
Spontaneous Supplies	22
Spontaneous Can Help Long Term	23
Stuck During Verbal	23
Teaching Teams About Timing.....	23
Practicing Spont Reduces Nervousness	24
Debrief After.....	24
Spont at Tournament	25
Suggested Debrief Questions.....	25
Additional Resources	27

What is Spontaneous?

Spontaneous, aka, "Spont"

Creativity comes in many forms. Odyssey officially scores creativity in two main ways:

- **Long Term:** The team puts as much time, effort, and creativity as they choose into solving one of the five Long Term challenges released every fall.
- **Spontaneous:** This is the creativity a team shows when they are faced with a short challenge they have never seen before. This is "on the spot" creativity.

At a tournament, scores from Long Term, Spontaneous, and Style (connected to Long Term) are combined to a final overall team score that determines placement.

The great thing about spontaneous is that coaches can COACH spontaneous without it being considered Outside Assistance. So, when should a team start practicing spontaneous? As soon as the team is formed! Doing spontaneous problems, even before any discussions of the long-term problem, is a great way to build teamwork. Spontaneous practice also extends the avenues of creative thought; this can positively affect the long-term solution. You will literally be opening team members' eyes and minds as you work on Spontaneous.

Getting Started

The standard spontaneous problem will take about 8 minutes to solve (does not include reading the instructions to the team).

Some common competition team elements are:

- Listening and looking carefully while the problem is being explained
- Evaluating the materials available to use when solving the problem
- Listening to each other while ideas are being shared
- Supporting each other throughout
- Being open to ideas
- Being mindful of the time left and dividing up tasks when possible
- Double checking to make sure all problem parameters have been met

Teams need to work together many times to develop these skills and instincts. We encourage every Odyssey team to practice spontaneous at every team meeting, even if it's just for a few minutes. This helps team members learn and appreciate each other's strengths, provides practice so that teams will feel comfortable as they face a never-before-seen challenge, and as you may have heard before, it helps the team expand the possibilities and think "outside the box."

Spont Supplies - Stock up!

Experienced coaches know that life is much easier if you have a "spont" supply box (container, tub, your call!) stocked with common spontaneous supplies. We're providing a document, [General Ideas for Building a Spont Supply](#) that can help you get started. Also, on the list are some fun games that help develop creativity.

A fun idea: Assign the task of providing a paint problem to a team member. After the problem, ask: "Why this Problem?" The answers might surprise you!

Spont Can Help Long Term

Sometimes teams are having a problem figuring out part of their long-term solution. For example: What if the team needs to find a way to fit items into a small space? Give them a piece of large cardboard and challenge them to make it all fit within a small shape on the floor... and maybe they cannot tear or cut the cardboard. What if the team is hesitant about making their own costumes? Create a verbal/hands on spontaneous problem that involves limited materials and creativity points for putting on a fashion show.

Getting "Stuck" During a Verbal Problem

Verbals can feel very challenging to some team members. If a team member cannot think of a response when it is their turn, it can feel as if time has stopped and a bright spotlight is focused on that team member. Not fun! It is true that if one member is stuck, the team is stuck. You cannot "pass" when it is your turn. Yet there are some options to at least get through such a moment and move on.

Team members can have categories to think of, just in case they are stuck. Some teams divide up the typical rooms of a house: one gets the kitchen and all its items, another gets the garage, someone else gets the backyard, and so forth. Other teams think of their favorite interests: someone gets sports, another gets music, and someone else gets the environment. This helps each team member feel more confident; there's an excellent chance that a team member can come up with at least one item in their chosen category. So, early on during spont practice, have team members pick "their" category and brainstorm as many items as possible from that room, that topic, etc.

Teaching Teams About Timing

After the team has become comfortable with the three main types of spont problems, the coach can then introduce two additional factors for teams to analyze: problem timing and point distribution.

There are some consistent timing patterns with spont problems.

- **Verbal problems:** Essentially two parts - 1-2 minutes of thinking time and 3-5 minutes for response time. Teams have a limited number of responses (usually 5 or 7) that each member can give in the provided response time. Usually these responses are given in a "round robin" fashion; team members go in the same order until all response cards are used or time is up. There's a famous spontaneous problem phrase: "If one member of the team is stuck, the team is stuck." A team member cannot pass on their turn to respond. Creative responses earn more points than common responses, and sometimes team members use a lot of time trying to think of a creative response. As time is running while a team member is thinking, other team members are losing their chances to respond. In

these cases, it's best to give any response to keep the team moving forward before time runs out.

At other times, teams tend to respond very quickly so that they can use all their cards. Such a team might finish with several minutes still available, minutes that could have been used to think of creative responses.

This can be very confusing! So, what's a team to do? Once their response time starts, team members can ask how much time remains. This will give the whole team information that can allow them to slow down and think a bit more or speed up!

- **Verbal/Hands on Problems:** Most of these problems have two parts: one for creating something from the available materials (usu. 3-4 minutes) and a response period (usu. 3-4 minutes). Very much like the factors mentioned about verbal problems. In this case, teams often do not finish their creations during the building time period. Again, teams should ask about how much time remains - maybe they can even slow down...and... embellish?
- **Hands on Problems:** Many hands-on problems have a single time period, usually 8 minutes. This is actually a lot of time for teams. Others will have two parts: a create and practice period and a scoring period. Again, asking for the time remaining in any of these timing periods communicates to the team if it's time to slow down and ponder or...hustle!

