

Academic Pentathlon Coaches Share Their Tips and Strategies

1. The younger the grade level of the competing team, the more structure is needed in covering the Study Guide material.
2. Speed is as important as content area – have students practice doing a 50 question test in 30 minutes, a two page essay in 30 minutes using the given format, and use the essay rubric to score each other's essay – discuss essays and how they can be improved. (Essay rubric and score sheets are included in the Coach's Supplement).
3. Use note cards to memorize facts and have students drill each other.
4. Plan field trips, pizza parties, and other team activities to encourage camaraderie and sense of belonging to a group.
5. Scrimmages between teams motivate students to study – teams take turns hosting and providing refreshments.
6. Emphasize importance of good test taking skills – have students practice taking tests on scantrons (sample scantrons are included in your Coach's Supplement).
7. Give each team member a responsibility and emphasize the dual function of a team member – to lead and be led – to work together to achieve a goal. Delegate study areas to each member and have them develop expertise in the area and share with the team.
8. Possible funding sources for materials, team shirts, food – PTA/ASB, Bingo, Principal's Slush Fund, Faculty Club and Academic Booster Clubs.
9. Get staff to sign a banner wishing students well at competition.
10. Honor students at assembly or Academic Awards Ceremony after they get their awards; team members cans can also be recognized for being participants in an academic event; get publicity in school paper, yearbook, district newspaper, and local paper – school administrators are more motivated to support the program if you can get this publicity.
11. Work hard, but have a lot of fun – it is more fun to win, but it is no disgrace to lose if you gave it your best effort and learned a lot in the process, not only about subject areas, about how to work with other people with different working styles, abilities, and interests.
12. Enjoy it – don't make it a chore – the key to a team's success is enthusiasm, practice, and team work – keep the team going without pushing too hard – don't burn the team out – try for peak performance at the competition.

13. Give lots of positive reinforcement – train team members to give peer support – boost confidence, downplay competition between team members, give moral support to each other.
14. Get team members to set goals for themselves to discourage competition among your own team – have students try to better their own scores and diffuse any one-upmanship among your own team.
15. Encourage team members to help each other improve – guide students in constructive critique – to accept and give advice in a positive manner – have a rap session to discuss problem areas and how study skills or interactive skills can be improved.
16. Emphasize benefits of peer coaching, sharing skills – the strength of a team working together – stimulate a non-threatening atmosphere where team members help each other and feel good about it.
17. Take team to breakfast on the morning of the event and give lots of positive encouragement; downplay over-emphasis on winning, and help each member feel good about themselves no matter how they do at competition. Review the benefits that each has gained just by making a commitment to be on the team, (e.g., meeting new people and learning how to work as a team).
18. Teach students to appreciate and honor other' accomplishments – take students to the Awards Ceremony so they see and experience the excitement and attention focused on those who have earned it.

SOME REASONS WHY I BECAME A COACH FOR THE PENTATHLON....

- Fun to get to know students outside the classroom; to motivate and challenge myself.
- Opportunity to share my love of learning and interacting with kids.
- Don't like coaching sports or chaperoning dances, but enjoy being around academically motivated students.
- Enjoy opportunity to try creative approaches to teaching and coaching provides that opportunity.
- It's exciting to turn around a student who lacked motivation – the Pentathlon often challenges bright, but unmotivated students.
- Provides a “safe” environment for students who need academic challenge; Pentathlon draws students of all GPA levels, so it is not exclusive like an Honor Society or other academic clubs.