

# OCCA COMPETITION HANDBOOK



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**OCJA (Oregon Cheerleading Judges Association) Spirit Commissioner: Amber Cowgill**

- Difficulty score questions
- Questions about the scoring rubric
- Reporting any judging errors
- Judge Complaints/Compliments
- OCJA Feedback Form for questions: [CLICK HERE](#)

**OSAA Spirit Rules Interpreter: Sarah Whaley, [cheerleading.sri@osaa.org](mailto:cheerleading.sri@osaa.org)**

- Safety Concerns
- Stunt Legality questions
- NFHS Spirit Rules Interpretation
- Safety Deductions
- OCJA Feedback Form for questions: [CLICK HERE](#)

**OCCA Competition Coordinator: [occageneral@gmail.com](mailto:occageneral@gmail.com)**

- General event questions
  - Please note that each event, except OCCA and OSAA sponsored events, is run by the designated competition director and the 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](mailto:president@occa.net)

For OSAA related questions, please email **Lauren Brownrigg** at [laurenb@osaa.org](mailto:laurenb@osaa.org)

For questions/advice on attending a national competition, please email **Christine Langley** at [christinelangleym41@gmail.com](mailto:christinelangleym41@gmail.com)

### **SCHOOL APPROVAL TO COMPETE:**

- Approval from Athletic Director/Administration to compete at events.
- High School Teams: Participating teams must represent high schools registered with the OSAA to compete in cheerleading, and the individual squad members must satisfy the OSAA student eligibility rules for cheerleading and school district requirements.
  - To see if your school is registered [CLICK HERE](#)
    - Cheerleading must be listed under all activities/athletics offered

### **COMPETITION PLAN:**

Communicate a clear plan for the year with your administration, team, and parents. Include additional competition costs, practice times, practice space required, and where you plan to compete.

- Financial Planning
  - Competition budget may include the following expenses:
    - Choreography (not required)
    - Music (must be purchased from an approved provider)
    - Entry Fees (\$50 - \$250 per event, depending on event)
    - Travel Costs (school transportation, gas, etc.)
    - Additional apparel (team shirts, competition bows, etc.)
    - Props (new signs, megaphones, flags, etc.)
- Create 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.
  - OSAA Sanctioned Events calendar is found [HERE](#)
  - Registration forms and competition host information: [HERE](#)

### **PARENT/ATHLETE MEETING:**

- Ideally, this meeting should happen before 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 and time commitment

### **ATHLETE ELIGIBILITY AND QUALIFYING FOR EVENTS:**

For a complete guide to qualifying for events and eligibility requirements, [CLICK HERE](#)

#### **Tips:**

- Sharing information with your administration will lead to a successful competitive season.
- It is important that everyone involved is on the same page in terms of information and schedule.
- Set the expectation of competing prior to tryouts or at the pre-tryout meeting.

### **DIVISIONS:**

#### **GAME DAY: (for more information regarding this division: [CLICK HERE](#))**

- Rec Game Day (Affiliated and Non-Affiliated)
  - Tiny - Kindergarten and under

- Mini – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and under
- Youth – 6<sup>th</sup> grade and under
- Junior – 8<sup>th</sup> grade and under
- Senior (non-affiliated programs only) – 12<sup>th</sup> grade and under, with a minimum of 5th grade.
- High School Game Day - Division size varies between OCCA Game Day Championships and the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships.
  - Junior Varsity (All Classifications)
  - 3A/2A/1A Varsity
  - 4A Varsity
  - 5A Varsity
  - 6A Varsity
- Stomp and Shake (6A/5A/4A/3A/2A/1A)
- Mascot (6A/5A/4A/3A/2A/1A)

**TRADITIONAL: (for more information regarding this division: [CLICK HERE](#))**

- High School:
  - JV (All Classifications)
  - 3A/2A/1A Varsity (Small and Large)
  - 4A Varsity (Small and Large)
  - 5A Varsity (Small and Large)
  - 6A Varsity (Small and Large)
  - 4A/3A/2A/1A Coed
  - 6A/5A Coed
- Rec Teams:
  - Tiny - Kindergarten and under
  - Mini – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and under
  - Youth – 6<sup>th</sup> grade and under
  - Junior – 8<sup>th</sup> grade and under
  - Senior (non-affiliated programs only) – 12th grade and under, with a minimum of 5th grade.