Practicing Spont Reduces Nervousness and Can Increase Creativity

It's important to practice the many types of problems regularly! This will help the team get comfortable with the various types of problems they might face in a competition. As your team gains experience, start running the spont problems as they might be "formally" run in a competition: picking your five members to compete, team questions only when permitted, time keeps running, etc. This will help teams get ready for the procedures that will be used in an actual competition.

Debrief After A Spontaneous Problem!

Since you can actually coach the team in Spontaneous, make sure that you debrief with the team after you run a problem. This also helps the team analyze what went well, and what could be improved. After eliciting team opinions, you can even provide your thoughts about the problem and its possible options. That's right, you can share your opinion! Just remember, though, that you are not providing your judgment of their performance; be careful not to be too critical. Here's a list of [Suggested Debriefing Questions in Spont.](#)

Spontaneous at A Tournament

When you go to an Odyssey of the Mind tournament, your team is actually participating in three competitions. Two of the three, Long Term and Style, take place at the Long-Term time and location given for your team in the schedule. The third competition, Spontaneous, has its own separate time and location.

A spontaneous competition is like a huge science experiment, with the focus variable being the team and their performance of that spontaneous problem. All the teams competing in the same long-term problem and age division will receive the same spontaneous problem. To keep the “experiment” consistent for all teams, the spontaneous problem is to be kept secret. This way, every team has the same initial experience and opportunities when solving the problem.

Before the competition, be sure to tell parents NOT to ask their child about the specific spontaneous problem that was solved that day. Team members are trying hard to honor the Team Conduct Code and the instructions they received when exiting their spontaneous competition. It is okay for team members to say that “The judges were great” or “We had so much fun!” or “It’s a secret for now”, etc.

This Code of Spont Silence extends to the internet. Regions and associations around the world choose their spont problems from the same sets of problems; keeping these problems secret allows for all tournaments to be fair, even if they occur after your own tournament.

Suggested Debriefing Questions for Spont

Adv. Spont, Coaching the Coaches NorCal 2019

Feel free to use any of these questions with any type of spont problem.

Basic questions for any type of spont problem:

- How do you feel you did?
- What did you like?
- What was creative?
- What was challenging?
- What was the best move a team member made? Why?
- Who helped clarify the problem? Helped you get points?
- Who listened and caught important parts of the problem?
- What did you learn by doing this problem?
- Was there a leader? What moves did that person complete that showed leadership?

Verbal or Verbal/Hands On:

- What responses were funny?
- Which responses helped you think of new responses?
- Did you come up with a “theme” when solving? How did you show this theme?

Hands/On or Verbal/Hands On:

- What teamwork stood out? What might have been missing?
- Materials: Did you use all the materials? Why? Were any of the materials there to distract? What materials do you wish you had - Could the existing materials serve the same purpose?
- What would you change in this solution? If the points could be changed, what would you change?
- Time: How did the team manage its time? Too much? Wasted? Where would you change your use of time? What do you need to be aware of in the future?
- When/where did you push the solution too far?
- What do you want to definitely do the next time you do this type of problem? What do you want to avoid?
- If you could do this problem again, what would you do differently? Be specific.
- What could/would you do differently next time?
- How could you have earned more points?

Spontaneous - Additional Resources

General Ideas for Building Your Own Spont Supply

Some games to play:

- Apples to Apples (start with family or junior editions)
- Blurt
- Kanoodle
- Quirkle
- Scattergories
- Suspend

Some places to buy spont supplies, in no particular order:

- Amazon
- CVS
- Dollar Store
- Joann Fabrics
- Michaels
- Target
- Any grocery or office supply store

Good supplies to have in your Spont Box:

For running spont problems:

- Set of spont verbal response cards (I use 5 pieces of different - colored cardstock and divide each piece into 8 sections... colored index cards work well, too!)
- Container for cards
- Countdown timer (we use kitchen timers in competition)
- Measuring tape

General supplies that are often used in competition:

- Bamboo skewers
- Cardboard tubes (toilet or paper towel rolls)
- Clay: Crayola modeling or Fimo (both do not quickly harden), usually in 1" cubes
- Coffee filters – white works best for when art might be involved
- Coins: variety of sizes
- Construction paper: variety of colors, 12" x 9" pieces
- Copier paper
- Cotton balls
- Craft sticks
- Foil, usually in rectangular sheets (I get these in bulk at Costco.)
- Golf balls

- Index cards
- Labels (Avery 8160 -30/sheet)
- Marbles
- Markers, basic 8 color set
- Painter's tape
- Paper clips
- Paper cups – 3 oz. size, 12 oz size
- Paper plates, salad size – rigid (like Dixie's) or thin and scalloped
- Pencils, sharpened and unsharpened
- Ping pong balls
- Pipe cleaners
- Rubber bands
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Straws
- String or yarn
- Tennis balls
- Toothpicks