

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHER COACHES

A. ROLE OF THE TEACHER COACH

The teacher coach is expected to help the team members decide which students will play which parts in the mock trial and to assist the students in playing those roles. As part of the sizeable responsibility of acting as team coaches, teachers are responsible for the following areas:

- 1 Rules of the Program. All teachers and teams are expected to adhere to the rules, facts, and materials provided in the Mock Trial Tournament Case Materials. Therefore, please make sure you are familiar with the tournament rules.
- 2 Role Assignments. Team members should be strongly encouraged to select roles based on their interests and abilities and not on the basis of any gender or cultural stereotypes which might be drawn from the characterizations in the fact pattern.
- 3 Team Preparation. Attorneys will also help coach each team. Teams should prepare both sides of the case and are strongly urged to arrange and conduct preliminary mock trials with other teams prior to competing in the regional tournament. Preliminary trials require only one attorney or judge to act as the presiding judge as it is not necessary to award points to the teams during these practice rounds.
- 4 Education. Education of students is the primary goal of the Mock Trial Tournament. Healthy competition helps to achieve this goal, but teachers are reminded of their responsibility to keep the competitive spirit at a reasonable level. The reality of the adversarial system is that one party wins and the other loses. Teachers should be sure to prepare their teams to be ready to accept either outcome in a mature manner. Teachers can help prepare students for either outcome by placing the highest value on excellent preparation and presentation, rather than on winning or losing the trial.
- 5 Observers. Other classes, parents and friends of the participants are welcome to attend the trials.
- 6 Arrival Times. Teachers are responsible for getting their teams to the assigned courtroom 10 minutes prior to the starting time of each trial.

B. SUGGESTIONS FOR TEAM PREPARATION

The following tips have been developed from past experience with students and may be useful:

1. Have all team members read the entire set of materials. When finished, have them brainstorm the points for each side of the case.

2. The best teams generally have their students prepare their own questions with the teacher and attorney coaches giving the team continual feedback and assistance.
3. As soon as possible, student attorneys should begin formulating questions for use in examination of witnesses and student witnesses should rehearse their testimony. Student preparation will progress more rapidly by simulating actual conduct of the trial than by merely conducting general classroom discussion of the steps in the trial.
4. After the questions are prepared for witnesses, a team should hold several practice sessions where its attorneys question individual witnesses and the rest of the team evaluates which questions are good and which might be dropped or added in order to bring out favorable evidence. These sessions will also help prepare the witnesses for the tournament.
5. Opening and closing statements should be written by students with editing assistance from the teacher and attorney coaches. (Teacher and attorney coaches should not write statements for students.) Coaches should not tell students to incorporate language that the students do not understand or feel comfortable with. Students should be reminded that closing statements must remain flexible to respond to the evidence as it comes out in the trial.
6. Each attorney should practice handling interruptions from the judge on matters such as the relevance of questions or the rationale of the arguments during the closing statement.
7. The ability of a team to adapt to different situations is often a key part in a mock trial enactment since each judge, or person acting as a judge, has his or her own way of doing things. Since the proceedings of the trial often depend in no small part on the judge who presides, student attorneys and other team members should be prepared to adapt to judicial rulings and requests, even if they appear contrary to outlined tournament procedures and rules.
8. Courtroom etiquette and decorum should be stressed at practice and observed at trial (*i.e.*, standing when the judge enters or leaves the courtroom and calling the judge “Your Honor”).
9. All participants should speak loudly and clearly. Microphones are not usually available. Practice this by having each student attorney stand at the far end of the room while interrogating the student witness.
10. Credibility of witnesses is very important and students acting as witnesses should be encouraged to “get into” the roles and attempt to think like the person they are playing. These students should read over their statements (affidavits) many times and have other people ask them questions about the facts until they know them “cold.” Witnesses are not permitted to refer to their statements during the trial unless requested by an attorney to refresh recollection

11. The students need to understand and become familiar with legal terminology; (*i.e.*, plaintiff, defendant, overruled, sustained, etc.).
12. Some of the things most difficult for team members to learn are
 - a. Deciding which points are the most important in proving their side of the case and making sure such proof takes place.
 - b. Stating clearly what they intend to prove in an opening statement and arguing effectively in their closing statement that the facts and evidence presented have proven their case.
 - c. Following the formality of court; (*i.e.*, standing up when the judge enters and calling the judge “Your Honor”).
 - d. Phrasing questions on direct examination that are not leading. (Carefully review the rules of evidence and watch for this type of questioning in practice sessions.)
 - e. Refraining from asking so many questions on cross-examination that well-made points are lost. When a witness has been contradicted or otherwise discredited, student attorneys tend to ask additional questions that often lessen the impact of points previously made. (Stop and recognize what questions are likely to require answers that will make good points for your side. Rely on the use of these questions. Avoid pointless questions.)
 - f. Thinking quickly on their feet when a witness gives an unexpected answer, an attorney asks an unexpected question, or a judge questions an attorney or witness. (Practice sessions will help prepare for this.)
 - g. Introducing exhibits into evidence.
13. In order for students to gain the most valuable tournament experience, it is crucial for teachers to discourage participating attorneys from promoting a “win-at-all-costs” attitude among their team members.