



Coaching Guide

2021-2022

15th Annual Oregon Game Project Challenge

www.ogpc.info

Introduction

The Oregon Game Project Challenge invites teams of students to use their talents in programming, art, sound/music, writing, and more to create computer games around an annual theme. At the Main Event, teams present their games to judges and other competitors, get a chance to hear talks by industry professionals, and compete for awards in several categories.

You serve as the primary line of communication between OGPC and the team and chaperone at the main event. You also will likely help the team out with finding a time and place for meetings and guidance as they learn to manage a multi-month project. You do not have to be an expert programmer or game designer yourself - there are many resources out there for students to learn from - we provide some information on where they can start: <https://www.ogpc.info/resources/>

For a quick list of everything you'll need to do, see the checklist at the end of this document.

Goals

More than anything, OGPC is about collaboration, learning, and fun! It's not about winning, and it's not even about being finished. No matter how much they have gotten done, as the Main Event looms, a first-time team will often feel like their game is not finished. Most projects arrive at the Main Event in some state of "well, it's not quite done yet." Much of the judging focuses on process as opposed to just final results, so encourage teams to focus on doing what they can and documenting what they do and not to panic if their game only ends up partially finished.

Remind the students that this is more about the journey than the destination. Unfinished games with excited, invested team members can still win awards!

Critical Dates and Updates

- November: Season kickoff - registration opens
- April - registration closes 1 month before the main event (if not already sold out!)
- May - Main Event at Western Oregon University

If you are not already on the mailing list (mailchimp), make sure to sign up at <https://www.ogpc.info/contact/>. We'll send out tips and tricks, notice of informative conference calls, and plenty of reminders for registration and the Main Event.

Team Basics

Starting a Season

Each November, the competition season is kicked off with the theme announcement and opening of registration. Along with the theme, the competition manual and achievements list for the season are released.

The competition manual details the rules of the road for OGPC. **Make sure the team (and yourself) read the document so they know what is expected and allowed.**

The achievements are the criteria by which the teams will be judged at the main event. As judges talk to the teams, they will be using the achievement list as an evaluation rubric. The best teams learn the theme and achievements early and review them constantly.

TIP: Try to capture as much of the early design process as you can. Being able to show judges how an idea went from concept to completion improves an entry's score.

Forming teams

Creating a computer game requires many skills. A successful team will need someone who wears each of these hats:

- Leader/Manager
- Artist
- Programmer
- Sound effects creator
- Musician
- Record keeper
- Writer
- Marketer

Teams are composed of 2-7 students. So on smaller teams, students will have to wear multiple hats. And sometimes multiple students will fill the same role and divide tasks in a critical area like programming or art.

Teams compete in one of two divisions: Middle or High School. A team that blends members from both age groups must compete in the High School division.

If a team lacks skills in a particular area, encourage them to look outside their usual circle and recruit new members with those skills (if the team is mostly kids in a programming club, maybe they should go talk to an art class or the band). Or, they can work around their limitations. If a team lacks experienced programmers, they can use a game design tool that allows for drag and drop game making. If a team lacks artists, they can design a game that relies on simple abstract graphics.

Finding Tools

If members of a team have not made any games before, they should start by checking out some of the tools recommended on our website (<https://www.ogpc.info/resources/>) and following a tutorial or two to build some simple projects before they get too deep into designing their game. Students will have a much better sense of what they can pull off once they have built even a simple project or two.

Team Management System (TMS)

TMS (<https://tms.ogpc.info>) is the website where coaches register their teams and team members manage their entry. Each team member registers individually on TMS (with their own profile) and connects to their team and game entry. Game pages include the game logo or promotional poster, a team photo and logo, descriptions, and screenshots and design images. Judging occurs directly from within TMS so having complete information is critical. TMS also makes it possible for teams to share their games with people outside of OGPC for years to come.

[This video tutorial](#) explains how to get started on TMS.

Getting To Work

Planning and Pacing

The best teams organize the work of creating a game. They have clear expectations of what each team member will do and what will happen at each team meeting. They set milestones with dates and test their games at each milestone.

A great strategy is to start by creating the minimal viable product and then make gradual improvements that are tested at each milestone. The first playable version of the game should be done very early in the season. It may only be a single level and missing most of the features the team eventually wants, but there should be something that the team can start testing.

Releasing early and often is a necessary part of being able to test the game and get feedback on it. An objective outsider may see a problem that a team member isn't aware of, so try to seek out others to come play the project as soon as it is playable.

