

Helpful Hints

1. Since a school team is required to represent both sides of the case during the competition, all roles in the case should be assigned and practiced.
2. Credibility of witnesses is very important to a team's presentation of its case. As a result, students acting as witnesses need to really "get into" their roles and attempt to think like the persons they are playing. Students who are witnesses should read over their statements (affidavits) many times and have other members of the team or their class ask them questions about the facts until they know them "cold."
3. Student team members have primary responsibility for deciding what possible questions should be asked of each witness on direct and cross-examination. This work can be done in class, through group work, or as an outside class assignment.
4. Based on the experience obtained through several years of mock trial competitions in other states, it was found that the best teams generally had their students prepare their own questions. The Teacher Coach and the Attorney Coach then provided continual feedback and assistance on the assignment to the students as it was completed.
5. After the students prepare the questions for the witnesses, the team should hold several practice sessions where their attorneys question individual witnesses, and the rest of the class or team evaluates which questions are good, and which might be dropped or added. These sessions will also help prepare the witnesses for the tournament.
6. Based on the experience of these practice sessions, attorneys should revise their questions and witnesses should restudy the parts of their witness statements which are weak. It is important for both the attorneys and witnesses to remain flexible and be prepared for the "unexpected" during the actual trials.
7. Opening statements and closing arguments should also be prepared in advance by team members. Legal and non-legal language should be avoided where its meaning is not completely understood by attorneys and witnesses.
8. Closing arguments should not be totally composed before trials, as they are supposed to highlight the important developments for the plaintiff (prosecution) and the defense which have occurred during the trial. The more relaxed and informal arguments are, the more effective they are likely to be.
9. As a team gets closer to the first round of the contest, it is suggested that they conduct at least one complete trial as a kind of "dress rehearsal." All formalities should be followed and notes taken by the Teacher Coach and students concerning how the team's presentation might be improved. Time keeping should be included as part of the practice. A team's Attorney Coach should be invited to attend this session and comment on the presentation.
10. The ability of a team to adapt to different situations is often a key part in a mock trial enactment since each judge, or lawyer acting as a judge, has his or her own way of doing things. Since the proceedings or conduct of the trial often depends 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 contest procedures and rules.

11. As the students practice with the case, refer to the "Judge's Rating Sheet" so that the students are aware of what the judges in the tournaments will be looking for.
12. If any questions arise regarding the case, please feel free to contact either the Legal Counsel Coordinator or your Regional Coordinator for clarification.

