

Starting an Odyssey of the Mind group in Texas.

Welcome to Odyssey of the Mind – Texas! We would love to have you join our non-profit organization of over 150 memberships from around the state of Texas. Odyssey of the Mind – Texas (our official name) is one association among the many states and countries that make up the international Odyssey of the Mind organization, which is run by Creative Competitions, Inc, or CCI. OotM-TX is divided into six regions, Bay Area, Central Texas, East Texas, Houston Area, North Texas, and South Texas. You would find your home in one of these six regions.

Each year, our parent organization, CCI develops six different “long term problems.” Teams from all over the world select one of the long term problems and begin to develop their own, unique solution that is presented to judges at various tournaments. In Texas, the first official tournament is at the Region level. Teams come together one Saturday in late February or early March, at a local school, to participate in their Region Tournament. At the tournament, the judges select teams from each problem and each age division that will advance to the Texas State Tournament, which has been held in Houston for the past few years. The judges at State select the top Texas teams, once again from each problem and age division, to advance to World Finals. CCI runs the World Finals tournament where 750-800 teams from around the US and from 20 plus countries meet to show their creative solutions to this year’s set of problems. World Finals is held for five days in late May and early June. The location rotates between colleges in the US. Recent locations include Iowa State, Michigan State, and the University of Maryland.

Get started now to become part of OotM-TX and the world-wide organization of Odyssey of the Mind.

STEP 1: Purchase A Membership. The first step to join in on the fun of Odyssey is to purchase a *membership*. *Memberships* are purchased, usually by a school, from CCI on their website. There are various prices and payment options that are all explained on the website, but a single membership costs \$135. Typically memberships are purchased in July, August, or September, though they can be purchased as late as December. Membership materials are mailed out to the memberships in early September. The memberships receive one copy each of the Program Guide, the year’s six “long-term problem” statements, a book of “spontaneous” practice problems, a membership card, and other materials.

Cost Summary: Besides purchasing a membership for \$135, each team will need to pay a tournament fee of \$75 (\$25 for primary teams), for region and for state. In addition, each team will need to budget for materials to solve the long term problem. This could be from \$50 - \$300, depending on what tools and materials are purchased or donated. Teams often need snacks during practice and building meetings. Snacks can be provided any way the team wishes. Teams advancing to state who live outside the Houston Area will also need to consider travel costs to the State tournament. Optional lapel pins, t-shirts, and other souvenirs are often sold at the tournaments. There is no cost for coaches training or judges training. Example: A school with one team that only competes at their region tournament will pay \$135 for the membership, \$75 for the region tournament. Snacks could be donated by parents. Most tools and materials were donated but the team still spent \$150 on other items needed to solve the problem they chose. Assuming there were seven children on the team, the cost is about \$51.45 per child for the year, September to late Feb or early March. If the school had five teams (as many as 35 children), the cost goes down to \$36 per child for the year because the membership fee is spread over more children. This is just an example. Actual costs would vary.

STEP 2: Read the Program Guide. The program guide describes how to build support for your membership's (usually a school's) new Odyssey program. It gives the rules for forming individual teams (usually groups of 5-7 students and the associated adult supporters) that will work on the one "long-term problem" and practice "spontaneous" problems. All this is done with the goal of competing at the team's Region Tournament. (And, hopefully, advancing to State and World Finals!) The general rules of Odyssey – outside assistance, cost limitations, required tournament paperwork, ... - are described in the Program Guide. Judging categories are described. Coaching tips are given. Ideas on how to raise money are provided. All this and more is in the Program Guide, which is new for each year. TIP: There is a link to the program guide on the CCI website home page. If it is before the new season starts, it will be last year's program guide, which is just fine for getting started because there are usually only slight changes from year to year. Read this now to get more information.

STEP 3: Form your Team(s). Sometimes a mom or dad starts a program at their child's school and has one team for their child and his/her friends. The other extreme would be the school district that decides to introduce Odyssey and buy memberships for many schools in their district and suddenly there are 10-25 new teams from 3-10 new memberships (schools). There is no one type of Odyssey membership or team and no one way to form those memberships and teams, though there are specific rules that must be followed. The program guide gives suggested ways to form teams and outlines the rules for forming teams. Basically, teams are divided by age division. Primary is Kindergarten through 2nd grade. Primary teams only present their "long-term" solution at their Region Tournament. They have only one "long-term" problem option, are not judged, and do not advance to State or World Finals. The remaining grades are divided into three divisions: 3rd-5th; 6th-8th; and 9th-12th. There is also a division for college students. These teams choose one of the five competitive "long-term" problems. The "long-term" problems are always a set class of five different types: a car problem, a technical problem, a literary or historic classics problem, a balsa structure problem, and a theatrical (usually humorous) problem. Teams of 5-7 students – never more than 7 – make up the teams, which can be multi-aged. Each team will need an adult coach, an adult judge representative, and an adult untrained volunteer. (New this year.) An additional volunteer from the school is required to help run the tournament for every four teams a membership has - competitive or primary.

