

2019-2020
OCCA COMPETITION
HANDBOOK



Would you like to begin competing and need to know where to start? Or maybe you have been competing for many years but have questions on certain aspects? This handbook is designed to help guide you through the process as well as answer any questions you may have. The handbook includes information about local events, national events, OSAA guidelines, and score sheet questions. If you have questions, concerns, or comments and aren't finding what you need in this handbook, please feel free to reach out to the contacts below.

WHO TO CONTACT

Performance Judge Trainer/Coordinator: Jenny Gonrowski, occajudgecoordinator@gmail.com

- Difficulty score questions
- Questions about the scoring rubric
- Reporting any errors
- Judge Complaints/Compliments
- Please include your score sheet, a video and your QC form (if you're challenging a difficulty score and were not approved). Please note, the judge trainer will NOT address other schools and what they performed or were scored. Execution scores will also not be addressed as this is scored based on the day. Good sportsmanship also applies to emailing the judge trainer, any emails that are inappropriate, demeaning or threatening, will be dismissed with no response.

OSAA Spirit Rules Interpreter: Haley Thomas, orcheertech@outlook.com

- Safety Concerns
- NFHS Spirit Rules Interpretation
- Safety Deductions
- Please be sure to send a video with your email when addressing stunt legality. If you are given the ok to perform a stunt understand that if the stunt isn't performed exactly the way the approved video was shown, you could still receive a safety violation. Good sportsmanship also applies to emailing the judge trainer, any emails that are inappropriate, demeaning or threatening, will be dismissed with no response.

Competition Coordinator: Bri McCain, compcoord@occa.net

- General event questions
 - Please note that each event, with the exception of OCCA and OSAA sponsored events, are run by the designated competition director and/or host school. Hosts are responsible for publishing the specific event information including registration information, spectator information and results.

If you have general concerns, comments or aren't sure who to contact, please email **OCCA President, Sarah Devereaux** at president@occa.net

For OSAA related questions, please email **Kelly Foster** at kellyf@osaa.org

For questions/advice on attending a national competition, please email **Christine Langley** at osaarep@occa.net

1. School Approval to Compete

- Approval from Athletic Director/Administration to compete
 - School must be sanctioned with OSAA to be eligible to compete against other OSAA schools. Your athletic director can provide assistance.
 - Go to: [OSAA School Members](#)
 - If cheerleading isn't listed for your school, you are NOT sanctioned to compete in cheerleading.
 - Be sure to communicate a clear plan for the year with your administration. Include additional competition costs, practice times, practice space required, and where you plan to compete.

2. Competition Plan

- Financial Planning
 - Competition budget should include the following expenses:
 - Choreography (not required)
 - Music
 - Entry Fees
 - Travel Costs
 - Additional apparel
 - Props (new signs, megaphones, flags, etc)
- Event Requirements
 - OSAA teams **MUST** only compete at OSAA Sanctioned Events*. To find a complete list of offered events, please see the OSAA Sanctioned Calendar on our website.
 - *National events do not have to be sanctioned by OSAA and teams are allowed to travel out of state to compete.
 - Varsity teams must compete their entire 2:30 performance routine at two OSAA Sanctioned Events to qualify for the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships. Game Day routines and All-State do not meet this requirement.
- Build a calendar to share with parents, athletes and school administration.
 - Discuss your plan with admin PRIOR to communicating with parents/athletes. You will need to have travel plans approved.
- Deciding to compete AFTER tryouts or when your season has begun can be difficult but you will want to be sure the expectations are clearly communicated as soon as possible.

3. Parent/Athlete Meeting

- Ideally this meeting should happen prior to tryouts, during your parent tryout meeting or immediately following tryouts.
- Present your competition plan to parents/athletes
 - Estimated Budget per cheerleader
 - Practice schedule
 - Competition Schedule
 - Travel Plans
 - What to expect from your athletes in terms of dedication

- If everyone is on the same page this will allow for success and a fun season for everyone involved. Set realistic goals for your team and focus on the present. Define and discuss with your athletes what the process will be to eventually achieve future goals for the program. Make them feel like they are part of the building process!

