



Orange County Mock Trial Frequently Asked Questions

Q: "What is Mock Trial?"

A: Mock Trial comes in a staggering variety of shapes, sizes, and formats. At last count, there were 42 different states, territories and countries represented at the high school level National Mock Trial Championship, each conducting its own local competitions with varying rules, scoring procedures, and cases. The Constitutional Rights Foundation brought Mock Trial to California high schools in 1981, holding the first statewide competition the following year. The first place team from the Orange County Competition will participate in the California State Mock Trial Championship.

Mock Trial competition tasks students with a unique responsibility - defend and prosecute a criminal court case. Participants compete in four to eight rounds of competition at the Central Justice Center in Santa Ana, alternately trying and defending the same hypothetical defendant. Volunteers from California State and Federal Court benches volunteer to preside over mock trials. Local attorneys give their time to help coach teams or score the rounds of competition, rating student performances based on their own legal experience.

In Orange County, we have experienced tremendous success with the program. Annually, mock trial draws more than 300 legal volunteers and nearly 1,000 student competitors from over 40 area high schools.

Q: "How do I get started?"

A: The Constitutional Rights Foundation of Orange County (CRF-OC) coordinates the Mock Trial Program for Orange County. If you are interested in forming a team, feel free to contact the County Coordinator, Wendy Townsend, at 714.259.1521 x102 or wtownsend@crfoc.org, for further details.

CRF-OC will conduct orientation meetings in the Fall of 2008, if you are interested in starting a Mock Trial team please contact Wendy Townsend at 714.259.1521 x102 or wtownsend@crfoc.org for dates and times.

Q: "What if I can't find an attorney coach?"

A: Each year, hundreds of local attorneys volunteer for CRF-OC sponsored programs. If you are having difficulty finding an attorney to coach your Mock Trial team, just let us know. CRF-OC will be happy to find one for you.

Q: "Who pays the registration fee for the Mock Trial Team?"

A: Check with your principal. Most school districts will pay the \$425 team registration fee. Another source is your school's Student Body General Fund. Ask early when budgets are being set. Some school improvement programs may be of help. PTSA can usually be counted upon. If all these options have been exhausted you can contact CRF-OC for further ideas and inquire about the availability of scholarships for your team.

Q: "What is the best way to select a successful Mock Trial Team?"

A: A successful team is about providing a positive, academic-oriented experience for participating students. It should be an experience that allows students to cultivate their appreciation of the justice system, while recognizing the personal responsibilities of citizenship.

The team will need to consist of a minimum of eight students, but must not exceed twenty. The team may be composed of any students currently eligible for school sponsored extra-curricular activities. They could be involved in a speech, drama, or a debate program. They could be selected from government or history classes.

What's important in selecting a successful Mock Trial Team, is gathering eager and committed team members. Successful teams require a significant commitment from students, teachers, and attorney coaches. The hours can be long, but the topics are always stimulating. Students bond easily, support each other, and become loyal friends.

Q: "Should Mock Trial Teams be composed of students only from Honors and AP classes?"

A: Honors students are a great gift to any program. However, continuation high school students have also participated in Mock Trial. There is no one way to be successful in competitions, but there are many ways for young men and women to enjoy the experience.

Q: "Is there a simple recipe for a successful team?"

A: Yes, Practice.

Practices should be scheduled at a time that is convenient for students, teacher-sponsors, and attorney-coaches. The time duration for each practice is up to you. It primarily depends on the attention span of the students and the schedules of the parties involved. Two hours is the minimum recommended meeting time. The number of meetings per week depends purely on how effective and efficient your team is during each practice. Most teams practice 5 to 10 hours per week.

Mock Trial Teams that do not meet as regular classes will have to choose between afternoon, evening, and weekend practice schedules. Having a regular time frame enables the best planning for all and may allow Mock Trial students to also participate in athletics or music programs.

Most importantly, make it fun! Students who enjoy the process win the competition.

Q: "Any suggestions on how practices should run?"

A: It is best to identify the role each person will portray early on, so as not to create confusion. It will also help practices run smoothly. Trial attorneys should decide who will be making the opening and closing arguments and which witnesses they will be questioning. They need to be as familiar with their witnesses' testimony as the witness is. This is not to say that they only need to be familiar with their own witness. Each attorney must understand the testimony of all the witnesses. Have the trial attorneys look at their witness testimony from both the prosecution and defense point of view. This will help them be able to counter possible opposition strategies and be on the lookout for obstacles.

It is also helpful to have the witnesses look at their statements from an attorney's point of view. They will know their character best, and thus are the most qualified to help the attorneys in preparing their testimony.

During some of the practice times have the prosecution and defense teams (each team consists of the trial attorneys and the witnesses) practice separately, rehearsing the questioning of witnesses and the delivery of opening and closing arguments.

It is a good idea to have both prosecution and defense pre-trial attorneys meet to discuss possible arguments for each side and to practice rebuttals. They must know the relevant case laws -- flash cards work well. Prepare for the exclusion of evidence, no matter how small the probability. Being caught without a backup plan can be devastating to the overall performance of the team.

During joint practices, conduct a complete trial. This will give both the prosecution and defense a chance to practice objections. Practice is the only way students will become proficient in objecting and countering objections. Have the trial attorneys make objections to questions, even if trivial. Often the attorneys will be able to get around objections either by re-wording the question or by argument (particularly to the hearsay rule). Students should also watch the opposition to observe possible strategies. Make sure to allow time for the prosecution to make comments on the strategy of the defense and vice-versa.

It is important to time each practice. Leave a buffer for unexpected delays or redirects at the trial. The attorneys shouldn't have to ask for the time remaining during the trial. They need to have a general sense of how long each witness's testimony takes. They also need to be able to know when to raise objections to the other team's timing, should there be a significant discrepancy.

During the actual competition, it is also helpful to hold a debriefing the day after your team competes to discuss what went well and what the team can improve on.

Q: "Should parents be encouraged to get involved?"

A: Absolutely. At many schools, parents are actively recruited to participate. They ride buses to matches and fill the courtroom seats. One school commented that the increased amount of parent involvement has encouraged more participation in organizations like the PTSA or other booster clubs. Positive parent feedback improves the school's image in the community and word of mouth success stories help build successful teams year after year. Parental involvement is a winning solution for families, schools, and the community.

Q: "How early should the team arrive for the competition?"

A: Consider arriving at least 30 minutes and probably an hour before the competition is scheduled. If unanticipated delays occur, your team will still be there before the beginning of the match. The cafeteria at the courthouse is open for Mock Trial participants; plan to arrive in time for the students to settle in, get some dinner, and unwind before the matches begin.

Q: "What if I have other questions that weren't answered?"

A: Wendy Townsend is the County Coordinator for the Orange County Mock Trial program. She is also the Program Manager for the Constitutional Rights Foundation, Orange County. She will be happy to answer any Mock Trial related questions you may have. Wendy is available to assist you during regular office hours (9am-5pm), Monday - Friday. You can contact Wendy at:

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Best of luck!