Step 4: Find Adult Supporters. The limiting factor in forming Odyssey teams is often finding enough adults to coach and judge for the team. Each team must have an adult (18 or older) who is responsible for organizing and supervising the practices, helping the team with finances, driving the props to competitions, and setting up training – but not helping to solve the problem. Often this person is a parent of one of the team members. The coach could be a teacher. It is up to the membership to find enough coaches to support all the students who want to form teams. In addition, each team must supply a trained judge to represent their team at Region and (possibly) State tournaments. Finally each team is required to supply an adult who helps at the tournament for 2-3 hours. There are coach's training materials available on the CCI website in the merchandise section and many regions offer coach's training and judges training, which is usually free and often includes snacks and a free t-shirt for every judge. Large programs are also required to provide a volunteer to help run the tournaments.

Step 5: Select your team's long-term problem. A membership can field any number of primary teams and one team in each of the five long-term problems for each age division. For most memberships, which are based in a standard school with one age division in that school, this means that each membership can field five different competitive teams. There are rules for other school set-up given in the Program Guide – home school memberships, K-12 schools, mixed school memberships,

community group memberships, etc. The membership is responsible for determining how the teams divide up the long-term problem if that is an issue. Schools can purchase additional memberships if there are more than five teams. In addition, some Regions have special rules for purchasing additional memberships if there are fewer teams.

Step 6: Create, Practice, Build. Every team chooses one “long-term” problem to solve. Each of the problems has some common aspects. Each problem has an 8 minute presentation or play, a cost limit, “style categories” that are judged, and general rules covered in the Program Guide. In addition, problem specific rules and limitations are described a document that comes with the membership materials. This is the long term problem description. (Six were included with the membership materials. One copy each for the primary problem and one copy of each of the five competitive problems.) A team cannot solve a “long-term” problem from the brief “problem synopses” found on the CCI website. The team will need to read and re-read the problem specific rules. From early September till the Region tournament, teams work on producing and performing their solution to the chosen long term problem and its style presentation. In addition, teams practice spontaneous problems. At the tournament each competitive team is judged in three areas – (1) the long term problem solution, (2) the style solution, and (3) the spontaneous problem solution. Long term and style are judged during the 8 minute presentation, which everyone can watch. The spontaneous problem is given and judged separately with only the team present.

Step 7: Qualify for your team’s Region Tournament. There are four requirements to qualifying for your team’s region tournament. First, the team must use an online system to identify themselves, their coach, and what long-term problem they plan to present. The deadline for registration is usually in early to mid January. Second, tournament fee payment (\$75 for competitive teams and \$20-\$25 for primary teams) must be received by a certain deadline. Third, the team must identify who will be their judge representative. This person must commit to three Saturdays – one for training, one for the Region Tournament, and, possibly, one for the State Tournament. Finally, the teams must identify who will be their untrained volunteer during the region tournament. This person is assigned a specific job to help run the tournament. Jobs last from 2-3 hours and don’t require training. There are deadlines for each qualification requirement which will be posted on the website for Odyssey of the Mind – Texas and/or sent to teams who have signed up for the yahoo groups associated with their region.

Step 8: If you advance to State and World Finals. Teams advancing to state also must qualify. It is essentially the same as qualifying of Region. Teams must let the State tournament director know that they do plan to attend, pay the state tournament fee, confirm the team’s judge representative and identify what area he/she judged at Region, and identify an untrained volunteer (can be a different person from Region). Again, there are deadlines for each of these requirements and they are quite short since there is usually only 4-6 weeks between Region and State. Teams travel to Houston (though we hope to have State at other Regions in the near future). There is a party for the kids on Friday night – The Mixer. T-shirts and pins are available for sale. Food and fun abound.

If your team advances to World Finals there will be a different set of requirements for competition. World Finals costs are much more and include room and board. The teams do not have to supply judges or volunteers. Judging at World Finals is an honor that few ever achieve. The tournament lasts five days and is chocked full of exciting, educational, and competitive activities. It is not uncommon for a first

year team to advance to World Finals in the state of Texas, so just keep this possibility in the back of your mind.

One last word. Don't let all the rules, deadlines, and requirements overwhelm you. Just take one step at a time. Your Region will help you if you miss deadlines and/or requirements. We are not so strict as to forget that this program is about kids. We almost always think of some devious substitution for a missed deadline/requirement for teams who are trying their best. Have fun. Be creative. Welcome to the world of Odyssey.

Websites and How to Stay Informed. The CCI website is www.odysseyofthemind.com The Odyssey – Texas website is www.txodyssey.org In addition, there are yahoo groups that you can join – one to receive emails for your region and one for state. Go to the Odyssey – Texas website for links to join those two email groups. In addition to that, you can Google Odyssey of the Mind to find other state's websites. Some other state websites have additional spontaneous practice problems and coach's training materials. It is OK to use those as long as you understand that some states may have their own rules not practiced by CCI or Texas.

Any time you have any questions or concerns, you can always email to info@txodyssey.org