**INDIVIDUALS/GROUP STUNT/PARTNER STUNT**

For more information regarding the individual and stunt divisions [click here](#)

**Tips:**

- Rec teams - The oldest athlete on the team will set your division.
- Rec divisions may be split by size depending on event registrations.
- JV divisions may be separated by classification or coed.
- Senior rec team athletes who are also a member of a OSAA high school team, may not compete at the same event.

**SCORING RUBRICS/SCORE SHEETS**

- Teams will be scored following the OCJA (OSAA approved) score sheets during the routine. All rubrics and score sheets are found [HERE](#)
- Any deductions or violations will be taken off the final score. Information on deductions/violations is found [HERE](#)
- Teams will be scored by three (3) performance judges and (2) safety judges.

- Final score sheets and final tabulation will be available at the conclusion of each event.

### **QUALITY CONTROL PROCESS (QC)**

- Quality Control will be available at all events.
  - 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.
  - 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.
- Quality Control (QC) Procedure:
  - A team's performance will be judged.
  - Difficulty scores will be taken to the challenge table.
  - Major Technical / Safety Violations will be listed on the challenge form; stunting / tumbling faults will NOT be listed.
  - A safety judge will be available at the challenge table.
  - Teams should 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. Form is [HERE](#)
  - 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. Example: 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, no further steps need to be taken.
  - A Quality Control Judge will review the Challenge Form and review the team's performance via video.
  - 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.

### **Tips:**

- Plan to attend the OCCA Coaches Conference to familiarize yourself with the scoring process. Training dates will be posted on the OCCA website and found [HERE](#)
- Print off all scoring rubrics and score sheets. It is handy to have an easy reference and to not depend on your phone or computer.

- Score sheets and rubrics are the “rules of the game” and should be studied prior to creating routines.
- Have a clear video of your routine to submit to Quality Control if needed. Designate this person ahead of the event.
- Create a quick reference guide listing what difficulty ranges you believe your team to be. This could just be on post-it notes or a piece of paper in your coach’s bag.

### **BUILDING A ROUTINE**

- Information regarding **GAME DAY** divisions: [CLICK HERE](#)
- Information regarding **TRADITIONAL** divisions: [CLICK HERE](#)

#### **Tips:**

- When planning your routine, you should plan to leave a 5-6 second buffer on time
- Watch videos of routines from the previous year
- Identify your team skills:
  - Tumbling, stunts, and jumps
    - Tumbling: List out what skills each athlete can perform.
    - Stunts: List skills your team performs well and safely.
    - Jumps: List your best team jump and 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
  - Divide your routine into sections.
    - Two Sections: Example – Cheer section and music section or vice versa **OR**
    - Three Sections: Example – Opening, cheer, ending
      - **Example:**
        - The Opening section (:45-1:00) may include tumbling, jumps, stunts, and dance.
        - Cheer (:30-1:00) may include motions, jumps, tumbling, stunts, props, and crowd involvement.
        - The ending section (:30-:45) may include pyramids, dance, tumbling, etc. End on a strong note regardless of what skill section you choose to end on!
      - Use a mat sheet and 8-count sheet to help with your planning of formations and music counts.
      - Plan the bones of your routine early. Update as you move through the season and note skill improvements.
      - 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 a check-off list to be sure you hit every element.

#### **Choreography Tips:**

- Always leave time in your routine to get from point A to point B.
- Avoid having athletes farther than they need to on the mat. Work on clean transitions and formations; athletes should not cross center all the time or take the attention off the team’s skills.

- Your goal should be to create a routine that shows off your team's strengths, is clean, and includes skills that your athletes can perform safely.
- 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 create a mat sheet and could be a helpful tool in organizing your routine. Use the mat sheet to create formations throughout the routine.

## **MUSIC**

- All music must be licensed and purchased through any of the music providers listed here: <https://www.usacheer.org/music>
- You may choreograph to specific music or choreograph your routine and fit the music to it. Keep in mind the speed of the music, be sure it fits with your team's ability.
- Teams should obtain a copy of the music license and be able to provide it upon request from the event director.
- Single songs may be used but must not be altered in any way.
- Coaches are responsible for playing music or designating a representative.
  - A sound system will be provided.
  - A representative must be present at the sound system at the time of performance.
  - The appointed representative should know your routine and be familiar with the music start/stop points.
  - Download all music directly to your device/phone, WiFi may not be available.
  - Turn your device/phone onto "Airplane" mode so your playback will not be interrupted by a text, email, or phone call.
  - Remove phone cover to ensure connectivity to the cord.

