



2026 Ohio High School Mock Trial Presiding Judge Procedures List

I. Materials/Supplies

Each judging panel will be provided the following supplies before each trial round:

- Official scoresheets (*provided by competing teams during pre-trial conference*)
- Courtroom and panel assignments
- Presiding Judge Procedures List (*this sheet*)
- Judge packet
 - Judge's brief
 - Trial note sheet
 - Mock Trial scoring rubric
 - Ohio Mock Trial reference guide
 - Summary Scoresheet/ Tabulation Assistance Sheet (*blue paper*)
 - Outstanding Witness/ Attorney certificates

II. Address Pre-Trial Matters

- The presiding judge, scoring judge(s), and participating students should introduce themselves.
- Discuss any pretrial matters raised by students. Pre-trial should be student-led, so allow teams to initiate the conference.
 - Teams may ask for permission to record or live stream the trial. This is permitted at your discretion and requires permission from both teams.
- Confirm that scoresheets have been prepared by the teams and provided to each judge.
- Teams are not to present any materials to judges other than their prepared scoresheets.**
- Confirm the presence of two (2) timekeepers and that they are seated together where they will be most visible to the teams and to the presiding judge.
- When both teams are ready for trial, instruct the bailiff to open court.
- Once the bailiff has opened court, please read aloud the implicit bias statement below:

“Before we begin trial, I have a brief message to share with today’s participants.

We all have feelings, assumptions, perceptions, fears, and stereotypes about others. Some biases we are aware of and others we might not be fully aware of, which is why they are called “implicit biases” or “unconscious biases.”

As participants in the Ohio Mock Trial program, it is important to resist jumping to conclusions or acting upon personal likes or dislikes. Resist letting bias, prejudice, or public opinion influence your behavior inside or outside of the courtroom. Treat all individuals with respect, regardless of ability, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, national origin, or socioeconomic status.”

III. Swearing-in the Witnesses

The Bailiff should swear all witnesses as a group immediately following opening statements. Following the reading of the oath by the Bailiff and the response by the witnesses, the witnesses should be seated, and the trial should proceed. In the interest of time, please do not swear in each witness individually throughout the course of the trial.

IV. Conducting the Trial

- All judges should complete their scoresheets, *including the presiding judge*. The team with the most total points on your scoresheet, including team performance score, wins your ballot. Unanimity is not required, and judges will not have time to discuss scores.
- Students should be evaluated only on their performance. Personal *styles* and *preferences* are not criteria for evaluating the students.
- Students should not be evaluated based on their dress, hairstyle, or other aspect of their appearance. Ohio Mock Trial embraces the diversity of all Mock Trial participants.

- Proceed according to the Rules of the Ohio High School Mock Trial Competition.
- Presiding judges should not “teach” during a trial or question the witnesses.
- Make rulings on objections based ONLY upon the Ohio High School Mock Trial Competition Rules and Simplified Ohio Rules of Evidence.
- Do not allow bench conferences – all arguments must be made from counsel tables.
- *Timekeepers should immediately inform the presiding judge of a 15-second or more discrepancy. The presiding judge rules on the discrepancy. Timekeepers adjust accordingly.*
- Student attorneys are to stand during questioning.
- Presiding judges have discretion in ruling on objections. Students’ responses/adaptation to objections should factor into your scoring.
- Each attorney should be afforded an adequate opportunity to state the grounds for objections and to respond to opposing counsel.
- If needed, students are permitted to point the court to a specific Ohio Mock Trial rule.
- Insist that counsel address the court and not each other.
- Interpret rules regarding unfair extrapolation strictly and narrowly.

V. Concluding the Trial

- Ask the timekeepers if there were any time discrepancies during closing arguments.
- Excuse the scoring judges from the courtroom while you wait on the bench for post-trial objections.
- Ask whether either team has any post-trial objections by reading the following script: **“Does either team have serious reason to believe that a material violation of any rule has occurred during this trial? I will remain on the bench for two minutes, during which time any protest or objection may be brought to my attention by a team attorney. The team may communicate with all rostered team members (witnesses, bailiff, timekeeper, and advisors) but may not communicate with anyone not appearing on the roster. If no team has any post-trial objections, I will retire for scoring.”**
- If neither team has any post-trial objections, call the trial into recess, and retire to the scoring room to complete your scoresheet and collect the scoresheets from your fellow judges.

VI. Post-Trial Objections

- If there is a post-trial objection, an attorney from the opposing team should be allowed to respond, and the presiding judge should conduct an inquiry into the matter as s/he deems appropriate. **Do not announce a finding or ruling.** Call the trial into recess and retire to the scoring room to consult with the scoring judge(s) about the objection. If the majority of the panel believes the rule violation materially affects the fairness of the trial, a 5-point deduction should be made on *all* judges' scoresheets. If the majority of the judging panel believes the violation is serious enough to warrant additional sanctions, please notify the site coordinator, providing as much written detail as possible.

VII. Retiring to the Scoring Room

- Check the math on **all** scoresheets. Collect all scoresheets from the scoring judges.
- Check that no fractions have been used.
- Check that all blanks are filled in on each scoresheet. The overall team performance score is often missed.
- Make sure there are no ties in the total score on any judge's scoresheet. Adjusting the Overall Team Performance score is one way to break a tie if necessary.
- Check that each scoresheet has the judge's name on it.
- Complete the Summary Score Sheet (blue paper) and use the tabulation sheet on the back to determine Outstanding Attorney and Outstanding Witness award winners.
- Return to the courtroom to provide feedback and present the Witness/Attorney awards.
- Give all scoresheets and the Summary Score Sheet (blue paper) to the competition coordinator after the critique.

VIII. Conducting the Critique - Judge Commentary

- After all judges have completed their scoresheets and you have filled out the summary scoresheet (blue paper), judges may provide comments to both teams.
- Limit the critique to no more than 3 minutes per judge.
 - Students will keep time during judges' critiques.
- DO NOT announce scores or reveal which team won the round.
- Recognize each team for a job well done and present the Outstanding Attorney/Outstanding Witness awards.
- Remember:
 - **Be brief! The teams are on a very tight schedule.**
 - Bear in mind the educational goals of the tournament. The participants are high school students – thus, criticism should be constructive and absent of harsh remarks.
 - Humor is a welcome tension reliever during critiques – remind everyone that his or her experience during the competition should be fulfilling and fun.
 - Comments should be of a general nature and not directed toward individuals, except perhaps when pointing out something particularly well done.
 - Be fair and distribute your comments broadly – students listen closely during the critique for clues about which team won the round, so be careful not to give away the result.
 - The most valuable assistance you can provide in your critique is to point out (generally) what the team did well, rather than focusing on what the team or an individual did poorly.

XI. Mock Trial Procedural Rules

- No communication is allowed between participating team members and other observers until the trial has concluded.
- No extrapolation is permitted on direct, and only fair and neutral extrapolation is permitted on cross.
- No objections are permitted during opening statements or closing arguments.
- The only communication allowed between the timekeepers and the teams is the display of time-remaining cards.
- Students should stop once the timekeepers indicate time has expired by holding up the "STOP" timecard. The questioning attorney may then ask for permission to complete the question or answer, which is at the presiding judge's discretion.

**** Thank you, Ohio High School Mock Trial would not be possible without you! ****