Orange County High School Mock Trial Competition

2026-2027 Orientation Handbook

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Mock Trial – An Introduction

Welcome to Orange County High School Mock Trial! We look forward to working with you to make this year's competition a success. We hope you and your team find this year's case, as well as the Mock Trial experience, to be exciting and educational.

In the pages that follow, you will find important information about the Orange County Mock Trial Competition. This packet is designed to enhance and supplement both the formal mock trial case packet and the competition rules. Should you have any questions not answered herein, please contact CRF-OC Program Manager, Michelle Antenesse at mantenesse@crfoc.org.

Program Notices for 2026-2027 Season

Location

CRF-OC has reserved this year's competition dates with the Orange County Superior Court. The Courthouse is still under construction. We will be using available courtrooms, and the location of these rooms within the courthouse may be different than in previous years.

Policy Regarding Exiting the Courthouse

There have been issues with teams exiting the courthouse promptly after the end of the trial in previous in-person competitions. CRF-OC's facility agreement with the Orange County Superior Court necessitates that all participants exit the courthouse by 8:00 pm. To ensure timely exit from the courthouse, this season CRF-OC is instituting the following policy:

- All clerks (through time notification warnings) will need to adhere to the 10-minute debrief following the conclusion of the trial. Presiders will also be instructed to strictly enforce the 10-minute debrief period.
- Once the debrief concludes, students will need to promptly exit the courtroom. Students will NOT be permitted to receive individual verbal comments from volunteers. CRF-OC recognizes that individual feedback is important to students and has adjusted the Competition Team Roster/Award Nomination form to allow more space for comments.
- *Any team that remains in the courthouse after 7:50 pm (absent an ongoing trial) may have points deducted from their Team Performance & Participation score.*

Case Packet and Other Competition Materials

Registered schools are issued a username and password to the CRF-OC website to access the case packet in their registration confirmation email. All other competition

forms and documents will be available on a shared Google folder and a link to the drive will be provided in the registration confirmation email.

Please bookmark these links for future reference. Please be advised that forms for this year's competition have been updated from previous years.

Reasonable Accommodations

If a member of your team has a recognized disability that requires accommodation for them to actively participate in the competition, please contact CRF-OC staff as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made in advance of the competition.

Competition Updates on Social Media

CRF-OC invites you and your students to follow us on Instagram @crf_oc for competition updates, including notifications on courtroom assignments and the release of win/loss results.

New California Law Regarding Child Abuse Prevention

To comply with a new California law, all "regular volunteers" (this excludes teachers) aged 18 and over who have direct contact with, or supervision of, children for more than 16 hours per month or 32 hours per year must:

(1) Provide CRF-OC with a copy of a certificate verifying that they have completed the free online volunteer child abuse training available at: https://mandatedreporterca.com/training/volunteers no later than **October 18**.

(2) Must also undergo a livescan fingerprint background check with CRF-OC's specific form, which we will attach to multiple emails to coaches for your convenience. It is also available on the Mock Trial page of our website.

CRF-OC anticipates that these requirements will apply to most attorney coaches. The combination of even a few practices and attendance at all the preliminary competition rounds would meet the threshold set by the legislation in most instances. Teachers will need to notify CRF-OC staff in writing if their coaches will not meet this threshold so that we have a record of this on file to ensure compliance with the new law. If the mandated reporter training and livescan have been completed specifically for CRF-OC in the past and are on record with CRF-OC, then they do not need to be completed again.

Additionally, as part of the new law, all volunteers must agree to abide by CRF-OC's Child Abuse Prevention Policy. All attorney coaches, regardless of whether they meet the statutory definition of a "regular volunteer," must certify to CRF-OC using the designated **Attorney Coach Form** that they have read and agree to abide by this

policy, in addition to the Team Rulebook with Orange County Appendix, no later than **October 17**.

Objective and Ethics

A copy of the Program Objectives and Code of Ethics can be found in the case packet and Team Rulebook with Orange County Appendix. Please take the time to read and discuss the Program Objectives, Code of Ethics, and Team Rulebook with your students.

Competition Schedule

Rounds 1-8 will start no later than 5:30 pm. Most trials will end before 8:00 pm.

1. Preliminary Rounds of Competition

   Round 1– Thursday, November 5
   Round 2 – Tuesday, November 10
   Round 3 – Tuesday, November 17
   Round 4 – Thursday, November 19

2. Playoff (single elimination) Rounds of Competition:

   Round 5 – Thursday, December 3 (Sweet 16)
   Round 6 – Tuesday, January 19 (Elite Eight)
   Round 7 – Tuesday, January 26 (Final Four)
   Round 8(A) – Thursday, January 28 (Championship Round)
   Round 8(B) – Tuesday, February 2 (Championship Round)

3. Other Important Dates:
   Mock Trial Awards Ceremony: April TBD, 2027. Award winners will be notified by the end of March.

