**How to read an Odyssey of the Mind problem & why read them so many times**

Regardless of the Odyssey of the Mind problem you choose, it is as important to know what the problem doesn’t say as what it does say. The general rule has always been, “If it doesn’t say you can’t, then you can.” What does this really mean? It means that if between the problem, the Program Guide (Rule) Book, and the Clarifications, if it doesn’t say you can’t do something in solving the problem your team has chosen, then you can. The reasoning behind this approach is to teach that there are many, many solutions to most problems and to encourage the teams to really stretch to find a creative solution.

If it doesn’t say you can’t do something, but your team thinks their idea is “pushing the envelope” or risky or your team just wants to be sure what the problem says about a particular item, then write national for a clarification. (See the section about clarifications in this handbook, the Program Guide or the national web site at [www.odysseyofthemind.org](http://www.odysseyofthemind.org) and click on clarifications)

**How to best attack the problem**! There are numerous ways that have worked for teams over the years. This is one approach.

1. **Make two copies of the problem** for each team member and coach.
2. At the first meeting **give each member two copies** of the problem and have them put their names on both copies.
3. **Collect one copy** of the problem from each team member. That copy stays with you for the members to have when they meet as a group.
4. **Send one copy of the problem home**. Encourage team members to read it at least once each day out loud. This way they both see and hear the words on the page. It also encourages them to read slower, thus not missing so many words along the way. Many team members read their problem the last thing before turning out the light and going to sleep.
5. When team members come to meetings **always pass out their copy of the problem** that was left with you.
6. **Analyze the Problem name**. A good place to start is brain storming. (What is a Tech Transfer? What is Tech? What is a Transfer? What is a Tech Transfer?) Don’t forget to suggest that the team appoint someone to always take notes. (This might be the coach in Division 1)
7. **Read the problem aloud** including scoring and penalties. Involve all team members in this reading exercise.
8. **Read the summary** paragraph.
9. **Analyze every word** in the summary paragraph.
10. **Read, analyze and discuss at length the “Spirit of the Problem”.**
11. **Read the scoring descriptions** aloud and discuss whether this is an objective or subjective problem.
12. **Decide where the points are located** and as a result where you will want to spend your time.
13. **What does the style section say** and what is required for style.
14. **Discuss parallel themes, plots and possible layering** based on the Spirit of the Problem, the Problem Name and the Problem Requirements.
15. **Reflect** on what you have discovered about the problem.
16. **Repeat** items 5-15 at every meeting.

If you are not sure what a word means in the context of the problem, or what the writer is trying to say, **get a clarification immediately**.

# REMEMBER:

YOU CANNOT READ THE PROBLEM TOO MANY TIMES!