



NCMTP HIGH SCHOOL MOCK TRIAL COMPETITION

FAQs for Homeschool Teams

1. How many hours per week should a team plan to meet? Does it vary from fall to spring?

The North Carolina Mock Trial Program (NCMTP) will release the case in early September. Some teams will start meeting at that time, although other schools wait until October to get started. In the beginning, it takes a bit of time to read through and analyze the case and decide upon roles for the students. Many teams will meet a couple of times for 2 - 3 hours to do that part, which may take several weeks. After roles are determined, teams may not always meet as a large group; instead, attorney-witness pairs could meet on their own or correspond via email (sending proposed Direct and Cross Examination—DX and CX—questions back and forth for revision and comments, etc.). Some teams will meet weekly throughout the fall, while others may meet every other week (with most work occurring outside of team meetings); each team can determine the schedule that works best for them.

Teams will want to meet with their attorney advisor several times during the fall. The attorney advisor serves as a mentor, helping the students to understand the legal issues and giving feedback on the students' DX and CX questions. The attorney advisors can also help the students learn how to structure an opening statement and a closing argument.

Beginning in late fall or after the New Year, teams will definitely want to meet more regularly to be ready for the Regional competition. By December/January, teams should be trying to do full run-throughs of both sides of the case in order to improve their presentations and check on their use of time during the DX/CX questions. Some teams may meet over Christmas break, if everyone is around, but many teams take off a couple of weeks over that time. In January, teams should try to meet once a week, increasing to twice per week the last couple of weeks before the Regional competition. If possible, teams should conduct at least one full dress rehearsal, with feedback from the attorney advisor, in an actual courtroom, and more than that if schedules permit.

The most intensive time commitment is after January, and much of the fall work can be done in smaller groups and individually. The overall time commitment will vary among teams, depending upon their level of understanding and motivation/goals. Top teams may set the goal of having all witnesses notes-free by December, and all attorneys notes-free by early January.

Some teams still have attorneys using notes for their questions in competition, but the best teams do not.

2. Would the attorney advisor always be present?

No; teams will want to meet sometimes, and probably even a majority of the time, without the attorney advisor present. The role of the attorney advisor is to clarify the legal questions and issues in the case; help the students understand the difference between Direct Examination (DX) questions and Cross Examination (CX) questions; help the students learn to correctly make and argue objections; provide feedback and advice on your team's approach to the case ("case theory" and "theme"); and help students to understand courtroom decorum.

The actual work must be done by the students; the attorney is a resource to *advise* the students. It is important to remember that the attorney is working full-time and is volunteering to help, so you want to make sure that your team members are diligently working on their presentations outside of the meetings with the attorney advisor so that the time with the attorney is well spent.

Many teams initially meet several times without the advisor present when the case is released so that students can talk through the issues, write down legal questions to ask the advisor, and decide upon team roles. Teams then schedule a meeting with the attorney advisor to ask questions about the legal topics which the case addresses and to get their advice on possible themes or "plan of attack" in developing DX and CX questions. Throughout the fall, teams may try to meet with the attorney advisor another 2 – 3 times, working through many issues on their own. It will partly depend upon how flexible team schedules are and how easy it is to meet with the attorney; often the attorneys can also answer questions via email or phone.

3. What does the parent/teacher coach do?

For a new team, the parent/teacher coach has the role of helping to facilitate team meetings, communicating expectations to team members and parents, interfacing with the attorney advisor, helping to arrange transportation to Regional competitions, etc. Depending upon the maturity level of the students and emergence of team leaders/captains, the students can take over many of these responsibilities. However, **it is always crucial that the parent/teacher coach make sure that all NCMTP paperwork and fees are submitted by the deadlines and to make sure that all important deadlines, information, and expectations are communicated clearly to team members and parents.** Of course, the more that the parent/teacher coach educates himself or herself about aspects of mock trial (format for DX/CX, requirements for openings/closings, etc.), the more the parent/teacher coach can provide helpful feedback to the team members during practices.

4. Can the students earn school credit for participation?

It certainly is possible. According to the NCHE, “In most traditional high schools one credit is earned for each year-long course (135-160 hours of classroom instruction). As homeschooling and traditional schooling are two different forms of education, homeschool work cannot always be measured in traditional ways. Each homeschool must determine what constitutes a credit in their school. One suggestion is to use a combination of hours the subject was studied and mastery of the subject.” If a student has a significant role on both sides of the case, participation in the Mock Trial Program could be intensive enough to earn a full elective credit in Rhetoric, Communications or Speech. If a student plays a role on only one side of the case, it could still require enough time and preparation for a 0.5 credit course. To enrich the student’s experience, it would be good to add in books or resources which discuss public speaking, presentation skills, rhetoric, etc. Check your usual homeschool publishers for ideas on resources which could prove helpful; the NCHE website also has useful links at http://nche.com/high_school.

5. How are the team roles determined?

Teams really vary in how they handle role assignments: some have the students "try out" or express their top 2-3 choices; others are assigned by the coach/adult sponsor based upon their familiarity with the skills, available time, and commitment level. So, it's completely up to you based on what you think will work best with your group of students.

6. Do you have training materials available?

We have a teacher resource manual available on the website as well as a worksheet that leads students to learn about mock trial by analyzing a one-on-one competition. We’ve also posted a three-part video seminar on the website that was filmed during one of our on-site training sessions in the 2012-13 season. Many additional tips and techniques sheets are also available on the website at <http://ncmocktrial.org/resources/training-materials>.

7. What happens at a Regional competition?

The Regional competitions last one day (Saturday in February). Each team will present each side of the case once. So, they will argue for the plaintiff in the morning and defense in the afternoon, or vice-versa. The teams are scored by 3 jurors in each round, so they earn a total of six ballots over the course of the two rounds. After both preliminary rounds are complete, an awards ceremony is held to hand out Best Attorney and Best Witness awards for each trial that took place. Then the top two teams at each regional competition (based on win-loss record, then total ballots won, then total point differential in order to determine the top two teams) are announced, and they will compete in a championship round from ~ 4:00 - 6:00

pm. Other teams are welcome to stay and watch, or can leave if they do not wish to do so. We generally try to have 5 scoring jurors in each championship round, and the winner of each Regional competition will advance to the state finals in Raleigh in March!