



“How to” Guide for Developing Mock Trials for Students

“The mock trials are really enlightening – having hands on experience is awesome!”

“It’s overwhelming, I can’t believe it is in the actual courthouse – you picture it in a certain way, then walk in and realize it is so different”

Student mock trial participants

Mock trials are a great way to bring the law to life for students. Often held in local courthouses or law schools, mock trials are a dynamic interactive experience, bringing together the legal and education sectors.

Ontario mock trial activity involves hundreds of students, teachers, and justice sector volunteers. Exciting inter-school mock trial programs take place in many parts of Ontario including Peel, Sudbury, Simcoe, Toronto, York and Halton. Local committees, including judges, teachers, lawyers, Crowns, court managers and staff, are involved in organizing and supporting mock trials.

The annual Ontario Bar Association Law Day provincial mock trial tournaments for secondary school students are a highlight of province-wide mock trial activity. Many participants in local programs link into the Law Day tournaments.

Below are **16 steps** to consider in planning your mock trial event:

1. **Set up a planning committee.** Members could include judges, lawyers, court managers, teachers and school board officials.
2. **Assign responsibility for logistics.** These may include communications with, and registration of attendees, communications with sponsors, press releases to local media and school yearbook coordinators, creation and distribution of material/information packages, catering, photography, and transportation.
3. **Establish a budget.** Will attendees pay a nominal amount to participate? What sort of contributions might organizations such as judicial or legal associations, corporate sponsors or others be willing to make? Will a local establishment be willing to donate refreshments?

4. **Arrange a venue.** A courthouse is an ideal mock trial setting if it can be arranged.
5. **Set a date, timetable and rules for the mock trials.** Consult teacher/school board representatives when setting the date and timetable. Set timelines for entry, and choose a mock trial scenario (using the OBA Law Day/Law Week scenario available at www.oba.org will mean students are already prepared for progression into the OBA regional level tournaments). The OBA site can also provide guidelines adaptable to your event's needs.
6. **Recruit Judges, Justices of the Peace, Lawyers and Crown Counsel and Others.** These legal professionals can serve as mock trial judges and markers, and be assigned to teams as coaches and mentors. Court clerks can train students to perform the court clerk role.
7. **Develop a Marking Strategy.** There are a variety of approaches to marking mock trials: a mock trial judge can mark or there could be collaborative teams (i.e., lawyers, Crowns and court personnel) assigned to mark the students. A marking guide and consistent standards are important. Teams planning to go to the OBA regional tournaments may wish to refer to the OBA website for its marking structure.
8. **Promote the mock trial event.** Circulate notice of the tournament as soon as possible to aid in school scheduling. Circulate to eligible schools (promotion possibilities may be the curriculum and instruction portal, as well as Social Science Department Heads through board email).
9. **Finalize enrollments.** Ensure you have email contacts for every teacher and justice sector volunteer, and the names of every participating student.
10. **Develop and distribute an information package.** This package can go to enrolled schools, and include case scenario, rules and logistical details, and provide the names and contact details of the lawyers and Crown lawyers assigned as team coaches.
11. **Obtain Student Media Consent.** Ensure participating students have signed and returned a media consent and release allowing photos of the event to be published. This is important if photos are to be used in yearbooks, newsletters and newspapers.
12. **Develop a program for the event.** Schedule time for welcome addresses from local justice sector representatives, award ceremonies, and refreshment and networking breaks. Are parents and the media being invited?
13. **Arrange for certificates and/or prizes for top placing teams.** Consider participation certificates for students, schools, teachers and coaches. Sponsors may be interested in donating items such as law resources as prizes.
14. **Organize day of event details.** These may include signage, program, student and teacher nametags, tent cards for student lawyers, a board to post the trial schedule, photography, student helpers, and the assigning of individuals to introduce and thank speakers, conduct registration, and distribute materials. Arrange for students to borrow court gowns from local lawyers, Crown lawyers, and court staff.

15. **Ask participants for their evaluation.** Have on site drop boxes for completed evaluation forms. Have on site drop boxes for completed evaluations. Use the collated evaluations in planning future events.
16. **Enjoy the day!** Participating students are experiencing the justice system in action!