



TRIAL COURT

What is Trial Court

The Trial Court section of Texas Youth and Government is a hands-on program where students simulate the courtroom experience by preparing and presenting both sides of a legal case. Participants take on roles as attorneys, witnesses, judges, and bailiffs, learning about courtroom procedures, trial advocacy, and the judicial process. Through competitive mock trials, students build skills in public speaking, critical thinking, teamwork, and legal reasoning while gaining a deeper understanding of the justice system.

Order of Trial

- Opening Statements
 - 2 minutes per team
- Direct Examination
 - 18 minutes total per team
 - Covers the direct and re-direct of all 3 witnesses
- Cross Examination
 - 15 minutes total per team
 - Covers the cross and re-cross of all 3 opposing witnesses
- Closing Arguments
 - 3 minutes total per team
 - May include up to 1 minute of rebuttal

[Example Mock Trial Flow](#)



For more information check out the rules of procedure on the trial court section page of the website.

Opening and Closing Statements [Watch a video for more info](#)

The opening statement introduces the case with a clear theme, outlines key evidence and witnesses, explains the burden of proof, and ends with a request for a specific verdict. The closing statement revisits the theme, summarizes persuasive evidence, highlights weaknesses in the opposing case, and reinforces the burden of proof while asking the court for the desired outcome.



[Check out the Rules of Procedure for example script](#)

Direct and Cross Examinations

Direct examination should feel like a natural conversation using open-ended questions to highlight the witness and support your case theme, while cross-examination uses controlled, closed questions to reveal weaknesses without being aggressive. Redirect is used to rebuild a witness's credibility after cross, but must stay within the scope of what was covered during the cross-examination.



[Watch a video for more info](#)

Admission of Evidence [Watch a video for more info](#)

To successfully admit evidence during a trial, students must lay the proper foundation before presenting a document. This means establishing the witness's connection to the evidence through clear, relevant questions by confirming their role, responsibilities, and direct involvement with the document in question. Once that connection is made, the attorney must follow proper courtroom procedure by asking the judge for permission to approach the witness and opposing counsel with a clean, unaltered copy of the exhibit.



[Also, make sure to check out the Rules of Evidence guide](#)

Objections

Objections in mock trial should be used strategically and only by the examining attorney. To be effective, competitors must understand key objections, such as hearsay, speculation, narrative, leading, argumentative, and relevance, and know when exceptions apply or when a simple rephrase is the better choice.



[Watch a video for more info](#)

The Trial Court section of the YMCA Texas YG website provides a range of materials to support student participants. These include the current year's case materials and evidence, rules of procedure and rules of evidence, and official forms such as team rosters, bailiff timesheets, and evaluator score sheets. The page also offers instructional resources, including videos on how to deliver opening and closing statements, handle objections, and admit evidence.



Know Your Team

A Trial Court team consists of 5 to 8 high school students who work together to present both sides of a legal case at competitions. Each side in a trial requires 2 attorneys and 3 witnesses. Attorneys may remain the same or switch between prosecution and defense, while witnesses must prepare to play a different character on each side. On smaller teams, some students will need to double up on roles to cover all positions. A bailiff is also required for each trial, but this cannot be a student's only role; if needed, a coach, advisor, or parent may fill the bailiff position. For more information on each role check out the Trial Court Student Manual.

Know your role



Attorneys

Student attorneys play a critical role in presenting their side of the mock trial case, whether for the prosecution/plaintiff or the defense. Students prepare arguments, examine witnesses, make objections, and deliver opening and closing statements. All trial attorneys must be ready to argue both sides of the case, switching roles between prosecution/plaintiff and defense during the competition. This requires strong preparation, adaptability, and a thorough understanding of courtroom procedures, the case materials, and the rules of evidence. A team may have up to 4 total attorneys, but only 2 will present per trial.



Witness

Student witnesses are responsible for bringing the case to life by portraying the characters involved in the trial. Each student must prepare a witness character for both the prosecution/plaintiff and defense sides, meaning they will play different roles throughout the competition. Witnesses must know their affidavits thoroughly, respond confidently under direct and cross-examination, and stay in character while maintaining the facts of the case. Their performances help judges and evaluators understand the case narrative and play a crucial role in the team's overall success. Witnesses must remain true to their affidavits and the facts provided without creating new facts.



Judge

Student judges oversee mock trial rounds to ensure they are conducted fairly and in accordance with the rules of procedure and evidence. Judges manage the courtroom, rule on objections, and help maintain the flow of the trial. Students serving as judges must have prior experience as attorneys in the program to ensure they understand trial processes. Their performance is also scored during competitions, and they contribute to the educational and competitive environment of the mock trial experience. Must be a high school student who has previously served as an attorney in Youth and Government. Each school must provide 1 judge for every 2 trial teams.



Scan these QR codes to learn more about the responsibilities of each role. All videos can be found on our YouTube channel @TexasYouthandGovernment

Case Materials & Updates

Case materials and section updates are released at the beginning of September each year and include everything needed to prepare for the trial court competition. These materials typically consist of the official case problem, witness affidavits, exhibits, and any necessary stipulations or legal background. Students and advisors can access these resources directly from the Trial Court section of the website.

Trial Court Questions

Updates to the case, including clarifications and responses to submitted questions, are also posted throughout the fall on the trial court section page to ensure all participants have the most accurate and current information before competition begins. Make sure to submit any questions that you have.

Scan the QR code to access a comprehensive 8-week lesson plan designed to guide and prepare your team step-by-step for success in the Trial Court competition. This resource includes structured weekly objectives, skill-building activities, and practical tips to ensure your students are confident and competition-ready. These are also found on our resource page of the website.

