

Dear Mock Trial Colleagues,

We write to let you know about two documents that have recently been adopted by the National High School Mock Trial Championships and that we will be adopting for our competition over the next six months. Those documents are attached hereto for your review.

The first document, the “Scoring Matrix,” is a set of standards that describes the characteristics of a performance and aligns those characteristics with suggested scores. We certainly expect that most students will fall across several categories. (For example, a single student might be “minimally responsive” to the other team’s presentation (worthy of a 6) but might be mostly maintaining eye contact (a 7 or 8) and recovering exceptionally well after objections (a 9 or 10).) Accordingly, the Matrix is designed as a guideline to flesh out an assessment. No one element is expected to predominate, and the Matrix is not a checklist or – worse – an indication that the lowest of a student’s performance elements is the “right” one. We believe that the Matrix provides an excellent baseline for judges and will serve as a useful guide to the things we expect to see and how we expect them to be scored. We hope that the use of the Scoring Matrix will also help check idiosyncratic scoring practices.

Similar, but not identical, is the second document, “What to Look For.” Rather than focusing almost exclusively on presentation, What to Look For emphasizes the structural elements that we expect in a statement, examination, or witness performance. While there is some overlap with the Scoring Matrix, the What to Look For document explains the things we expect a given performance to be doing, rather than just how it is to be done.

You will notice that the Scoring Matrix sets an “Average” performance at a 6. Experience suggests that many judges tend to score higher, in the 7-7.5 range (or even higher) as a baseline. The Executive Committee believes that this hurts the competition overall by compressing scores into the higher ranges, generating too many sheets with only 9s and 10s. This score compression reduces differentiation between teams, hurting our ability to accurately power match, and it can prevent truly exceptional performances from standing out and being properly rewarded.

Both the Scoring Matrix and the What to Look For documents were adopted unanimously by the National Board a few weeks ago, following dozens of person-hours of consultation and debate. We believe these documents to be an excellent starting point, and we will welcome feedback on them over the coming months. Nationals has adopted both documents effective for this year’s championships in Reno, Nevada.

Because most if not all District and Regional competitions are well under way at this point, we will not be introducing either document for purposes of these competitions in the 2017-18 mock trial season. They will, however, be distributed to the scoring judges in Harrisburg for use in the state competition rounds and in our State Championship.

The Scoring Matrix and What To Look For documents will be distributed to judges for all District, Regional, and State competition rounds starting with the 2018-19 mock trial season. We hope to roll out training for the judges on these documents over the summer, if not sooner.

We are sharing these documents with you for three reasons. First and most importantly, we believe in transparency and in your right to know the basis on which teams will be scored. Second, we want to get whatever input you have on the documents. And third, we believe that these documents are excellent training tools for your students and can serve as useful reminders for them of the areas judges look to in differentiating teams.

We recognize that releasing these documents now, rather than over the summer, is unusual. But we wanted to be sure that these materials reached you in time to help this year, and we felt that with Nationals adopting this schema for this year's competition, we ought to attempt to align our state championships to them sooner rather than later.

We hope that you are all having a great season. We look forward to seeing some of you in Harrisburg and to continuing to communicate with you all in the coming weeks.

- The Mock Trial Executive Committee