

12 Keys for Teachers Coaching Mock Trial (for the First Time!)

***Synopsis of the Role of the Teacher-Coach:** The teacher-coach is responsible for supervisory and administrative duties regarding the team, such as selecting the team, registering the team, making sure team members sign and return the Code of Conduct, setting up practice schedules with the team and attorney-coach, chaperoning the team at competitions, and arranging for transportation if contests are in person. Following are 12 keys to the process:*

1. Talk to your County Coordinator(s)!

Get to know the structure/dates/ locations of your county competition. Contact information for the County Coordinators is posted on the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's (NJSBF) website, njsbf.org. If you need an attorney-coach and don't have one, check with your County Mock Trial Coordinator.

2. Talk (as early as possible) with your attorney-coach(es)

The attorney-coach should meet with the team at least 6 times. Don't forget other ways to meet such as Zoom, Meets, Classroom, Docs, etc.

3. Publicize the team

RECRUIT! Especially the students from drama/debate/musicals. While Mock Trial team members are typically seen as "future lawyers," the competition helps students in so many other ways! Use your school's social media and webpage to spread the word.

4. Develop your own strategies for picking a team

Talk with other coaches in your county. Student-lawyers MUST be aware of how much work must be devoted to Mock Trial during preparation and competition.

5. Be flexible and creative with your schedules

This is the toughest aspect for new coaches. How much time do I need to meet with the team members? Each school is different. Each group of members is different. Mock Trial team members are typically involved with other activities and responsibilities so be flexible. If there is a benchmark, try for 2-3 hours per week...ramp up as competitions get closer! Again, don't forget other ways to meet! Zoom, Meets, Classroom, Docs, etc.

6. Let your kids take ownership of the case early

The team members will have a stronger connection to the case materials if they are the authors. Teacher- and attorney-coaches should guide case strategy and make sure all rules and procedures are followed!

7. Challenge the student-lawyers to know everything

Rules, procedures, etiquette, case materials, objections, etc.

Student-lawyers have a difficult job so make sure that they are given all the resources and help they need!

8. Off notes, off notes, off notes

Remember that the scoresheet focuses on “Presentation.”

Again, student-lawyers have a difficult job!

9. Let the witnesses develop and decide how to play a character

Let the witnesses have fun!

10. Don’t get accustomed to practicing against your own team too much

Try to schedule some scrimmages (virtual too!) so that the team can see/hear other strategies and questions.

11. Choose a team wisely...but be flexible with the roles as well!

Don’t be afraid to change roles and responsibilities especially because you should have back-ups and understudies (if numbers permit).

12. Veteran Teacher-Coaches Ed Moody and Dave Pfeifer have volunteered to guide new teacher-coaches through the mock trial process. Their contact information is posted on njsbf.org.

For information about the New Jersey State Bar Foundation’s High School Mock Trial Competition, click on the following: <https://njsbf.org/school-based-programs/mock-trial/high-school-mock-trial-competition/>