

Mock Trial Helpful Hints

The following information represents some of the most frequently asked questions about the Florida High School Mock Trial Program.

STARTING A TEAM

Q: What is Mock Trial?

A: The Florida High School Mock Trial Competition is a competition in which students take on the roles of witnesses and attorneys in simulating a trial against another team. The trial is based on a hypothetical case the students receive well in advance and there are rules governing the competition to make it fair to all parties.

Q: I want to try this competition, but I'm not sure how to get started, what should I do?

A: The first thing a student should do is find a teacher who is willing to sponsor your team. Having a teacher coach is essential for (1) obtaining a meeting room, (2) advertising for the team, (3) gaining permission to miss school for the competition, (4) helping to coach the team as you begin developing your case, and (5) assisting in general. You should also read the rules of the competition thoroughly and contact FLREA so we will know you are interested in competing.

Q: A teacher has committed to sponsor the team, what's next?

A: The next step is to obtain an attorney coach. It is a good idea to ask your local public defender and state attorney to advertise in their office for an attorney coach. If this attempt does not work, you can try calling different law offices or law schools that may be in your area.

Q: I've got a teacher coach and an attorney coach, what's next?

A: You need to find a way to fill a team. You need AT LEAST six people to fill a team. You can reach that number by just asking your classmates to participate or advertising try-outs for the team.

Q: What should the try-out be like?

A: Try-outs should really be established by your attorney coach and teacher coach. Try-outs usually consist of reading an opening statement on the case and then answering some general questions about the case. You could also instruct students to prepare for a witness role and have your attorney coach cross examine them. No matter how you do it, everyone should have the same type of try-out for the sake of fairness.

PRACTICES

Q: I have a team together, how do we start getting ready?

A: In order to be ready for any kind of competition, you need one big thing: PRACTICE. The first order of business once the team is compiled is to set up a meeting time. This time needs to be at some point when everyone can come together and at a time where everyone will be able to actively participate. Consider factors like: Will everyone be awake for the meeting? Will we all be able to make it there? Will there be transportation problems? Will there be conflicts with other school activities (i.e. sports, clubs, tutoring)? How many times do you want to meet a week? All of these issues should be addressed as you begin holding practices.

Q: How exactly do I get ready to take on the role of a witness/attorney?

A: The set up of practices are usually an issue for a team to decide. From the time you begin practices to the time you have to compete; you need to write a direct and cross examination of every witness, an opening and closing statement for both sides, and have witnesses who are so familiar with their roles that they can perform under direct and cross examination without their affidavit.

Q: Who should prepare the direct and cross-examinations?

A: The students must prepare all the material, which will be presented at the competition. Your coaches can help you figure out what sounds good and doesn't, what is objectionable and what is not, but all the work must be your own.

Q: What about objections and entering evidence? How do we know how to do that?

A: Your attorney coach is your BEST resource for questions about legal procedure. Questions about those things should be directed his/her way. In addition to an attorney coach, the Mock Trial rules of procedure spell out the simplified process used in the competition. Be sure that you are fully aware of these procedures.

Q: How do we know we are ready for competition?

A: The best gauge for telling you are ready for competition is to make it the entire way through the trial twice without any major problems. The witness should be able to perform without scripts, and attorneys should be comfortable enough with their questions that they don't need their papers.

COMPETITION – LOCAL AND DISTRICTS

Q: How is the competition structured?

A: First you must compete in your high school to be your high school's representative, as only one team per school is allowed to compete this year. Then you must compete within your circuit to win the right to go to the state competition.

Q: If there is another team in my high school, how do we setup the competition?

A: The teacher coach(es) and attorney coach(es) should try to obtain a courtroom for you to compete in and lawyers/judges to act as your competition judges for the round. You will need at least three competition judges: one presiding judge who will rule on objections and keep the trial going, and two scoring judges who will score every part of the trial according to the score sheet found in your case materials. You will also need a timekeeper, but your coach or an impartial observer can serve in this capacity.

Q: If there is no competition in my high school or we won that competition, what comes next?

A: Now you move on to the circuit competition. This competition will be conducted in much the same manner, except this time it will be conducted by a Circuit Coordinator or an FLREA staffer. You need to contact FLREA to make sure that we have your team listed.

Q: Will the competition look the same?

A: Every round will be the same, but the competition itself may have many rounds depending on how many teams are competing in your circuit. You will have the opportunity to try the case as both prosecution and defense before it ends. All the particular details for your circuit competition will be decided by your Circuit Coordinator or FLREA in communication with your teacher/attorney coach.

Q: How long does the circuit competition last?

A: Usually no more than a day.

COMPETITION – STATE

Q: Where is the state competition held?

A: The state competition site is determined at the beginning of every year by FLREA. It is available for you in the case materials and should be sent to your teacher coach along with the competition dates. You can also check the FLREA website at www.flrea.org.

Q: How much does it cost?

A: There is a \$200 registration fee for a team plus the travel, hotel, and food expenses of getting a team to the competition site and staying for about 3 nights.

Q: When should we arrive for registration?

A: The Mock Trial Coordinator should provide your teacher coach with the necessary time and place to be for registration. If you are concerned that somehow you are not receiving this information, call the FLREA office, ask for the Mock Trial Coordinator, and make sure that your email is on the list.

Q: What should I wear?

A: You should wear clothing appropriate for trial. You will be in a real court, acting as a professional, so dress accordingly. If you're not sure about something definitely check with your attorney coach and teacher coach before leaving for the state competition.

Q: Can my parents watch the competition and/or can we videotape it?

A: Yes, your parents are allowed to come and watch in accordance to the courtroom size accommodations. Videotaping is forbidden unless you have the permission of the presiding judge in the round and the other team. Usually this is permissible if you are willing to send the other team a copy of that round by mail.

Good luck to all competitors this year. If you have any other questions, comments, or concerns, feel free to contact us:

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