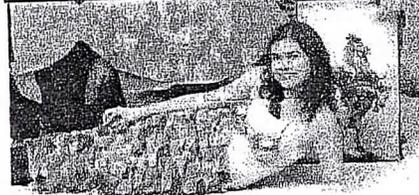


The Elements of Style

What is Style?

Style is that dimension of the long-term problem solution that goes beyond the actual solution of the problem, to enhance the team's performance. The style portion of the competition is important to a team in that it will help to set the team apart and distinguish the unique qualities of its solution. As an example, "My old red truck gets me around, but when I want to go in style, I take the Ferrari." Both are motor vehicles and will get me from Point A to Point B, but the ride may be more interesting or exciting in the Ferrari – and people will definitely take notice.

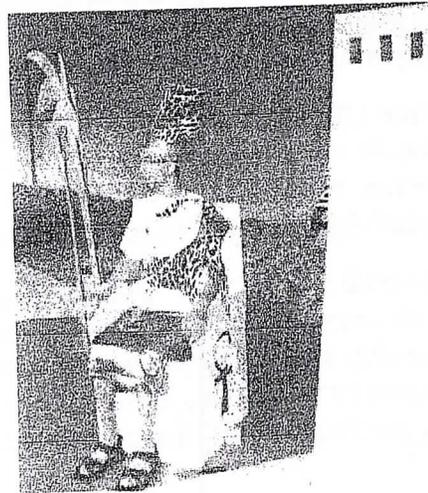
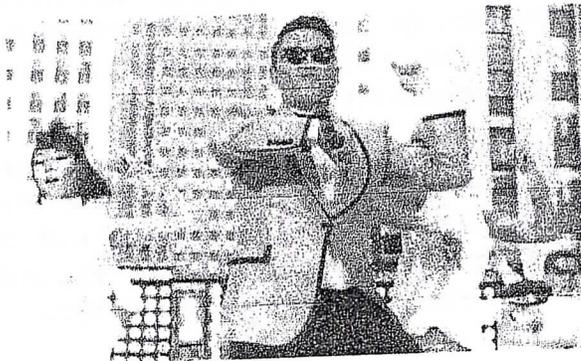
*A quality of imagination
and individuality expressed
in one's actions and tastes*



Unfortunately, many OM teams treat style merely as an afterthought, added to the presentation as an appendage because it is mandated as part of the scoring. Instead, style elements should be an integral part of the solution, chosen to make the main points of the performance "pop out." In addition, each style element should harmonize with one another. Style may not seem as concrete as other elements of the solution, but no product is marketed to us without "style" (think about your favorite TV commercials).

Style need not be just costumes or props. They can be any element that adds to the performance in unique ways – with the emphasis on *unique*. For example:

- Use materials in a unique and creative way
- Design the set to show a metamorphosis in its form and shape
- Build unique mechanical devices or sets with electric elements
- Make use of dance, song, acrobatics, rap
- Do the performance in rhyme or mime
- Add foreign accents to the dialog



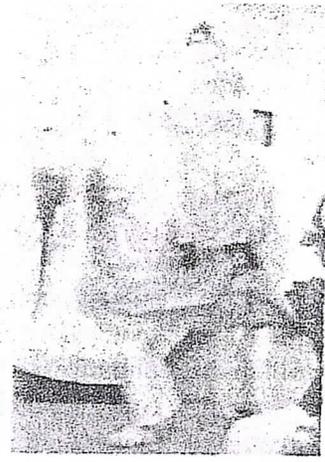
Style Basics

Integration: The style elements should be unified with the performance, and with each other. Choose a style “theme” and build around it, be it board games, animals, food items, or good vs. evil. Integrate the style theme into all aspects of the performance – scenery, costumes, props, membership sign, etc.

Pizzazz: The style elements should “pop” – capture and hold the audience’s attention. They should be featured, front and center, not hidden. They should be chosen to make the overall performance more fun and exciting for the audience.

Originality: Remember this is a program about *creativity*. Style is a perfect venue for the team to let their creativity soar! Offbeat approaches to the typical stage performance should be encouraged, be it visual or aural style.

Skill: Play to the strengths of the team. If you have builders, feature sets and props; if you have artists, impress the judges with drawings and paintings; if you have actors, use song, dance, accents.



Style Elements

Every problem has five style elements. Two are required, two are “free choice of the team” and the fifth is always “overall effect.”

Required Elements: These two elements must be done by every team. Pay close attention to the wording of the elements. For instance, there is a big difference between “creative use of materials in a prop” and “use of creative materials in a prop.” If the element specifies “artistic quality,” then a really creative design that is haphazardly executed will not be scored as highly as a traditional design that is very artistic. While it is important for the team to be excited about what they are doing for style, it is equally important to make sure they are adhering to the constraints of the problem.

Free Choice: These two elements are anything the team wants to select. The choices should be carefully considered so as to 1) enhance the performance, 2) be showcased within the performance, and 3) integrate with the overall performance. Focus on creativity, uniqueness, and skill needed to create the element.

Overall Effect: This is not a separate element, but refers to the blending of the various style elements throughout the performance, in other words, how all of the elements work together to enhance the team’s performance. While many teams have difficulty with this element (“what does it mean?”), it is actually quite easy to specify *if* the team has started by picking a style “theme” and thought about how it integrates with the performance.

Style Tips

Talk with the team about the marketing of products with which they are familiar. They are a part of the marketer's audience and know what works: fast food restaurants, snack foods, soft drinks, video games, clothing, iPod, etc. Get them to elaborate on what catches their eye and what holds their attention and why.



