

Tips for Judging High School Mock Trials



Whether you're judging a scrimmage or at the state finals, here are some basic tips that will help make judging mock trials a successful experience for you *and* the students.

Preparation - Know the case. Know the mock trial rules.

Think about your own experience in the courtroom and, how frustrating it is to appear before a judge who has not thoroughly read your brief and knows little about the case. The same is not only true for the students, but also the teachers, attorneys and parents who have helped the students prepare for their trials. They have spent several months learning the materials and developing their trial strategy. **They can tell if you're not prepared!**

It is equally important that you learn the *Rules of the Competition* and the *Simplified Rules of Evidence*. Even if you are experienced, it is important to review these for updates and changes.

The following information will be included with your case materials:

- Case Materials: includes Facts, Statutes & Case Law, Witness Statements and Exhibits.
- Case Clarifications: any changes made to the case since the initial printing.
- Rules of the Competition & Simplified Rules of Evidence.
- Trial Day Procedures.
- Mock Trial Performance Rating Standards & Scoresheet.

The students spend several months learning these materials. A mock trial judge should spend at least several hours.

Rating Standards – Follow them.

Mock Trial Performance Rating Standards are included in your case materials. These standards were devised to help judges balance style and substance. You'll be using a scale of 1-10 to rate each part of the trial, from opening statements to each witness' performance to closing arguments. Keep in mind that this is an educational program for all students, not just students with an interest in legal careers. Try to be **consistent** (inconsistency in scoring defeats the educational purpose and can skew the competition results) and **compassionate** (remember that the participants are high school students, so adjust your expectations accordingly). Be fair, but reasonable.

Positive Learning Experience – It's up to you!

The overall objectives of the program are to help students (1) understand the legal system and profession, and (2) learn the value of teamwork, communication skills and critical thinking. As a judge, your role is to conduct/evaluate the trial. The trial is not the time to teach, especially since most teams have an attorney coach so they get lots of "legal advice." There is a brief time after you have completed your rating sheet during which you can offer a few simple suggestions (rather than directives), but please be sure your comments are constructive ones.

If you know the case, conduct your trial according to the mock trial rules, and use the mock trial rating standards, you can gain as much from working with the students as they learn from you!