

10 Tips for Instant Challenge Preparation

From Iowa DI

Don't forget about Instant Challenge between Tournaments. Especially at the State Tournament, the best teams can rank closely in their Central Challenge scores. What generally makes the difference, when it comes to team placement, is Instant Challenge, since this represents one-quarter of the final score. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

1. Make sure your team practices Instant Challenge at every single meeting. Although one meeting does not make up for a lack of consistent practice, arrange for a meeting, if necessary, where you can focus on Instant Challenge.
2. It is not just the quantity of Instant Challenges practiced that matters, but also the quality of the Challenges and the quality of the debriefing that takes place afterward. Select Instant Challenges with a view toward providing students with exposure to new skills or experiences they need to acquire. Then make sure you discuss the outcome with students.
3. Although it is critical for a Team Manager or Coordinator to provide students with constructive feedback after a practice Instant Challenge, students also need to be involved in evaluating themselves. Ask them how they might score themselves, what they think they did well, where they could improve, and what they might do differently. In fact, give students a chance to repeat all or part of an Instant Challenge to help them experience learning success.
4. Go back to old Instant Challenges and ask students to develop a different solution. Then encourage them to solve the Challenge again with a third solution. This teaches students not only that there is more than one solution for every single Instant Challenge, but also the importance of generating a unique solution.
5. Just as there is more than one solution to every Instant Challenge, there is more than one way to prepare for it. Encourage your students to play board games together that stress risk-taking (and consequences), critical problem-solving and creative thinking. Games to consider include Risk, Apples to Apples, Cranium, The Game of SCATTERGORIES, and similar games. To emphasize pattern analysis, ask your team to solve a jigsaw or Sudoku puzzle. To focus on balance, movement, and spatial awareness, have your team play Jenga or build a marble maze. To sharpen acting skills, play charades.
6. Emphasize to teams that they need to avoid the trap of seizing the first idea that occurs to them, since this is usually the most common solution. All Instant Challenges are designed to have more than one solution. Just because adults or students are unable to generate more than one solution does not mean they do not exist.

7. Avoid the trap of assuming there is a loophole that will solve the challenge. This is related to the assumption that there is only one solution to the challenge. When in doubt about the intent of a challenge, students need to refer to the Challenge statement that appears at the start of every Instant Challenge. Note that the Challenge is read once in entirety, and then the Appraiser re-reads the Challenge statement before the Timekeeper starts the clock.

8. Make sure your team practices a balance of all types of Instant Challenges: Performance, Task and Combination. Don't be afraid to modify existing Instant Challenges so that your team is exposed to as many different types of challenges as possible. Shorten the time, add or subtract a step, change the materials, or switch a verbal challenge to a non-verbal one. Your goal is to help your students build a library of experiences from which they can draw when they compete, or at the very least achieve a level of comfort with the unexpected.

9. Be aware that within each type of Instant Challenge are sub-categories. Performance-Based Instant Challenges can be verbal or non-verbal, involve props or have no props at all. Task-Based Instant Challenges can be verbal or non-verbal, and involve moving, modifying, controlling, protecting, extending, building, communicating or solving a critical thinking problem that has more than one solution. Combination Instant Challenges can involve both a task and a performance which may or may not be related to each other. Sometimes a team is required to divide its members in order to accomplish multiple tasks or parts of a performance or task. Instant Challenges can have 2 or 3 parts whose tasks are well-defined; other times, there is only one part and the team must monitor the time closely to complete all of the requirements.

10. Make sure your team members are cross-trained in various roles, such as facilitating idea generation, tracking time, analyzing the rules, knowing how to score points, and manipulating materials. Even though all teams are comprised of external (talky) and internal (reflective) students, make sure everyone has a role during Instant Challenge, since this affects your teamwork score and, ultimately, the outcome of the challenge.