   California Mock Trial State Championship: March location and dates TBD.
   For more information, please visit the Teach Democracy website: www.teachdemocracy.org

   National Mock Trial Championship: May 13-15, 2027 in St. Louis, Iowa.
   For more information visit: https://www.nationalmocktrial.org/

Important Dates & Deadlines

1. **School Registration: August 24-September 25 –** Teachers must register their school using the online form at https://www.crfoc.org/mock-trial-school-registration/. A minimum of 12 students is required to register. Only registered teams will receive access to the case materials. Once a team is registered, the school is responsible for paying the fee of $1,100. Teams that withdrawal from the

competition after the school registration deadline are responsible for paying the full registration fee.

2. **Orientation for New Schools: September 22 at 4:00 pm –** CRF-OC will host a virtual orientation for new teachers/schools. This meeting will provide an overview of the competition as well as suggestions on how to prepare a team for the competition. Teachers should RSVP to Program Manager Michelle Antenesse at mantenesse@crfoc.org.

3. **Mandatory Coaches' Meeting: September 29 at 5:30 pm at the Orange County Bar Association–** At least one coach from each team must attend. Prosecution and defense assignments for Rounds 1&2 will be drawn during the meeting. Exhibits will also be distributed to teams.

4. **Google Doc Official Team Roster: October 19 –** All teams are required to submit a complete list of all participating students to CRF-OC. Teams must submit the list using the online Google document form provided in their registration confirmation email. This document will serve as the official team roster. Failure to submit a roster by the deadline may result in disqualification of the team. Teachers should notify CRF-OC staff if anyone on their team drops out of the competition after this deadline. *Please note that this form is separate from the Competition Team Roster/Award Nomination form that is submitted before each round.*

5. **Student Registration Deadline: October 9** – All students listed on the official team roster Google form are required to submit the online student registration form at https://www.crfoc.org/mt-studentregistration/. CRF-OC staff will email teachers the list of students that have registered in the weekly competition update email. **Teachers should review the list each week to see which students have registered and inform staff if there are any errors.** Teachers should remind students to register if their names are not on the weekly list. CRF-OC staff will use the official team roster to verify that the students registered are indeed members of the team.

6. **Attorney Coach Form: October 19 –** All attorney coaches must complete and submit this form to CRF-OC no later than October 19.

7. **Team Registration Fee: October 23** – The registration fee is $1,100.00. Teachers will be sent an invoice in their registration confirmation email. Teams that do not pay their registration fee by the deadline are subject to disqualification. Teams that withdraw from the competition may be responsible for paying the full registration fee.

Competition Format

1. The pairings for rounds 1-4 will be decided by a random draw, with no team competing against the same team twice. Each team will be assured of competing twice as prosecution and twice as defense. Teams will be given their prosecution and defense assignments for rounds 1 and 2 at the Mandatory Coaches' Meeting and their assignments for rounds 3 and 4 the day after round 2.

2. Upon completion of round 4, only the top 16 teams will advance to round 5. Advancement will be determined first by win/loss record. In the event of a tie, the highest average point differential and strength of schedule for the first four rounds will be the deciding factor.

3. Round 5 commences with the single elimination format. The top sixteen teams will be seeded according to their record. During this, and the remaining rounds, a concerted effort will be made to match teams according to the following criteria:

    a. That the overall seeding format is preserved
    b. That each team competes against a team not previously encountered
    c. That teams reverse prosecution/defense roles in each consecutive round

4. **Scoring Rounds 1-7**: Winners of each round will be determined by the team that has won the most scorecards during the match. The team with the most points on a scorecard wins the card. If there is a tie, the team with the highest number of total points from all scorecards wins. If the teams are still tied, the presiding judge's tiebreaker will determine the winner of the round.

5. **Scoring for Round 8**: Scoring during the final round is slightly different than in previous rounds and the procedure varies depending on the number of scorers present at each session. For a detailed explanation of the procedures, contact the Program Director.

Bailiff

1. Each team is responsible for training their bailiff prior to the competition.

2. Bailiffs are scored on a 5-point scale.

3. Bailiffs are responsible for calling the court to order and swearing in witnesses. The bailiff is also responsible for bringing a copy of the Team Rulebook with Orange County Appendix to the competition. If a question arises and the

judge needs further clarification, the bailiff is responsible for providing a copy of the rules to the judge.

Clerk

1. Each team is responsible for training their clerk prior to the competition.

2. Clerks are scored on a 5-point scale.

3. The clerk will record the precise time elapsed during each section of the presentation.

4. When "time" is called, the student speaking must stop immediately. There will be no allowance for overtime.

5. Refer to the Team Rulebook with Orange County Appendix for further details regarding timing. An instructional video for clerks is also available in the shared google folder.