4. Team Divisions

- Divisions are set by each event director. General division guidelines are as follows:
 - **Varsity Teams**
 - 1A/2A/3A – All-girl
 - 4A – All-girl
 - 5A – All-girl
 - 6A- All-girl
 - 1A/2A/3A/4A/5A/6A – Small Coed (up to 2 male members)
 - 1A/2A/3A/4A/5A/6A – Large Coed (3+ male members)
 - All varsity teams are allowed up to 20 athletes competing at the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships. Local events allow for more athletes to compete, please check with the event director.
 - **Junior Varsity Teams**
 - JV divisions are at the discretion of event directors. Most likely all JV teams, regardless of classification, are in one division. Some events will split JV All-girl and JV Coed or small and large JV. Check each event registration/information regarding JV divisions. JV teams do not compete at the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships and there is no maximum number of athletes allowed to compete.
 - **Partner Stunt, Group Stunt, Game Day, and Individual divisions** may also be offered at local events. To compete in these divisions, please follow the scoring rubrics and score sheets listed on the website.
 - **Rec/youth Divisions:** Please see the OCCA Rec Handbook found on the OCCA website for more information.

5. Rules of the Game

- Before you begin to plan your routine, you need to learn the rules. As a coach, it is your responsibility to set up your athletes for success.
 - Attend OCCA Performance Judge Training in person or via online streaming.
 - Print off and study the scoring rubrics. The more you read over them, the more you will understand and familiarize yourself. All scoring rubrics and score sheets are found on the OCCA website.
 - Current NFHS Spirit Rule Book should be on hand or on your phone for easy access.
 - Familiarize yourself with the Quality Control process. The QC process (found below) and form can be found on the OCCA website.
 - **ASK QUESTIONS.** Ask questions throughout the season. The cheer community is here and wants to help. We **ALL** grow and learn every year, don't be stubborn and never ask for help or advice. Everyone benefits from talking with each other.

6. Building a Routine/Music

- 2:30 is the time limit for all performance routines. **this may differ at national competitions.*
 - When planning your routine you should plan to leave a 5-6 second buffer. Ideally your routine should be around the 2:20 mark. You don't want to chance going over time.
- Watch videos of routines from the previous year to get an idea of the flow.
- Divide your routine into sections.
 - Three Sections: Example – Opening, cheer, ending
 - Two Sections: Example – Cheer section and music section or vice versa.
 - Both options will work! What is best for your team?
- Identify your skills
 - Tumbling, stunts, jumps, etc.
 - Tumbling: List out what skills each athlete can perform.
 - Stunts: What skills does your team perform well, what is the ultimate goal for your skills?
 - Jumps: What is your best team jump? Identify your skilled jumpers.
 - Once you have a skill list, identify what difficulty range your team falls in based on the scoring rubric.
 - Once a difficulty range is established, can you recycle skills to move into a higher range?
- Mapping out your routine
 - Plan the bones of your routine early. Always be updating your notes and always be noting skill improvements.
 - **Example:**
 - Opening section (:45-1:00) includes: tumbling, jumps, stunts, dance
 - Cheer (:30-1:00) includes: motions, jumps, tumbling, stunts, signs, poms, etc.
 - Ending section (:30-:45) includes: Pyramid, dance, tumbling, etc. End on a strong note regardless of what skill section you choose to end on!
 - Think of your routine in chunks or sections. How many total 8 counts will you need to stay within the time limit.
 - **Use the scoring rubrics as check-off list to be sure you hit every element**
- Music
 - All music must be licensed and purchased through any of the music providers listed here: <https://www.usacheer.org/music/preferred-providers>
 - You may choreograph to specific music or choreograph your routine and fit the music to it. Keep in mind speed of the music, be sure it fits with your team's ability.
- Helpful Tips
 - Always leave time in your routine to get from point A to point B.
 - Try to avoid having athletes farther than they need to on the mat. Work on your formations so your athletes aren't crossing center all the time or running across the mat and taking the attention off of your team's skills.
 - Your goal should be to create a routine that shows off your team's strengths, is clean, and has skills that your athletes can perform safely and well.
 - Watch routines to see what you like and don't like.
 - Clear and easy to follow cheer words. Be sure your props add to the cheer appropriately.

