



High School Moot Court Association  
Competition and Tabulation Rules  
2025-2026

*Last edited May 26, 2026. All rules subject to change with express notice to all participants.*

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## Chapter 1: General

### 1.01 Purpose

The High School Moot Court Association (HSMCA) exists to train high school students in constitutional law and oral advocacy. In doing so, we aim to foster: (1) high quality judges; (2) elite competition; and (3) efficient tournaments.

### 1.02 Amendments

This rulebook is subject to amendment by the board of the HSMCA. Notice of any changes will be given to the competing families.

### 1.03 Affiliation and Eligibility

In order to compete, all students must affiliate (one affiliation required per family) with the HSMCA. HSMCA will send all affiliates a family affiliation code which they may use to register for tournaments.

Competition is limited to only those students who are in high school. Students may not compete if: (1) they have graduated from high school; or (2) they are 19 or older on September 1st of the competition year. Conversely, a student who is younger than a typical high schooler *may* participate, so long as they are taking high school classes. Eligibility questions should be directed to the Board at [contact@hsmca.org](mailto:contact@hsmca.org).

### 1.04 Conduct Expectations

All students are expected and required to conduct themselves in a professional and sportsmanlike manner both in tournaments and without. The Board retains the right to revoke eligibility if the competitor has engaged in behavior that significantly harms another competitor or violates the conduct expectations of the league.

# Chapter 2: Tournament Rules

## 2.01 Script Expectations

Competitors are expected to include the following elements of their introduction to their oral argument. At their own discretion, competitors may choose to add other elements (e.g., “honorable associate Justices”).

- (1) “Mr./Madame Chief Justice, and may it please the Court”
- (2) An introduction of oneself (and one’s co-counsel; first speaker of the petitioner only)
- (3) The issue the speaker will address (and one’s co-counsel; first speaker of both teams only)
- (4) Rebuttal time (first speaker only)
- (5) A brief overview of the argument and roadmap

*Note: There are no requirements on the way in which a competitor begins her or his rebuttal.*

### 2.01.01 Enforcement

The sole enforcement of the script expectations is the judge. Students who leave out expected elements of the opening statement should be penalized, but the severity of the penalty as reflected on the ballot is up to the judge’s discretion.

## 2.02 Timekeeping

Violations of rule 2.02.01, 2.02.02, and 2.02.03 may be brought before the Adjudication Committee. Teams found in violation will automatically lose the round. This does not affect oral advocate points.

### 2.02.01 Time Constraints and Protected Time

In preliminary rounds, each side is limited to 20 minutes, split evenly between both speakers. Petitioners must request rebuttal time in whole-minute increments, between 1 and 4 minutes. The remaining time is split evenly between the two petitioners. Failure to ask for rebuttal time in the petitioner’s first speech may result in a forfeiture of rebuttal, but is subject to the judge’s discretion. In online tournaments, judges will be instructed to allow the speaker one minute of uninterrupted “protected time” before asking any questions. At in-person tournaments, there is no official “protected time.” However,

judges will be instructed to allow students to read their roadmap before interrupting the speaker.

### 2.02.02 Starting the Timer

Speakers must use the timer app on Zoom and are responsible for ensuring that the timer is visible on screen during the duration of the speech. In the event that the timer accidentally stops or the student drops out unexpectedly, the team is responsible for estimating, consulting with the Chief Justice, how much time is remaining and what the appropriate remedy shall be. If the issue is not resolved in-round, a request may be made to the Adjudication Committee.

Speakers shall begin their timer, at the latest, after stating, “may it please the Court.” There are no penalties for starting the timer before the opening remarks.

*Note: For in-person tournaments, students are still responsible for timing themselves. Cell phones may be used for timing so long as the internet capability is turned off.*

### 2.02.03 Outrounds Time Constraints

In outrounds, each side receives 22 minutes, split evenly between both speakers. Petitioners may request between 1 and 5 minutes for rebuttal.

### 2.02.04 Speaking When Time Elapses

Competitors may not begin a new sentence after time expires, except to briefly request an extension of time or to say “thank you.” Competitors must instead ask the judge for an extension, in any wording they feel is appropriate. Judges have full discretion to allow or deny such an extension. Competitors who (1) speak after the timer expires or, (2) after being given permission, exceed a reasonable amount of time may be penalized on one of the ballot categories, subject to a judge’s discretion.

## 2.03 Visual Aids and Gestures

Competitors may not use any visual aids in their presentation, and violations of this rule are subject to the Adjudication Committee. Hand gestures should be limited in keeping with traditional Moot Court practices and general courtroom decorum. Judges are given deference as to how much weight they afford to this suggestion.