Team Composition Guidelines

1. The rules regarding team composition can be found in the Team Rulebook with Orange County Appendix. CRF-OC strongly recommends that teams follow the guidance below to get the most out of their mock trial experience:
    a. Teams should utilize the maximum allowable number of trial attorneys where possible (the minimum is 2 and the maximum is 3).
    b. Teams should have different attorneys present the opening statement and closing argument.
    c. Each trial attorney should perform at least one direct examination and one cross-examination.
    d. Teams should involve as many students as possible in other support roles.

Odd Number of Teams

1. We ask that each team indicate on the registration form whether they have enough students to present both prosecution and defense cases in the same evening.

2. If an odd number of schools register for the competition, CRF-OC staff will select a "ghost" team for each round.

3. The "ghost" team's score will not count toward their team's overall ranking.

Mock Trial Courtroom Art & Journalism Contests

1. The Courtroom Art and Journalism Contests are held during the first 4 rounds of the Orange County Mock Trial Competition.

2. Student contestants must register for the competition using the online student registration form on the CRF-OC website. The rules for each of the contests are available on the Mock Trial page of the CRF-OC website.

3. The maximum number of courtroom journalists per team is three (3). The maximum number of courtroom artists per team is three (3). Artists and journalists do not count towards the team's limit of 25.

Errata

1. After the release of the case materials, errata are often issued by Teach Democracy. which is a separate organization based in Los Angeles that creates and licenses the mock trial case materials and coordinates the state competition in March. Teams will be notified of any errata by CRF-OC staff. Approved errata will be emailed and posted in the shared Google folder.

2. Teams are encouraged to carefully review the case materials and submit any questions or issues to Lourdes Morales, the Senior Program Director at Teach Democracy by **December 11, 2026.** No changes will be made to the case materials after this date. **Teach Democracy incorporates all the errata into a new case packet in January that will be the official packet used at the state competition in March.**

Lourdes Morales | Senior Program Director
Teach Democracy
601 S. Kingsley Drive Los Angeles, CA 90005
lourdes@teachdemocracy.org
www.teachdemocracy.org

Competition Team Roster/Award Nomination Form

1. The Competition Team Roster/Award Nomination form will include the students' names and the role that each of the student participants will be performing during that round of competition. This form is an important document that must be filled out completely and accurately to ensure that all award nominations and comments are correctly attributed. Each team must submit their team roster through the designated JotForm link no later than 12:30 pm the day of each round. CRF-OC will print copies of your roster and place them in the envelope given to the presiding judge for that round. CRF-OC will not accept late rosters or changes to the roster after 12:30 pm. If your team fails to submit their roster by the deadline using the appropriate

form, it will be the team's responsibility to **bring 5 copies of this form** (**printed front and back, no staples**) with them to the courthouse for distribution to the presider and scoring panel. If something happens between 12:30 pm and the start of the trial that results in a change to the roster, it is the responsibility of the team to notify the presiding judge and scoring panel of the change before the trial starts. Team must submit the appropriate form for whichever side competes (prosecution or defense) that round. The form is available on the Google drive folder. The folder also contains sample forms with instructions for how to complete them.

2. All teams are required to post the order that their prosecution and defense witnesses will be called on a shared Google document sheet by **October 23** (CRF-OC staff will include this document in the shared folder). **Teams may not make changes to their witness order after this date.**

3. CRF-OC will email the matchups for each round to coaches by 4:00 pm the day before the round. After determining which school your team will be paired against, you should look up the witness order of that team on the shared Google document. This will enable you to fill out the form for your team accurately.

4. The Competition Team Roster/Award Nomination form must be typed (form is pdf-type enabled).

Courthouse Arrival & Check in Procedure

1. Teams should allow plenty of time for traffic when heading to the courthouse. CRF-OC recommends avoiding the 55 freeway and checking local traffic conditions prior to travel. **Check-in will open at 4:00 pm. Schools/students <u>should not</u> arrive at the courthouse before 4:00pm**.

2. A teacher or authorized school representative should accompany the team to the courthouse.

3. Teams should enter the courthouse using the front entrance of the Central Justice Center on Civic Center Drive West.

4. After going through security, teams should take the escalators directly to the 3rd floor cafeteria. **Teams should not loiter on the 1st floor of the Central Justice Center**.

5. The school check-in tables are located on the 3rd floor of the Central Justice Center. A coach or authorized school representative must check in the team. Teams cannot check in until all students competing (that round) are present.

All teams must be checked in by 5:15 pm. If a team has less than 8 students present, they must immediately notify CRF-OC staff.