TIP: Getting feedback early and often can really make a difference in the final product. Teams don't want the judges to be their first audience!

Documentation

Teams that want to score well will keep track of their diagrams, brainstorming, pictures, and anything that documents their process from start to finish. This includes the discussions, decisions, and changes that happen along the way. Some teams use folders or binders, others scan or photograph everything and keep it online.

Consider using an online solution like Google Docs or Microsoft Office Online. This allows everyone to read and contribute, it can't be lost, and you can even use revision history to keep track of changes. The more that's kept online, the less likely it is for your student's hard work to be lost or damaged. It's easy to take pictures with a phone and put them in an on-line folder.



When it comes time for the competition you may want to print out any online documents. Though OGPC provides internet access, plan for the unexpected. It may also be easier for judges to page through a hard-copy than scroll around in different browser tabs.

Other Activities

In addition to creating the game, there are other criteria by which teams are judged. Here are some non-game activities in unrelated to game creation:

- Come up with a team logo
- Come up with a game logo
- Design a team t-shirt
- Make a website or blog for the game
- Maintain a social media feed for the project
- Design the Main Event booth - make a poster, put together a binder with documentation
- Make a Trailer video and Making of Video for the project
- Test the game: Quality assurance (QA) is vital. Break things, find bugs, look for problems
- Evaluate the game against the achievements and prepare to present/describe how the project qualifies for each

The Main Event

The Main Event takes place in spring, usually on a Saturday in Mid-May. Team setup usually begins about 8:30am. Judging starts at about 9:30 and concludes at about 3:30, at which point the award ceremony takes place. The event generally wraps up by about 4:30pm.

During the event, each team gets a table on which to display their work. Each team will be assigned a judging time (~20 minutes) during which they will project to a group of judges. Teams are expected to give a brief “elevator pitch” - a quick description of their game, how it interprets the theme, and what they think really stands out about their project. Judges will then try out the game and ask the team questions.

Scoring

In OGPC, a key focus of the judging is on "achievements" that each recognize an element in the final product or an activity that was part of building it. They range from "Make your own music track", to "Design a team logo", to "Provide multiple difficulty levels". They are divided into the categories of: Game Design, Art and Assets, Theme and Style, Professionalism, and Programming.

These achievements are published at the start of the season to give teams a target to shoot for. To maximize a team's chances to win, and to avoid disappointment, it is critical to make sure the team understands the achievements in advance. Many of the achievements will require keeping documentation of things like work schedules or early versions of art and code. So teams should refer to the achievements often to make sure they know what to document.

The points from achievements are used by the judges to rank the teams and help determine awards, although the final determination for awards in each category is done by the head judge. In addition to category awards, there are overall awards: Best in Show, Best Rookie Team, Judges' Choice, and People's Choice.

Checklist

Getting started

1. Advertise to get participants
 - a. Posters, Previous participants, Word-of-mouth, School newspaper, Directly ask students
2. Hold a game jam kick-off meeting
 - a. Pizza, Game development activities, Brainstorming, Game design, Playtesting, Elevator pitch
3. Form a team (or teams), potential roles --

- a. Project Manager/Scrum Master, Product Owner (Customer interface), Historian/scribe, Programmers, Artists, Musicians, Writer, Sound effects people, Marketing/communication
4. Register on [TMS](#)
5. Decide on a schedule
 - a. Weekly meetings, Monthly test sessions
6. Get familiar with ogpc.info
 - a. [TMS](#), [Resources](#), [How to compete](#)
7. Figure out how to communicate
 - a. Documentation/work in progress – Google Drive, Code – GitHub, Intra team communication – email, Discord
8. Figure out how to do project management
 - a. [Trello](#)
9. Decide on technology (see [Resource page](#))
10. Create a budget
 - a. Needed equipment, Registration fee, Transportation to main event, Other expenses (T-shirts, marketing swag)

Mid-season

1. Figure out how to test
 - a. Usability testing, Recruit testers, Game players, Mock judging sessions with mock judges
2. Develop iteratively -- Plan/design/build/test
3. Design Marketing
 - a. Create an elevator pitch, Design a game logo, Design a team logo, Design team, T-shirt, Website, Blog, Business cards, etc...
4. Start planning Trailer and Making of Videos

Preparing for the Competition

1. Produce the Trailer and Making of Videos
2. Practice
 - a. Present to strangers, Review achievement rubric - know what you expect to get