

# Thinking Skills

Creativity is like any other skill – it does not happen without conscious time, effort and energy.

As a coach, you provide the means for the team to grow and learn together. In addition to technical skills they may need for solutions they develop, they need thinking skills that they can call upon to solve problems creatively.

Your mission is to pick several techniques for generating creative solutions to problems and teach them to the team. They need to be able to draw on these techniques in Odyssey of the Mind – but even more importantly, in the rest of their lives. This means they need to have a “name” or referent to the technique, and they need to internalize it enough to explain it to others. You will name the technique, explain the technique and practice the technique with your team. Repetition is very important. You will be successful if your team members remember the technique and apply it in future situations.

You will evaluate your performance periodically by posing problems to the team and asking “What techniques could we use to generate some creative ideas that might solve this problem?”

The long term benefits of participating in Odyssey of the Mind revolve around the social aspects of working with a team and valuing each member, the self confidence and self esteem that come with solving problems with “No Outside Assistance” and most of all, these thinking skills!

What are the factors that influence creativity? These are the elements and skills to encourage:

Fluency: the ability to generate a great number of ideas

Flexibility: the skill that allows us to produce a variety of ideas

Originality: the talent to think of unusual ideas

Elaboration: the process of filling in the details

Evaluation: the selection, testing and revision of ideas

General Ideas for teaching things to groups of kids:

Make a game out of it. Devise some rules. Go for speed. Go for long length words. Go for three word phrases. Roll a dice. Pass a “token” that controls talking. Require them to talk in “Pig Latin.” Give rewards like M+Ms or stars. Impose ridiculous limitations like: no talking, or they can only speak in letters, or they have to use just their fingers and not their thumb, or just one hand, or they can only walk backwards, or walk like a crab or write with their opposite hand. Use “Stop and Go” – work for two minutes then everyone must be silent and think for one minute, then repeat. Use “Sequencing” – each person contributes an idea in turn (you can say “pass”).

Keep the activities short enough that team members remain attentive and want to do it again. Try things and keep track of what works. Think of new ideas to try. (uh oh, do we need some creative thinking training?)

Set ground rules for the process. Poor sportsmanship or disrespectful behavior is not tolerated. No put downs! Allow the team time to process things. Let them explore “impossible” ideas.

Let's practice a few techniques.

First, ground rules for brainstorming: (Put these up on the wall)

1. Withhold judgment
2. Give us some wild ideas
3. Quantity counts
4. Piggyback on the ideas of others

Establish roles: Facilitator, Scribe. This can be you at the beginning.

Describe a problem that you wish to practice on. Get as many ideas from the group as you can.

Now the techniques come into play:

Choose one or more listed ideas and try SCAMMPERR on it!

SCAMMPERR: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Magnify or add, Modify, Put to another use, Eliminate, Rearrange, Reverse.  
Add the new ideas to the list.

Choose one or more listed ideas and try:

Location Modification: Put it in another location! Kitchen, Antarctica, Forest, Office, Desert, etc.

Choose one or more listed ideas and try:

Provocation: State the opposite of the idea or the negation of the idea.

There are many techniques to try. Search for Creative Techniques in Google. Teach your team a few. Practice!

Now that you have ideas, they have to be evaluated. By having a large number, "ownership" issues are reduced. It is often helpful to do the analysis another day. You would also allow the addition of new ideas that may have occurred after the previous idea generation session. There are several techniques for selecting ideas that you will want to teach. During this process, ideas are converted to practical ones or used to suggest realistic ones.

Grouping: Categorize the ideas into three groups

Ideas of immediate usefulness.

Areas for further exploration.

New approaches to the problem.

Use the Diamond Method where ideas are reduced one by one until you get to a consensus point. This is a good way to avoid too much ownership of ideas.

We can't wait to see the amazing ideas your team will come up with!