

Center for Civic Values
New Mexico High School Mock Trial Program

Courtroom Decorum for Mock Trial Team Members

A critical aspect of trial procedure, often overlooked in teaching about mock trial, is the courtroom decorum of the participants. The following hints are intended to help mock trial team members understand the nuances of appropriate courtroom behavior.

1. Be polite and courteous to the judges, both presiding and scoring. The role of the presiding judge is to make rulings on the procedures and objections. Remember that this is the most powerful person in the courtroom and act accordingly. ALWAYS refer to the presiding judge as “Your Honor,” and accept decisions gratefully and politely (yes, Your Honor), even if they are not in your favor.

The role of the scoring judges is to evaluate the performance of each participant. You should refer to the scoring panel as “members of the jury.” Use extreme caution if you choose to refer to them as “ladies and gentlemen” – often panels are all female or all male.

2. Courtroom etiquette also demands that you behave courteously and respectfully toward the opposing team before, during and after the trial! To demonstrate your good sportsmanship, shake hands and congratulate your opponents at the conclusion of the judges’ debriefing. ***THIS APPLIES TO STUDENTS, TEACHER ADVISORS, ATTORNEY COACHES AND OBSERVERS.***
3. Be prepared to deal with the unexpected. Remember, something may arise for which you are totally unprepared. If you believe the rules were violated, object and be prepared to explain your objection. Maintain your composure, even if you feel the rug has been “pulled out from under” you. (You may want to watch the movie “Suspect” for a good example of how unpredictable things in a trial can be.
4. Emotions are not banned from the courtroom; however, they must be controlled. It is okay (and may even be part of your trial strategy) to be appropriately indignant, puzzled, etc., but uncontrolled outbursts or wild theatrics are not appreciated by the judging panels and may cost you valuable points.
5. Hats, gum, food or beverages of any kind are prohibited in the courtroom for both participants and spectators. The only exception is water at the trial table.