- Print off an 8 count sheet and/or create a mat sheet. This will be a helpful tool in organizing your routine. You will be able to map out different formations on the mat sheet and check off skills with the 8 count sheet.

7. Hiring a Choreographer

Hiring a choreographer is not required and it does NOT guarantee trophies or success. It is your responsibility as a coach to understand the score sheets and to guide your team to success. If you hire a choreographer you are hiring them to give you routine with good bones and material. Your routine will change week to week based on judges' feedback and what is and isn't working for your athletes.

When hiring a choreographer you should:

- Ask for references or watch their body of work. Everyone has their own style, find the one that best fits your team's needs and style. Know what you like and don't like.
- Schedule choreography ASAP. Most teams schedule choreography to happen in August/September/October.
- Be sure the choreographer is educated in OREGON's score sheets and scoring system. Many choreographers may offer great work but as a coach you need to ensure they are following the set scoring guidelines.
- Always ask for the entire costs of the routine and travel costs prior to agreeing to hire.
- Know what your budget can handle and secure funds prior to choreography.
- Ask if the price includes music.
- Decide whether you are hiring for full routine or partial. Some just hire out for the dance section or some hire out for the cheer section. Decide what your needs are and what you are able to spend money on.
- Be involved in the choreography process. Ask questions throughout and don't assume the choreographer knows what is best for your team.
- Clearly communicate what your team goals are regarding your routine.
- For a complete list of recommended choreographers, please email OCCA Competition Coordinator, Brianna McCain at compcoord@occa.net

8. Event Registration

- Registration information for local events is sent to cheer coaches via email or listed on the OCCA website.
- Be aware of registration deadlines.
 - If you must register late, be aware that late fees may apply and you should ALWAYS email the competition director that you plan to attend.
 - Be aware that some events DO NOT accept late entries.
- Stay on top of your bookkeeper to ensure prompt payment is sent for entry fees.
- If you register for an event and are unable to attend, please give the competition director as much notice as possible. Remember, each time a team adds or drops this will affect the entire event and performance order.
- OSAA STATE CHEERLEADING CHAMPIONSHIPS:
 - Registration links are posted in December. Specific date will always be communicated with all head coaches and athletic directors.
 - Late entries are NOT ACCEPTED.
 - Registration is completed online.

- Questions regarding this registration process should be directed to Kelly Foster, kellyf@osaa.org.

9. Events Expectations/Etiquette

- What to expect at events
 - Arrive no more than one hour before your team performs, unless you want to watch.
 - When you received the performance order, count about 5 minutes per routine to figure out approx. when you will perform. Share this information with parents/fans.
 - Keep your athletes and their belongings together. Space is usually limited.
 - Expect a 9 panel cheer floor for the performance area.
 - A spring floor will **not** be available at OCCA/OSAA events.
 - Once you arrive in the main performance area, establish where the warm-up area is located, where the music is played and where the Quality Control station is located. Share this information with your assistants.
 - Stretch and warm-up motions off the mat.
 - Be courteous to those around you and be aware of the performance schedule. A team who is performing at #15 should not be on the warm up mat before team #10.
 - Be efficient once you take the warm-up mat. Only use the mat for necessary skills. Running full out 5 times through is not efficient and not being courteous to those around you.
 - Stay seated in designated team seating.
 - Parents/Fans should remain in the spectator section for the duration of the event.
 - Music – Be sure to have designated someone to play your music that knows your routine. Be sure is in airplane mode, volume turned all the way up, phone case OFF, and you have the necessary dongle if needed. It is the responsibility of the coach (or designated music person) to play the music. If your music is not playing, it is the responsibility of the **COACH** to avoid time deductions and to begin counting when appropriate.
 - Competition Terms
 - **“Up Next”**: Team is taking the floor
 - **“On Deck”**: Team immediately following the team on the floor
 - **“In the Hole”**: Team is waiting to be on deck
 - **Quality Control**: Your challenge form will be available approx. 15 minutes following your performance. The form will list your **DIFFICULTY** scores only and should you feel it is incorrect, you may challenge for the revised score. This is also an opportunity to ask questions regarding scoring rubrics and safety violations.
 - **Spectator Entrance**: All persons should enter through this entrance with the exception of athletes and coaches.
 - **Team Entrance**: Only coaches and athletes should enter through this entrance.
 - **Cheer Grams**: Some events offer cheer grams. Parents/Fans are able to purchase and create an encouraging message to their team or specific athlete to be read prior to performing.
- Etiquette/Tips
 - Give yourself plenty of time for travel and parking.
 - HAVE FUN and stay positive throughout the day. Go over positive feedback only on competition day.