6. **Students are to remain in the cafeteria until directed by CRF-OC staff to proceed to their assigned courtroom. CRF-OC staff will post courtroom assignments on Instagram in groups to ease the elevator congestion. Students may not leave the cafeteria until assignments are posted.** The Orange County Superior Court is in session until 5:00 pm and students are reminded to exercise proper courthouse etiquette in the hallways of the Justice Center.

Courthouse Etiquette

The court staff has expressed concerns regarding previous Mock Trial sessions held at the Central Justice Center and requests that students, coaches, and spectators be notified the following:

1. Court should be considered in session until 5:00pm. Even if hearings are not taking place in the assigned courtroom, staff works until 5:00pm and must be able to conduct court business on the telephone and computer. This includes the jury deliberation room.
2. Students, coaches and parents should wait in the cafeteria area until 5:00pm before reporting to the courtrooms
3. Complaints have been received about groups of students congregating in the hallway and making noise that disrupts court business in the adjacent courtrooms
4. A teacher or authorized school representative should be present with students before entering the courtroom
5. Furniture should not be moved, and telephones should not be answered by students or other participants at any time
6. Exhibits, paperwork, supplies and personal items in the courtroom must not be touched
7. Night court and other programs/events may be in session at the same time as Mock Trial so please ask your students to be as quiet as possible
8. Students should not leave any items behind (binders, case materials, exhibits, etc.) as they will be thrown away by court staff
9. When in the courthouse or courtroom, students should conduct themselves in a manner consistent with their surroundings and be respectful of individuals present in the building

Security at the Central Justice Center

1. The Central Justice Center is a secure facility. All persons entering the facility will be required to pass through a weapons screening device. **Weapons of any type will not be permitted in the Central Justice Center.** The Orange County Sheriff's Department reserves the right to determine what constitutes a weapon. We advise participants in the Mock Trial Program to leave all potentially dangerous objects at home.

2. **The courthouse doors will close at 6:00pm. No one will be admitted to the building after this time. If an individual leaves the building after 6:00pm there will be no re-admittance.**

3. For safety reasons, the Superior Court advises that students be picked up promptly from the front of the courthouse after the conclusion of each round. For students and parents who drive separately to the courthouse, the Court strongly advises walking in pairs or groups when returning to their vehicle.

Score Notification

1. For each round of competition, the win/loss results will be posted on the Mock Trial page of the CRF-OC website at: https://www.crfoc.org/programs/mock-trial. During the preliminary rounds, CRF-OC staff will make every effort to publish the win/loss results online by noon the following day.

2. Individual scores will be **e-mailed to the coach(es)** of each team. CRF-OC staff will not send individual scores to students. Every effort will be made to have individual scores distributed within 24 hours of the competition. If comments are provided by volunteers, CRF-OC staff will send them with individual scores. Please note that not all volunteers provide comments.

3. Scoring information **will not** be given out via telephone, fax or to additional e-mail addresses other than a team's teacher and attorney coach(es).

Awards

1. To show appreciation for the extensive volunteer efforts of teachers, judges, attorneys, and law firms, we ask that students and/or coaches fill out the Adult Volunteer Award Nomination Form. All nominations must be submitted to CRF-OC staff by the end of Round 8.

2. Teams may also nominate another team for the "Team Civility Award" to recognize teams that display professionalism and fair play during the competition. If during the competition a team feels that another team should be recognized for their civility, the coaches and/or team captain should complete the nomination form and return it to CRF-OC staff. Teams may not

nominate their own team for an award. All nominations must be submitted to CRF-OC staff by the end of Round 8.

3. **Student MVP Awards:** At check-in before each round, teams will be given a blank student MVP certificate. At the end of the round, students should select an MVP from the opposing team and write their name on the certificate. Teams should exchange certificates before leaving the courtroom. All judges have been reminded of this and should direct the students to nominate a member of the opposing team at the conclusion of the trial. If a judge does not do this, students should remind the judge to do so.

4. Teachers and attorney coaches (deciding together) are to submit one School Award Nomination Form for their team, noting the MVP student for the opposing team and their nomination for an attorney and non-attorney from the opposing team. Teachers and attorney coaches are also instructed to nominate one student from their own team on the form. This form must be turned into CRF-OC staff (staff will be on the 2nd floor near the elevators) at the end of each round. **TEAMS THAT DO NOT RETURN THE SCHOOL AWARD NOMINATION FORM AFTER EACH ROUND WILL NOT BE E-MAILED THEIR INDIVIDUAL SCORES UNTIL THE FORM IS RECEIVED.**

5. CRF-OC staff will list the students that were nominated for an award each round on the CRF-OC website.

6. Award winners will be notified by the end of March. The awards ceremony is intended for adult/student honorees and their 2-3 of their family members. Please note that seating is limited and there is not enough space for all participating teams to attend.