

Handout 15
Courtroom Roles

Role 1: Judge

During the trial, the judge must be attentive, engaged, and in control of the courtroom. Judges need to be familiar with trial procedure to make sure the trial proceeds in an orderly manner, and must resolve disputes about application of the rules. At the close of each subpart of the trial, the judge tells the parties what happens next. Unlike juries, which decide cases simply by voting, and do not need to explain their vote, judges must provide a written explanation of their decisions.

To prepare for the trial you should:

1. Read through all the case and evidence material so that you are very knowledgeable about the facts.
2. Familiarize yourself with the law pertaining to this case. You are going to decide the case by deciding what the legal standard requires based on which facts you believe.
3. Familiarize yourself with trial procedure. This is particularly important for the judge, who needs to make sure everything runs smoothly in the courtroom. Use the space below to write a “cheat sheet” for trial procedure.

Role 2: Clerk

During a trial, the clerk is in charge of ensuring that the court procedures during the case are followed and assisting the judge and attorneys in front of the court in following the proper schedule and decorum.

To prepare for the trial, you should:

1. Familiarize yourself with the clerk's script in *Handout 15: Trial Transcript* as reproduced below:

(As the judge enters)

CLERK *(hits gavel three times)*: All rise. The U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon Portland Division is now in session. The Honorable _____ presiding.

For each witness:

CLERK: Please stand. Raise your right hand. Do you promise the testimony you shall give in the case before this court shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

WITNESS: I do.

CLERK: You may be seated.

Role 3: Witnesses

During a trial, it is important that witnesses only respond to the questions asked of them, and that they stick to their original story. You want the judge to believe that you are a credible witness. The opposing side will try to show that you cannot be believed or that there are inconsistencies in your story.

To prepare for the trial, you should:

1. Read through your statement. As much as possible, try to see this case from your character's perspective.
2. Pair up with the other witness from your team to practice questioning each other. This will help you to learn more about your witness. Drill each other until you can answer every conceivable question without looking at your statement. Use the space below to create a "cheat sheet" that you can review before going to the witness stand.

Role 4: Direct Examination Attorneys

Direct examination questions should be designed to get the witness to tell a logical story about what s/he saw, heard, or experienced. The questions should ask only for facts, not for opinions. (For example, “What did you see?” Not “Did that seem dangerous?”) You should ask open-ended questions that begin with why, where, when or how. During direct examination, you may only ask questions; you may not make any statements about the facts. You may have the opportunity to conduct a redirect examination if, during cross-examination, your witness says something that requires explanation or correction.

To prepare for the trial, you should:

1. Read through all the statements from your witnesses.
2. Pair up with the other direct examiner from your team and outline a series of open-ended questions for each witness. Think about how the witness’s testimony connects to the theory of the case. Write your questions in the space below.
3. Think about how you might rephrase questions in case the witness does not understand, gives an incorrect response, or there is an objection.

Role 5: Cross-Examination Attorneys

During the trial, it is important that you pay close attention to questions and responses given during direct examination. You want to undercut the opposing side's testimony, and you are only allowed to ask questions about subjects that came up during direct examination. Make sure that questions are not long or argumentative. It is best if they require only a simple yes or no answer, not long explanations. You don't want to give the witness a chance to explain their response. Leading questions that begin with something like, "Isn't it true that..." *are* allowed, and it is a good idea to use them.

To prepare for the trial, you should:

1. Read the opposing witness statements and think about how they could support the opposing case. Think about how to weaken or cast doubt on their statements. You want to highlight any inconsistencies, to show that the witness's story is implausible.
2. Discuss the questions and responses that might come out of the direct examination. Plot out a series of cross-examination questions you can then use to address the material that comes out of direct examination. Use the space below to record your potential questions.

Role 6: Opening Statement

The opening statement is the introduction to the case and the very first time attorneys get to tell their side of the story. The opening statement should include a summary of the facts, a summary of the evidence, and a statement regarding what your party hopes to get out of the trial.

To prepare for the trial, you should:

1. Work with the other attorneys to understand the core arguments that will be presented.
2. Write the opening statement for the case. The opening statement should paint a picture of the case, summarizing the evidence and testimony.

Role 7: Closing Argument

The purpose of the closing argument is to convince the judge or jury that the evidence presented is enough to win the case. The closing argument should summarize the facts, and evidence, and present a legal argument about how the law requires the judge or jury to interpret the evidence and decide the case.

To prepare for the trial, you should:

1. Work with the other attorneys to understand the core arguments that will be presented.
2. Prepare an outline for the closing argument. You can then write this in full during the trial.

Role 8: Media Reporters

The media reporters will provide a written or oral account of the trial at the close of each day of the mock trial. During the trial, the media reporters must be attentive, engaged, and taking note of everything that happens in the courtroom. The media reporters need to be familiar about the facts of the case and the pertinent law to make sure they fully understand the legal arguments that are being made. Although the media reporters should present both sides, the written account should revolve around a specific theme or lens that shapes the account.

To prepare for the trial you should:

1. Read through all the case and evidence material so that you are very knowledgeable about the facts.
2. Familiarize yourself with the law pertaining to this case.
3. Discuss with the other media reporters potential themes and lenses that you could use in writing the account of the trial.