## 2.04 Communication

Competitors may not communicate strategy about the round, whether in person or online, with anyone but their partner during rounds. This ban includes friends, parents, coaches, or anyone else who might provide strategic advice. Violations of this rule are subject to the Adjudication Committee.

## 2.05 Rebuttal

Every argument made in rebuttals should be responsive to an argument advanced by the respondent during their speeches. Judges may disregard arguments, penalize speakers, or both, if the speaker makes arguments in rebuttal that should reasonably have been made in the earlier speeches. Rebuttals may feature quotes or pieces of case law that have not been referenced yet, but they should not alter the Petitioners' original argument.

Only egregious violations of this rule are subject to the Adjudication Committee. Judges have discretion to penalize minimally or severely based on the particular circumstances of each rebuttal.

## 2.06 Closed Universe

Competitors may only quote material which is sanctioned in the official HSMCA packet and appendix, as well as the Constitution. Competitors may cite anything from anywhere in the packet. Competitors may also read outside sources, but they may not quote any part of, or cite, those sources.

Referencing a fact known outside the packet without a citation does not always constitute a violation of this rule, though the judge has discretion to disregard arguments or penalize the competitor for plagiarism or unsubstantiated claims.

*Example 1: "According to the CATO Institute, in the 1970s, Fed Chair Eugene Volcker raised interest rates—though unpopular in the short term—in order to save the economy." The Adjudication committee would intervene because this is a violation of the rules.*

*Example 2: "In the 1970s, Fed Chair Eugene Volcker raised interest rates—though unpopular in the short term—in order to save the economy in the long term." The Adjudication committee would not intervene because this is not a violation of the rules.*

*However, a judge may penalize the competitor on the ballot and disregard the argument if he or she believes that this statement is unsubstantiated.*

*Example 3: “If a Fed Chair raises interest rates, that would be unpopular, but would likely save the economy in the long term.” The Adjudication committee would not intervene because this is not a violation of the rules. Additionally, the judge should not penalize the student because this statement is not attributable to any particular source.*

A violation of this rule occurs if the competitor cites a source outside of the packet, and is subject to the Adjudication Committee.

### 2.06.01 Sub-Citations

Students may cite cases referenced in the caselaw (known as sub-citations) only insofar as they are referenced in the caselaw given in the appendix. Students are required to orally subcite: they must reference both the sub-cited case from which the quote comes *and* the case in the appendix from which they found the quote. Students may not reference facts that would not be known aside from reading the cases in the appendix.

Violations of this rule are subject to the Adjudication Committee.

### 2.06.02 Mid-Season Balance Changes

At the discretion of the HSMCA, the packet may receive additional material to offset any side biases. This may include, but is not limited to: Law Review Journal Articles, new facts, and new cases. The timing of this release will be around the middle of the season.

## Chapter 3: Tabulation Rules

### 3.01 Number of Rounds; Number of Judges

Four preliminary rounds will take place at each tournament, with each team participating in two rounds on each side. Two judges will participate in each round, with one acting as the “Chief Justice.” **In the event of excess judges, there may be three judges in a round. Only two ballots will be counted. The ballot left off will be determined by a random draw prior to the round by the tabulation director.**

## 3.02 Preliminary Round Pairings

### 3.02.01 Qualifying Tournaments

At all qualifying tournaments, preliminary round pairings will be randomized.

### 3.02.02 National Tournament

At the 2026 National Championship, powermatching will be used. The powermatching guide is created by the tabulation director and available upon request.

### 3.02.03 Byes

At a tournament with an odd number of teams and without powermatching, byes will be assigned to:

- (1) The teams who received the fewest amounts of wins at previous tournaments that year; or
- (2) At the first tournament of the year, the teams who have the least amount of combined experience at HSMCA tournaments.

In the event of more than four teams fulfilling the criteria, the byes will be randomized among those teams who fulfill the criteria.

At a tournament with an odd number of teams using powermatching, byes will be assigned to the lowest seeded team entering the tournament for round one. Afterward, the bye will be assigned to the bottom bracket, with exceptions laid out in the tabulation guide.

## 3.03 Ballot Release Timing

Teams may choose to “opt-in” to see the results of their rounds as soon as tabulation has processed the ballots. The method and extent of the information will be determined by the tabulation director.

The results from round 4 will not be released publicly during the tournament; competitors will hear the results at the announcement for outrounds and in ballots afterward.

### 3.04 Outrounds

Teams qualify to outrounds by reaching a threshold of total ballots collected, not the rounds “won.” In qualifying tournaments, there will be a pre-set number of outround slots based on the registered teams.