- Provide all complete and clear event information as soon as you receive it to parents/fans. (time, location, parking info, admission price, concessions, etc)
- Provide information sheets the practice before with what to pack, wear, meeting time, etc.
- Be sure all parents/fans know they represent your program and encourage them to behave in a manner that is positive and respectful to all other teams, coaches, event personnel, judges, and school officials.
- Only move around or enter/leave the performance arena in between performances. Stay seated during performances.
- Have a discussion with all of your athletes and coaches about behavior expectations, uniform expectations and sportsmanship before EVERY event.

10. Alternates/JV Swing Athletes/Athlete Eligibility

- A JV cheerleader may participate in both varsity and JV performances at the same cheerleading competition **no more than twice each school year**.
- Under no circumstances may a varsity cheerleader participate on a JV team performance at any cheerleading competition.
- To be eligible to compete at any OSAA Sanctioned Events, athletes must be currently academically eligible per OSAA requirements. Eligibility requirements are found here: [OSAA Handbook](#)
 - Please note, some school districts may have additional academic eligibility requirements. Please check with your athletic director for more information.
- Varsity Athlete Eligibility:
 - In order to represent the school as a participant in the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships, a cheerleader must have participated on squad at a majority of VARSITY games for at least one season for the year.
 - A cheerleader who participates on the varsity squad during the winter sports season **ONLY**; must have participated on the squad at a majority of the entire winter sports season's contests prior to the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships in order to be eligible.
 - Exception: Alternates may be members of the school's junior varsity or freshman squads, and may replace a varsity squad member due to special circumstances (i.e. illness, injury, ineligibility of a varsity team member) if the substitution is reported and approved by the OSAA prior to participation at the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships.

11. Competition Season Practice

- Practice – Ready to Perform!
 - Break down sections at practice.
 - Mix it up and don't spend an entire practice on stunting.
 - Practice like you will perform.
 - Practice the warm-up process to mimic the events.
 - Review all judges' comments and scores and make notes on where to improve.
 - Ask for feedback from assist coaches or other coaches.
 - Keep feedback positive and stay focused and relaxed around your athletes.

12. Quality Control

Quality Control is a major piece of all competitions. Familiarize yourself with the process. Be patient, it may take a couple of times to get the hang of it! The QC Form is available on the website.

