

# Hints for Creating a Successful Style Presentation

## – Maine

### **1. Treat the creation of the style performance as a “spontaneous” problem.**

For example, for the structure problem called “A New Twist,” we thought of everything that could twist, including licorice, the dance, Oliver Twist – and settled on a story that was filled with twists and turns.

### **2. Think about the strengths and weaknesses of the team.**

Have them list their individual strengths, then have the rest of the team talk about what each person can do well. You may discover that someone has a vast knowledge of the Civil War – can that be used in the style presentation? Can someone compose original music? Can they write poetry? If a member is a gymnast, think about whether their skill can be incorporated. Conversely, if painting is not a strength, you may want to think about working with other media. If the team wants music but no one sings well, can they talk or rap the song? Although you cannot suggest these uses, the questions “How could we use Billy’s talent?” or “How can we get around our lack of musicians?” may bring the team to some creative solutions.

### **3. Have the team get an image of what they would like their performance to look and feel like.**

Do they want it to be funny? poignant? dramatic? colorful? stark? Use this as an opportunity to set goals for the team, and refer to the list as you go about creating the style presentation. If the team says they want their style to involve large props, items that move and a black & white motif, is that what they are developing? They may want to refine the list as they go on, but prominently posting the list can help in guiding the creation of the style presentation.

### **4. Pay attention to details.**

Practice setting up. Practice again. Then practice again. A refined set-up creates a good tone for the performance and gives it polish. Each team member should know what their job is and where they should be. Who will plug in the extension cord? When will the background be brought in? Add special touches that reflect care and elaboration. If you are using music, does it relate to the style or is it just “there”? Are the props on the stage for a reason or just to fill space?

### **5. Plan, plan, plan**

Look at “what-if” situations. What if the scenery falls down? What if someone gets laryngitis? What if the structure doesn’t break? What if the vehicle runs into an obstacle? Thinking about these possibilities ahead of time can make the team more relaxed if something should actually happen.

The most important part of the planning is reading the problem and the rules. Every year teams are penalized because they did not read the problem or did not understand the rules.

### **6. Style presentations should be seen and heard.**

Can the judges hear the actors? Practice projection by standing in the back of the room and seeing if you hear what the performing members are saying. Can your props be seen? During our first year we had some nice props, but you couldn’t tell what they were at a distance. Call attention to aspects of the performance you want noticed.

**7. Make sure the forms are filled out in advance and tell your story.**

Think about the items you want the judges to score. Have the team think critically about their presentation. Remember that the judges are looking for creativity. A team member may play the violin very well, but this is considered “talent” and not creativity. If, however, they write the composition that will be played, judges will see this as being more creative. Each year there are teams that score very well or very poorly in style, often because of the way they have completed their style forms. Call attention to your strengths. If there is a known weakness to your performance, do not ask to have it judged.

Remember that judges only have a few moments to read the section about how the style relates to the problem solution. They shouldn’t have to wonder what your performance means or what you were getting at. Make it clear.

**8. Be unique.**

Ask the team if they think their theme will be unusual or if everyone else will think of it. Some of our best ideas came from looking at our brainstorming list and putting together parts that do not seem to go together. Our performance two years ago was Romeo & Juliet told from the point of view of shoe puppets. We knew that no one else would have an identical theme. Common themes are okay if they can be handled in a novel way. Novelty, however, is the key.

**9. Remember who the judges are.**

Judges are adults. Ask the team if adults will find what they are doing funny. Adults usually do not find toilet jokes funny, although fourth graders may think they are hysterical. Beware smacking each other and running around aimlessly. A talented team can pull off a Keystone Kops routine with style, but this can run the risk of looking disorganized (and knocking down props along the way).

**10. Be sensitive.**

Humor is subjective. Think about whether what you do and say may offend someone. Ask the team whether anyone’s feelings might be hurt by this presentation. Be aware of language. Are there potential slurs or words adults consider swears in the performance? This may work against your performance. Many judges are also offended by gratuitous violence. It is the team’s choice as to how they present themselves, but you can reasonably ask if anyone might be offended by their performance. They may still choose to proceed in the same way, but they have been forewarned.

**11. Watch other performances at your State Tournament.**

If time allows, watch other teams perform. Appreciate what they have done well. Critique what other teams have done and think about what made them unique or special.

**12. Read all materials carefully.**

Make sure that the team understands what they are to do. Read and be familiar with the rules. Read and re-read the problem. Don’t lose points because of carelessness in following rules.

**13. Be wary of things that are “good ‘nuf”.**

Think quality. Ask the team repeatedly, “Is there anything you can do to make this better?” Encourage them to stretch and surpass what they ever thought they could do. Have them evaluate what they think they might score on each element; it may point up their strengths and/or shortcomings and encourage the team to put that little extra into their performance.

**14. Keep a lot of stuff in your house.**

You never know what you'll need. Go to your local recycling center and collect up assorted "junk". You can never tell which items will become just the right treasure. Some supplies that you might want to have handy are:

- refrigerator and other cardboard boxes
- poster board
- duct tape
- markers
- Velcro
- fasteners
- masking tape
- paint brushes
- primer paint, tempera paints
- newspapers (to protect work areas, use for papier maché)
- construction paper
- standard workshop tools: screwdrivers, hammer, pliers, glue gun, glue white, carpenter's glue, saw, utility and x-acto knives
- aluminum foil
- sticks
- tape measure
- nails
- old white sheets
- pie pans
- screws, hooks, and eyes,
- paper towel rolls
- fabric scraps

**And, most importantly, pizza!**