



A Brief Introduction to the Competition

Started in 1988, the Georgia Mock Trial Competition helps students gain an understanding of the legal system by providing opportunities for school teams to participate in academic competitions where players assume attorney and witness roles in a court case. Lawyers coach students in developing questioning, critical thinking, and oral advocacy skills.

The Georgia Mock Trial Competition is a project of the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia and hosts a high school competition each school year. The competition is open to high school teams from public, private and homeschool associations where each school fields a team in the competition.

The Competition is strictly an extracurricular activity. All Team activities must take place after school hours. Team members may be enrolled in law related classes taught by the teacher sponsor, but class time cannot be used for mock trial preparations, practice, meetings, or other activities.

This introduction is meant to give prospective schools and coaches an overview of the competition and a realistic look at what to expect when considering starting a team. Approximately 160 schools have registered teams over the past several seasons and have involved 1800+ students each season. We hope you will join the ranks!

The Team

Each **team** must be formally affiliated with a school or organization. Teams may come from public or private schools as well as homeschool associations. Students must be between 14-19 years old and enrolled with the school/organization registering the team.

A team registers with the Mock Trial office in August/September by submitting a **registration form** and **\$125** registration fee. (Registrations submitted after the October 1 deadline incur a \$100 late fee.) Once registered, the team will be assigned to a Region for the first level of competition. Teams will have an opportunity to indicate a preference of Region during the registration process, though the assignment is made by the Mock Trial office.

A school may register more than one team in the competition. Multiple teams will compete as separate teams during the competition and may meet each other in a Round, depending on how the scoring plays out. Additional teams will require a \$100 fee. Teams from the same school may not switch students during a competition level for any reason.

Each team is composed of **6-12 competing students**. The team will present both sides of the case during competition. Each round, the team will have 6 students present their case, depending on which side of the trial they are presenting that round: 3 attorneys and 3 witnesses. Each team also provides a timekeeper each round. Teams may have additional students as part of the team but who are not competing at a specific level of competition. These **non-competing students** may help with preparation and potentially compete at later levels.

Each team must have a teacher sponsor (**Teacher Coach**) and an attorney volunteer (**Attorney Coach**) prior to registration. The Attorney Coach must be a member of the State Bar of Georgia in good standing. Many teams have more than one Teacher Coach and more than one Attorney Coach.

The Competition

This is not a scripted mock trial activity. Each season's case is produced by the Problem Subcommittee of the YLD's High School Mock Trial Committee. The problem contains written statements from each of the six witnesses, exhibits for the case (police reports, maps, photos, etc.), indictments or complaints/answers, legal statutes, and jury instructions. Teams use the Mock Trial Rules of Evidence, based on the Georgia and Federal Rules of Evidence, during trial. The provided case materials are the only materials that may be used during the competition. The case alternates between criminal and civil topics each season.

Each team prepares both sides of the case for trial, developing theme, theories and an entire case presentation, drawing their facts from the case materials. At competition, each team will be assigned one side of the case against an opponent's opposite side per Round. Over the course of the competition level, each team will be guaranteed to present both sides of the case at least once. The team may divide its competing team members between the two sides however they wish, as long as all six roles are covered by six individual students on each side of the case. A team with six students would have all six compete on both sides whereas a team with 12 students would have enough for each student to only compete on one side of the case.

The trial includes opening statements from each side, direct and cross examination of the 6 witnesses, and closing arguments from each side. Attorneys make objections throughout the trial, on everything from admissibility of evidence, character evidence and hearsay. Impeachment of witnesses is encouraged to discredit adverse witnesses. The case authors purposefully include contradictory statements, problematic evidence and other issues into the case to test students' knowledge of the Rules of Evidence and their ability to handle problems that arise throughout the trial.

Each Round is scored by 3 **Scoring Evaluators**, volunteer attorneys from the community who act as the jury in the case. The Evaluators score the attorneys on their presentment of the case, knowledge and use of the Rules of Evidence, courtroom decorum, and overall courtroom presence. Witnesses are scored on their knowledge of the witness statement, believability of the character and overall presentation of the character. Each Scoring Evaluator's ballot will declare a

winning team for that Round. The team with the most winning ballots wins the Round. A verdict is never given in the case; the focus of the Round is about the presentation of the case, not the merits of the case.

Each Round also has a **Presiding Judge** on the bench. Presiding Judges are either sitting judges or attorneys from the local community and run the trial, making rulings on objections and admission of evidence, and presiding over the proceedings.

Each portion of the Round (openings, directs, cross examinations, and closings) are limited in overall time to help limit the amount of time a Round can take. Each team provides a **timekeeper** to monitor the time taken for each stage. Time is stopped for objections and the changing of witnesses. Overall, a competition Round takes about 2½ hours to complete.