- What it is and isn't
 - This is an opportunity for coaches to challenge the difficulty score(s) when they believe their team has been placed in the wrong range.
 - This is not an opportunity to challenge scores within the correct range, or to challenge other scores such as technique and execution.
- Rationale
 - The goal for the judging panel is to get it right every time. However, judges are human and mistakes are possible. The Challenge Option provides the opportunity for aspects of a routine to be reviewed to ensure teams receive credit for skills that may have been missed.
 - Many coaches put together their routines expecting to be in a certain difficulty range. The Challenge Option provides the opportunity for coaches to advocate for their teams, and it provides an opportunity for coaches to be educated on why their team is not achieving their intended range.
- Procedure
 - A team's performance will be judged.
 - Difficulty scores will be taken to the challenge table.
 - Major Technical / Safety Violations will also be listed on the challenge form.
 - Stunting / Tumbling faults will NOT be listed.
 - A safety judge will be available at the challenge table.
 - Teams will only be allowed to send one representative to the QC table to pick up the form, to turn in the form and to discuss any possible changes with the QC Judge.
 - The coach should plan to be at the QC table approximately 10 minutes following their performance. The QC table should have scores when the next team in your division is performing.
 - As soon as your form is available at the QC table, you will have 15 minutes from that moment to complete any challenges. If your form arrives at the table at 1:15, your time expires to review, complete and turn in the form at 1:30. The time will be noted on your form.
 - Coaches have 15 minutes to fill out the Challenge Form if applicable, and return the form to the Challenge Table.
 - The 15 minutes is a hard deadline. Failure to submit a Challenge Form within this timeframe eliminates this opportunity.
 - If the coach is happy with the difficulty scores, and does not want to challenge scores, then no further steps need to be taken.
 - A Quality Control Judge will review the Challenge Form and review the team's performance via video.
 - Coaches will wait for QC Judge to review. Coaches should wait a reasonable distance while waiting to give the QC space to review. The QC Judge at the Challenge Table will call you over to discuss the results.
 - Possible Outcomes-

- Upon further review, it is found the difficulty range was correct. No scores will be changed.
 - Upon further review, it is found that the difficulty range was incorrect. Corrected scores will be given to the tabulator.
- By filling out a challenge form, a team's routine will be re-examined for the difficulty ranges indicated. Although it is the coach's intention for difficulty scores to be raised, keep in mind that upon further review it may be found that a team was placed in too high of a difficulty range. Therefore, a team's difficulty range may be lowered after reviewing the performance.
- Providing the Challenge Option may create a longer than desired pause before final awards. Coaches and spectators need to show patience and support of the process as the coaches, judges, and competition staff ensure that the results of the day's competition are accurate.
- Be sure to have a CLEAR video of your routine. Designate someone to take care of this for you, iPads are best but not required. This is not a requirement but a suggestion. Sometimes, we as coaches, think a skill was completed and it really wasn't. It is nice to review your video prior to turning in your form to be sure the challenge is valid.
- Have what your ranges should be in an easy place to reference. Notes on your phone, a post it note in your cheer bag, something that shows every category and what range you think you should be in. This will help you to look quickly at your form and more time to challenge anything that doesn't look correct.
- Unsportsmanlike deductions will be added to final team scores this year to any coaches who are acting in an inappropriate manner to our QC Judge. This will be a tech/safety violation and reported to OSAA and the school's athletic director.

13. OSAA State Cheerleading Championships – Varsity Level Teams Only

For information regarding the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships, please visit: [OSAA Cheerleading Handbook](#)

14. National Competitions

For questions and advice, please reach out to Christine Langley, osaarep@occa.net.

- National Competition Options:
 - USA, UCA, NCA – All require bids (research requirements).
 - JAMZ, CANAM, Aloha Spirit Nationals, American Cheer Power Nationals, Sea to Sky International - All options that do not require bids (and there are many options).
 - Do your research! Select the best option for your team and budget.
- District/School Approval
 - Administration needs to be on board.
 - Fill out any and all paperwork required for district approval.
 - Make sure students will be excused if missing class time.
- Division Options
 - Varies depending on the event. Select the best option for your team and mindset.
- Registration
 - Be sure to read through everything thoroughly.
 - Follow company policy – do they require you to stay in their host hotel?