## **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. If you hire a choreographer, you are hiring them to give you routine with structure and material. Your routine should change week to week based on judges' feedback.

Consider the following when hiring a choreographer:

- Ask for references or watch their body of work. Everyone has their style but 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.
- The choreographer should be knowledgeable with 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 is and secure funds before choreography.
- Ask if the price includes music.
- Decide whether you are hiring for a full routine or partial. Teams just hire out for the dance section, or some hire out for the cheer section. Decide what your needs are and what you can 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 [occageneral@gmail.com](mailto:occageneral@gmail.com)

### **EVENT REGISTRATION**

- Registration information for regional events is available on the OCCA website. [CLICK HERE](#)
- Be aware of registration deadlines and register in a timely manner.
  - If you must register late, be aware that late fees may apply.
  - Be aware that some events DO NOT accept late entries or may reach capacity without warning.
- Stay on top of your bookkeeper to ensure prompt payment 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 will affect the entire event and performance order.

### **EVENT EXPECTATIONS/ETIQUETTE**

- What to expect at events:
  - Arrive no more than one hour before your team performs unless you want to watch.
  - When you receive the performance order, count about 5 minutes per routine to figure out when you may 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 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 space for necessary skills. Be efficient and 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.
  - Competition Terms
    - ***"Up Next"***: Team is taking the performance mat.
    - ***"On Deck"***: Team immediately following the team on the performance mat.
    - ***"In the Hole"***: Team is waiting to be on deck
    - ***Quality Control***: Your challenge form will be available 10 minutes following your performance. The QC form will list your **DIFFICULTY** scores only, and should you feel it is incorrect, a challenge for the revised score. Serves an opportunity to ask questions regarding scoring rubrics and safety violations.
    - ***Spectator Entrance***: All persons should enter through this entrance except for athletes and coaches.
    - ***Team Entrance***: Only coaches and athletes should enter through this entrance.
    - ***Cheer Grams***: Some events offer cheer grams. Parents/Fans can purchase and create an encouraging message to their team or specific athlete before performing.

### **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 event information as soon as you receive it to parents/fans. (Time, location, parking info, admission price, concessions)
- Provide information sheets during the practice before with what to pack, wear, meeting time, etc.
- Parents and fans represent your program. Encourage positive behavior and respect 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 athletes and coaches about behavior expectations, uniform expectations, and sportsmanship before EVERY event.
- Introduce yourself to fellow coaches and teams! It is always nice to meet your peers at events.

### **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 assistant coaches or other coaches.
  - Keep feedback positive and stay focused and relaxed around your athletes.

### **OSAA STATE CHEERLEADING CHAMPIONSHIPS – *Varsity Level Teams Only***

For information regarding the OSAA State Cheerleading Championships, please review the OSAA Cheerleading Handbook found [HERE](#)

### **NATIONAL COMPETITIONS**

For questions and advice, please reach out to Christine Langley, [christinelangleym41@gmail.com](mailto:christinelangleym41@gmail.com)

- National Competition Options:
  - USA, UCA, NCA – All require bids and coaches should 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 the 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 the best/cheapest option from your closest airport.
  - JetBlue 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 buses in advance of your trip.
- Park Tickets/Extra Events
  - Reserve park tickets (Disney) through company USA/UCA.
  - Select the 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 the hotel – are there quick, inexpensive options available?
  - Team Dinner – Costs, large party reservations.
  - Free breakfast at the hotel.
  - Food in venues 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 team 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 are expensive and could be a sensitive subject with your athletes and parents. Administrative approval could also be time sensitive.

## COMMON QUESTIONS

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

ABSOLUTELY! This is a common misconception. Oregon 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 tough moments, and everyone is dealing with injuries, dedication issues, academically ineligible, or personal crises, 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 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. Start off small. Maybe start with the OCCA Game Day Championships and perform your game material. Game Day is a wonderful way to "get your feet wet". Print off this handbook, the scoring rubrics and score sheets, watch some videos, and begin to study. Reach out for help! Contact information is listed at the top of this handbook. Everyone is happy to help and support your journey and success!

Be sure to follow OCCA on Facebook and Instagram. Important updates will always be available at [WWW.OCCA.NET](http://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!