Number of Teams	Outround Slots	Outrounds
9-11	4	Semis, Finals
12-13	5	Partial Quarters, Semis, Finals
14-16	6	Partial Quarters, Semis, Finals
17-18	7	Partial Quarters, Semis, Finals
19-21	8	Quarters, Semis, Finals
22-23	9	Partial Octas, Quarters, Semis, Finals
24-26	10	Partial Octas, Quarters, Semis, Finals
27-28	11	Partial Octas, Quarters, Semis, Finals
29-31	12	Partial Octas, Quarters, Semis, Finals

Higher seeded teams may receive a “bye” in the event of an odd number of outround slots. For breaking ties, see 3.05.

#### 3.04.01 Number of Judges

HSMCA plans for three-judge panels in outrounds. In the event of excess judges, there may be four or five judges in a round. In five-judge panels, all ballots will be counted; in four-judge panels, one ballot will not be counted. The ballot left off will be determined by a random draw prior to the round by the tabulation director.

#### 3.04.02 Side Balancing

In most cases, side assignments in outrounds will be randomized. However, where possible, tabulation will assign sides to teams who have not yet gone on that side (e.g., a team who has been petitioner for octafinals and quarterfinals will be respondent for semifinals). In cases in which both teams facing each other have been on the same side, side assignments will still be randomized.

### 3.05 Breaking Ties

Where teams have identical records, the following tiebreakers will occur to determine seeding:

- (1) Competitor strength (“CS”): How many total ballots the team’s opponents won, aside from the head-to-head rounds (0-24).
- (2) Point differential (“PD”): Total points of team - Total points of opponents.
- (3) Opponent’s competitor strength (“OCS”): How many total ballots the team’s opponents’ opponents won (0-128).
- (4) Opponent’s point differential (“OPD”): Total points of opponents - total points of opponents’ opponents.

### 3.06 Oral Advocate Awards

Oral advocate awards will be given to the top 25% of advocates (rounding up).

The awards will be awarded by taking the average of the middle 6 ballots (removing highest and lowest ballots). The following criteria will break ties:

- (1) Head-to-head: If the competitors were in the same round, whichever student ranked higher will win a higher oral advocate award. Includes outrounds.
- (2) Average points per round (“PPR”): For each round,  $PPR = \frac{\text{a competitor's points} - [\text{points of co-counsel and two opponents}]}{3}$ . To calculate average PPR, add all 8 rounds and divide by 8.

### 3.07 Qualification for the Championship

Every team who advances at a qualifying tournament is placed on the at-large list, with the exception of the top four teams at each tournament, who receive a direct qualification bid to the Championship.

There are no roll-down slots; only places 1-4 receive bids to the National Championship. Every team who does not receive a direct bid may only qualify through the at-large list. The precise number of total bids (and therefore, bids from the at-large list) is dependent on the number of affiliations by the end of the fourth qualifier.

## 3.08 Play-in Qualifying Tournament

If more than 45 unique teams compete during the year, a “play-in” qualifier will be held. Teams who have either: (1) not advanced during any qualifier but have earned a record of 4-4 at least twice; or (2) have advanced during at least one qualifier but are outside the expected bid allocation are eligible for a final, play-in qualifier that takes place after the final qualifying tournament. The play-in qualifier operates as any other qualifying tournament, except that only the top 2 teams receive a direct qualification bid to the Championship; all other teams receive points on the at-large list.

# Chapter 4: Enforcement

## 4.01 The Adjudication Committee

### 4.01.01 Common Jurisdiction

Many of the principles established in this rule book are enforced solely by the judge on a ballot. There are rare, well-defined times in which rule violations may be brought before the Adjudication Committee team. These include: timekeeping violations (2.02); using visual aids (2.03); communicating strategy with someone not one’s partner (2.04); introducing a new argument or key pieces of support in the rebuttal (2.05); and violating the closed-universe policy (2.06).

The only other rule violation that the Adjudication Committee has jurisdiction over is when a speaker claims to quote a sentence and proceeds to add or subtract words from the original quote which substantially alter or affect its original meaning.

### 4.01.02 Raising a Request

Excluding violations of rule 2.03 and 2.04, teams may *only* raise an adjudication request if they present an audio recording of the round with the alleged violation audible. There are no exceptions to this rule. By competing or judging, participants agree to be recorded for the purposes of raising an Adjudication request.

### 4.01.03 One-Request System

Teams are allowed a maximum of one Adjudication request throughout the entirety of each tournament, including outrounds. Requests reset after each tournament.

#### 4.01.04 Penalties

The Adjudication Committee, after reviewing and/or hearing the evidence, may choose to impose no penalties or a point deduction on the ballot. In some cases, the Adjudication Committee will alter the decision of the round.