- Fill out all paperwork, get everything signed by your admin, turn in by due date.
- Lodging
 - Does event require that you stay in one of their hotels?
 - Book within walking distance to the venue, if possible.
 - Look for free breakfast or family suite options.
 - Book early!
- Airfare/Travel
 - Book flights well in advance.
 - Research best/cheapest option from your closest airport.
 - Jet Blue and Southwest have fantastic group travel rates.
 - Rent a charter bus.
 - Use school transportation – May have strict guidelines for bus drivers.
 - Cheerleaders secure their own transportation – Some teams allow their cheerleaders to find their own way to the event (i.e. Family road trip, family flies on a different airline, etc.)
- Transfers from Airport to Hotel
 - Rent vans or book busses in advance of your trip.
- Park Tickets/Extra Events
 - Reserve park tickets (Disney) through company USA/UCA.
 - Select best option for your team (1 day, 2 day?)
 - Be sure you select what you can afford. Many teams forgo the park experience for cheaper options such as the beach, a cheaper park option, zoo, etc).
- Meals
 - Research area around hotel – are there quick, inexpensive options available?
 - Team Dinner – Costs, large party reservations.
 - Free breakfast with hotel.
 - Food in venue and parks is expensive – pack snacks!
- Chaperones
 - Follow district policies.
 - Chaperones are just that – helpers for you! Do not let them alter plans.
 - Other family visiting – remind your athletes this is not a vacation.
- Event Tips
 - ALWAYS read the entire packet of info prior to attending – highlight important points.
 - Carry your ID with you.
 - Be friendly to the staff – they are overworked.
 - Do not arrive too early – 10 mins to your assigned check-in time is enough.
 - Print out maps if they provide them – highlight walking routes.
 - Have your kids practice warm-up timeline.
 - Clear communication with parents and admin. You are traveling out of state with your athletes and with that comes some heavy responsibility.
 - If you are planning to compete at Nationals, we encourage you to make this declaration at the BEGINNING of your season. Nationals is expensive and could be a sensitive subject with your athletes and parents. Administrative approval could also be time sensitive.

15. Additional Tips/FAQ's

1. If we don't have tumbling is it worth it to compete?

ABSOLUTELY! This is a common misconception. OCCA's score sheets are designed to reward teams for higher execution over skill difficulty. You may have a lower difficulty score but you can certainly make up for it through execution. Also, tumbling isn't your entire score. Even if a team scores higher than you on the tumbling/jumps sheet, you could still beat them on building and overall. Plenty of teams have performed well without a single back handspring.

2. Why is it important to follow through on the promise to compete?

Stay the course! If you are making the promise to compete every year and not following through, what does this show your athletes? Making a solid plan early will help everyone achieve the goal. All teams face the tough moments and everyone is dealing with injuries, dedication issues, academic ineligibly, or personal crisis, you will get through it. Reach out for support and keep going!

3. It is our first year competing, what should our team goals consist of?

Set realistic goals. It is not all about winning. Hitting a routine and having fun is the ultimate goal for all teams. Focus on improving your performance each week and guide your athletes positively and keep their spirits up. Be sure the routine is showcasing what they can do well. Athletes perform great when they feel comfortable and safe performing skills.

4. How do coaches get the parents excited to support the team at competitions?

Get the parents involved by encouraging them to sit together, make t-shirts, make goodie bags, etc. The more positive parent involvement you have, the higher your dedication level is from the athletes. Be sure to let them know you need their support to have a successful competitive season. You have the same goals, you want to see the athletes shine!

5. How do we generate student interest in our competitions?

Perform your routine for assemblies, make posters about your upcoming events, post pictures on social media, etc. The more you share your routine and are proud of what you are doing, the more the students will take notice! Talk with the sports teams or coaches and ask if their team would be able to attend. Inviting admin or teachers is a great way to generate interest.

6. It all seems overwhelming and scary to begin competing. Where do I start?

First, teams do not have to compete to be a successful program. If you are ready to make the leap, we have an entire cheer community who wants to support you. You just have to reach out. Start off small. Maybe start with the OCCA Game Day Championships and perform your game material. Game Day is wonderful way to "get your feet wet". Print off this handbook, the scoring rubrics and score sheets, watch some videos, and begin to study.

Be sure to follow OCCA on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Important updates will always be available at WWW.OCCA.NET. Please feel free to reach out to the contacts above if you have any questions or need some advice. We can even help connect you with a coach in your general area. GOOD LUCK and we hope to see you on the mat!