Style is about elaboration. All of the elaborated parts should enhance the creative expression of the “essence” of the long-term solution. Talk to the team about picking a style “theme” that unifies the various elements and connects with the main aspects of the long-term solution. It can be coherent with the performance (e.g. making costumes out of playing cards for a performance related to a game show) or play against type (e.g., using non-food items to create the food at a banquet). Style is the perfect opportunity to showcase the unexpected, for that extra bit of pizzazz.

Good style elements tend to exhibit both high originality and high craft. Elements that involve unique expertise and/or intricate attention to detail tend to be appreciated – such as detailed artwork (especially if using creative materials), mechanical or electronic devices, well-done accents, or highly coordinated choreography. Make sure that the team is excited about each element, so that they will be happy to put in the time needed to craft something really special.

The team should not assume that the judges will get the point – they need to make it obvious. Each style element should be featured at some point during the performance – usually the more it is featured, the better. It is important to remember that the judges and the audience are seeing the performance for the first time. This is not the time for subtlety or hiding the style elements in the background. A style element that appears only fleetingly in the performance, where the judges might miss its appearance, is not really something that enhances a performance.

Coaches may want to conduct workshops on the use of materials and tools. This may include age appropriate use of hand and power tools, instruction in painting techniques and color mixing and instruction on the physical properties of various materials (glues, tapes, fasteners, etc.). Use resources within the community, including community theater groups, local artists, engineers, scientists, etc. While these individuals cannot tell the team what to do in their solution, they can talk about the processes they themselves use and they can serve as a source of inspiration for the team. **Note:** teaching *general* techniques is *not* outside assistance.

Make field trips to sites related to their chosen theme (art museums, natural history museums, science centers, historical sites, aviaries, aquariums). Take the team to live theater productions or look at other OM performances (many World champion teams post videos to YouTube), and discuss which aspects of the performance caught their attention.

Be careful not to choose elements as style that are already being judged as part of the long term. You can sometimes have overlap, but it is usually tricky to make sure they are separate (for instance, if a prop is being scored for artistic quality in long term, you could have it scored for its mechanical design, as well – see picture above). If you are not sure whether it is double-counting, though, it is better to have separate items.

Most important: **PLAN AHEAD!** It is important to be thinking about the style form early in the development of the team's solution. Two common mistakes many teams make:

1. Waiting until the night before competition and seeing what the team has that looks good. Inevitably, it isn't that special.
2. Deciding to make several "potential" style elements and seeing which ends up looking the best. The team wastes valuable effort on elements that are not scored, and the people who worked on the element that isn't chosen often feel hurt.

Style Form

Be specific on the form. If the team spent most of the time on the painting of a set, have them put down something like "artistic quality of the underwater backdrop," rather than just "the underwater backdrop." The judges will score those the aspects that are on the form – if the team puts something general, they will be judged on everything related to that element; if that is not what the team wants, make sure they limit the description to only part of the element. And, again, make sure that there is no overlap between what is being scored as long-term elements and style elements.

The style form is where the team gets to tell the judges what they think is important/special about their style elements. Encourage the team to think about what is unique about their style elements and how they enhance the performance, and have them explicitly write those things down on the form. Use the form to describe how the item enhances the performance, not so much about how it was made or of what materials. The judges will get the latter information when they talk to the team after the performance, but alerting them in advance, through the form, about what to expect and what to look for during the performance is critical. If you have a style "theme", make sure that what it is and how each style element contributes to that theme is clearly stated on the form.

For children who have computer skills, encourage them to type up the descriptions and paste them onto the style form (which can then be copied). That way, they can put a more detailed description and you won't have to worry about messy handwriting being misread.

Make sure to list the required elements on the style form using the same wording, *and in the same order*, as it appears in the problem description. If there is ambiguity in the element, make it explicit – for instance, if the required element is "the creativity of a costume of one of the required characters," make sure to indicate which character that is in enough detail that the judges cannot possibly be confused.

Reid Simmons

Style Scoring

Here are the three Las Vegas themed palm trees again.

Team 1. The palm tree is made of a tube covered in brown wrapping paper with leaves cut out of green paper. It is very realistic and well made.

Team 2. The palm tree is made out of cereal boxes cut and shaped around a tube and the leaves are made of green paper covered with glue and sprinkled with green coconut. It is a bit messy and much of the coconut has fallen off.

Team 3. The palm tree is made of a tube covered with poker chips and the leaves are made of playing cards. It looks like it was made by 7 different people, some leaves are cut and shaped, other leaves are torn and ragged. The trunk is folding over under the weight of the leaves.

What we are looking at now is the wording for their STYLE sheet. Let's assume that all three teams have chosen the Palm Tree as their "Free Choice" style category and all three teams use the same wording- in which range would you score them?

	Low	Medium	High	
Quality of construction of Palm tree	2&3		1	
Use of recycled materials in Palm tree	1,2&3			What exactly is recycled? Green paper is not recycled (it <i>will</i> be recycled), the coconut is not recycled, nor are the poker chips etc
Creative use of materials to make the Palm Tree	1	2	3	using paper as bark is not very creative, using coconut is a bit more and the cards and chips more so because they enhance the theme
Use of green coconut to make the Palm tree look more realistic- it is a Coconut Palm			2	
How the use of poker chips and playing cards enhance the Las Vegas theme			3	

Is this what your team came up with? As you can see each team has the opportunity of getting a HIGH score even though they built very different Palm Trees!

Remember that these are my opinions, you may disagree and if you do please let me know we encourage lively discussion!

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