Regional Competition

Regional Competitions take place on in late January/early February in locations around the State:

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| – Albany | – Cumming | – Jonesboro | – McDonough |
| – Athens | – Dalton | – Lawrenceville | – Newnan |
| – Atlanta | – Decatur | – Macon | – Savannah |
| – Cartersville | – Douglasville | – Marietta | – Valdosta |

Each Region is comprised of 6-16 teams and is coordinated by a local Bar member volunteer team. Most competitions take place in courthouses, using real courtrooms for a more authentic experience for the students. Each Team competes in 3 Rounds with Round 2's matches based on each team's results from Round 1 (Power Matching), and Round 3's matches based on the team's cumulative record to that point. At the conclusion of Round 3, each team's scores throughout the day are totaled and the top three teams qualify for the District Competition.

District Competition

The top three teams from each Region advance to the **District Competition** where two Regions are partnered to make a District. District Competitions take place in 8 locations around the State, changing each season to alternate hosts. During the competition day, the teams are matched for Round 1 based on their final ranking from their Regional Competition, and then power matched for Rounds 2 and 3. At the conclusion of Round 3, each team's scores throughout the day are totaled and the top two teams qualify for the State Finals Competition.

State Finals Competition

The **State Finals Competition** is held at the Gwinnett Justice and Administration Center in Lawrenceville in March. The 16 District Champion teams that advanced meet to determine the State Champion Mock Trial Team, who qualifies for the National High School Mock Trial Championship in May.

Season Timeline

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| October 1 | Team Registration Deadline |
| Mid October..... | Case is released to registered Teams |
| Late January/Early February | Regional Competitions |
| Middle/Late February (2-3 weeks after Regional Competitions) | District Competitions |
| Middle March (2-3 weeks after District Competitions)..... | State Finals Competition |
| Early May | National High School Mock Trial Championship |

Keep in mind that the season includes the Thanksgiving and Winter Holidays, along with fall semester Finals. Teams will need to be creative on handling practice time and case preparations over these weeks.

What to Expect

Schools looking to field a high school mock trial team should consider the following information:

Time – Most teams start meeting in September to work on trial skills and Rules of Evidence before the case is released. Once the case is released, successful mock trial teams meet at least twice a week for practice. Many teams meet on weekends as well, especially in January. All team activities must take place outside of school hours and many teams practice in the evenings to give their attorney coaches time to get to practice after work hours.

Individual Time – A serious time commitment is required of all parties: teachers, attorneys and students. Each season sees a handful of teams withdraw from the competition. The biggest reason for a team's withdrawal is that students lose interest, are not able to commit for the full season, or are not able/willing to commit to the level of work needed to compete. Students who commit to Mock Trial need to understand the time commitment to which they are accepting. Students who overextend themselves with multiple AP/IB classes, clubs, sports and a job have a hard time making time for Mock Trial (or any extracurricular activity!).

True Cost – The only monetary cost required is the initial registration fee. Beyond registration, however, teams will need to print off copies of the case materials for each student and have materials ready for competition which includes clean copies of exhibits and statements. Students will need to dress in courtroom attire for competition. Some travel may be involved in getting to the competition site, though most Regional Competitions will be within an hour and a half drive from school at most. Travel to District and State may be greater and require additional travel funds. The program can only defray travel costs for District/State teams traveling more than 85 miles to the competition site. Teams are responsible for their own food needs on the day of competition.

This is an educational competition – Students need to understand that Mock Trial is an interscholastic competition, not unlike the school's sports teams. It is the goal of the program for students to learn about the American judicial system and develop personal skills and confidence in public arenas. However, they are ultimately competing to represent their school against other competing schools and advance to further Rounds and ideally a state title. Teams with students who treat Mock Trial like an interest club or an occasional activity are rarely successful. If students buy into the idea that they are actively competing for their school, the team has a much better chance of surviving the season and being competitive.

Mock Trial is extremely rewarding – This is true for both the students and adults. Despite the long hours and exhaustive mental work, students who are involved in mock trial will gain skills in critical thinking and public speaking and a serious injection of self-esteem. Coaches get to work with students in a different capacity than they do in the classroom and see the direct results in their students almost immediately. While many mock trial students do not go on to join the legal community, almost all leave the program changed individuals. Mock trial, while being a competition, is more of a vehicle for intrapersonal growth amongst the students who are fully involved.

Contact Us

The Mock Trial office at the State Bar of Georgia exists to not only run the program and coordinate the competitions but also support teams by answering questions and helping resolve issues throughout the season. If you have any questions or need more information, please contact the Mock Trial office.

Michael Nixon, *Director, Georgia Mock Trial Competition*



The Georgia High School Mock Trial Competition is a project of the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Georgia

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