



National Trial Competition Witness Information and Guidelines

Thank you for volunteering to serve as a witness! Your participation is crucial to the success of this prestigious competition, and we appreciate your time and commitment.

What is the National Trial Competition (NTC)?

The is one of the most esteemed mock trial competitions in the country, designed to cultivate law students' trial advocacy skills. Co-sponsored by the Texas Young Lawyers Association (TYLA) and the American College of Trial Lawyers (ACTL), this year's event will feature over 300 mock trial teams competing in regional rounds. The top two teams from each of the 15 regions will advance to the national finals in Texas.

What is the Role of a Witness in a Mock Trial?

Each mock trial includes four witnesses—two for the plaintiff and two for the defendant. You will take the stand to provide testimony about key people, events, and documents relevant to the case. Each trial team consists of two student advocates, who will examine you through direct and cross-examination.

What If You Need to Cancel?

We often face a shortage of witnesses, so please make every effort to attend. If you must cancel, contact a competition administrator as soon as possible, so we can assign another volunteer to your round. If you know someone else who might be interested in witnessing, feel free to share their contact information with the competition administrator—we'd love to include them!

How do I Prepare to Be a Good Witness?

Before the trial, you will receive a deposition (or statement) and possibly related exhibits. Familiarize yourself with these materials to ensure you can confidently answer questions without needing to reference documents during your testimony. Witnesses are not allowed to make notes on depositions, statements, or exhibits during the competition to ensure a level playing field. You may, however, highlight or underline important sections and bring the materials to the stand. If you've made any notes, you'll receive a clean copy upon your arrival.

What Should I Expect during a Trial Round?

Before your trial round, the student advocate who will direct your testimony will meet with you in a “woodshed” session lasting approximately 15 minutes. During this time, they will discuss your testimony and the types of questions to expect. After this session, you cannot confer with the advocates about your testimony. The trial will begin with various motions from the student advocates, followed by opening statements and witness examinations. Once you've finished your testimony, you're free to leave or stay to observe the rest of the trial.

Helpful Hints

- **Be Professional:** Conduct yourself with professionalism at all times. Remember that you are representing a witness in a legal proceeding.
- **Be Courteous and Respectful:** Treat everyone in the courtroom with courtesy and respect, including attorneys, the judge, jurors, and other witnesses.
- **Stay Truthful:** Stick to the facts and truthfully recount the events as you understand them. You may draw necessary inferences from the facts provided but avoid embellishing or exaggerating your testimony.
- **Do Not Speculate or Change Your Testimony:** Only testify to the facts and details of your original statement. Avoid guessing or speculating about events or information.
- **Don't Volunteer Information:** Answer questions directly and succinctly without providing unnecessary additional information. Stick to what you know and what you've been asked.
- **Listen Carefully and Do Not Interrupt:** Pay close attention to the questions asked by attorneys and the instructions given by the judge. Ask for clarification if needed. This will help you provide relevant and accurate answers. Do not interrupt.
- **Stay Calm and Composed:** Remain calm and composed, even if you face challenging or aggressive questioning. Keep your emotions in check, even if the questioning becomes intense or emotional. Take your time to answer thoughtfully and accurately.
- **Speak Clearly and Confidently:** Project your voice, maintain eye contact, and speak clearly so that everyone in the courtroom can hear and understand you.
- **Respect Court Procedures:** Follow the rules and protocols of the courtroom. Address the judge as "Your Honor" and wait for permission to speak. Obey any instructions given by the judge.
- **Don't Make Jokes or Comments:** Mock trials are serious proceedings, and inappropriate remarks or attempts at humor can be perceived negatively by the judge and jurors.
- **Don't Show Bias:** Avoid displaying any bias or prejudice toward any team involved in the case. Please refrain from asking student advocates about their law schools, as they cannot disclose this information. Remember, while your role as a witness is important, you are not an official team member. Strive to be fair to both sides, providing honest and truthful answers based on the case materials.

Thank you once again for your invaluable contribution to the NTC!