



Judicial Virtual Procedures

Courts around the globe have grappled with how best to conduct hearings and trials virtually in an attempt to protect court staff and members of the public from COVID-19. The Supreme Courts of most states have given wide latitude to individual Judges authorizing them to modify in person rules to work with a virtual court environment.

Likewise, for our Virtual Competition, Judges are being called upon to conduct a bench trial where all participants are remotely presenting their arguments to the court. Basic rules such as “rise when talking to the Judge” obviously do not make sense in a virtual environment. Also, tendering evidence to opposing counsel for consideration does not work virtually. As such, the students are being asked to embrace the flexibility needed for this competition to be successful.

Appropriate Virtual Etiquette

- When signing-in for court, please use follow the following rules for zoom name:
 - Attorneys use **Attorney, Last Name, First Name** (not a random username)
 - Judges/Justices use
 - Witnesses use **Name of witness in Zoom**. EX: If Jane Smith was playing the role of Kate Riley, her name in Zoom will be Kate Riley.
 - Appellate teams must use zoom names as follows: **Role (Justice, Respondent, Petitioner) Last Name, First Name**. EX: Jane Smith is the Respondent so her Zoom name is Respondent, Smith, Jane.
- Please find a quiet area and call-in at the scheduled time so you can be fully present.
- Cameras need to be on for all teams for the entire time. Evaluators, advisors and other attendees will keep cameras off until evaluators deliver feedback at the end.
- Please do your best to keep background noise or distractions to a minimum.
- Please do not take your phone or computer to the bathroom.
- Photos and videos of others without their expressed consent is prohibited.
- If you have tech issues, text someone on your team that you are working on it. We will wait a few minutes for issue to be resolved and it should not affect scoring.

Mock Trial:

For the Zoom calls, each speaker will need to be on a separate connection. For example, an attorney and the witness they are questioning will need to be on two separate devices for the examinations. They cannot be side-by-side on a single Zoom session window.



However, if allowed by your school and parents, the witnesses can share a single Zoom session window and the co-counsel attorneys can share a single Zoom session window. The bailiff will need to be on their own connection though.

The bailiff will have time cards available to print out or can be created on their own if unable to print, so they may hold them up to their camera as an attorney's time elapses.

If an attorney needs to address the court, the attorney should state their concern like in a regular court hearing (ex: "Objection!"), but they should also hit the "raise hand" button on Zoom so that the Judge can see who is addressing the court.

For the offering of evidence, the attorney simply needs to make their intention known to all participants. "I am holding pages 38-40, which I have marked as State's Exhibit 1. Mr. Witness, could you please reference these pages? Do you recognized what has been marked as State's Exhibit 1? ... Your honor, I offer State's Exhibit 1."

Attorneys should call out specific exhibit numbers rather than descriptions (the newspaper)

Reminder: Remain seated the entire time. There is no need to stand to "approach" for tendering to opposing counsel or approaching the bench. We approach the bench to bring things to the Judge or quietly address things outside the presence of the jury. With a Zoom bench trial, our Judge is right in front of us on the screen and there is no Jury.

Judges, we hope each will receive a YMCA Judicial Robe, coordinated with your District. If not available, Judges should wear a black shirt.

Appellate:

Because there is little movement during an appellate argument, your rules do not need to be altered much. Attorneys should attempt to limit reading their arguments. There is no great way to monitor whether competitors are simply reading their arguments off their screen. You should still work to memorize your arguments as much as possible.

There is no ban on having resources pulled up on your computer screen. However, you will be scored lower if you are scrolling through pages to answer questions. You should try to limit your resources to two side-by-side word documents. Both attorneys can share the same webcam stream if they wish. If a justice has a question, they have control to interrupt arguments still, but they should "raise hand" on the zoom meeting so that the attorney knows which justice to address.

For our competition, Justices may have to make calls on amending certain rules on the fly if needed for the proper administration of their courtroom. Justices should not make changes that substantially impair an attorney's ability to present their case.



TEXAS YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT

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