

James Patterson McBaine Honors Moot Court

2026 Competition Rules

Advocacy competitions are complex events that require a significant amount of coordination to operate smoothly for everyone involved. The tournament organizers may, in their discretion, amend or add to tournament rules as appropriate to suit the needs of the tournament.

Competition-related emails may contain material that requires a time-sensitive response. Competitors are expected to review competition-related emails promptly upon receipt and in their entirety. Failure to respond as directed may have consequences, including disqualification from a competition.

Competitors are expected to keep all potential competition days and timeslots open in their schedules. Tournament organizers have carefully selected the dates and times for the oral argument rounds, making every effort to avoid class conflicts. Dates and times for all rounds will be provided to competitors before the add/drop deadline. Important competition dates are also listed on the [2026 McBaine webpage](#).

I. HONOR CODE

By participating in this exercise, students express their agreement to abide by the rules described below. A violation of any McBaine Moot Court rules shall also be treated as a violation of the Berkeley Law Honor Code.

Any attempt, direct or indirect, to contact the attorneys or the parties, or to examine the case file (other than the materials provided) or briefs in this case or any part of any case or brief in which any of the parties raised substantially the same claim(s) as in this year's case is prohibited. If you are assigned any reading or have a class discussion related to the case, please immediately contact the Competition Program Director, the Competitions Associate, the McBaine Academic Director, and the McBaine Student Directors (collectively "the Directors").

II. OUTSIDE HELP

The competition is primarily self-guided and does not have a regular classroom component. Competitors may only receive limited assistance in writing the brief or preparing an oral argument, as described below:

- A. *Brief*: The brief should be entirely your work. You may not solicit or receive help in any form from law school faculty members, attorneys, or any other person, except for the Directors, who will provide limited feedback on drafts submitted by the applicable deadline. You may also have someone who is not a lawyer or current McBaine competitor proofread your brief for grammar, spelling, and punctuation only. To address limited questions about the substantive aspects of the case, you may consult only with the McBaine Student Directors and the Academic Director. Except as described here, you may not cooperate or collaborate with any other person in preparing your brief.
- B. *Oral Argument*: You may practice your oral argument with anyone except current McBaine competitors, law professors, or lawyers. If you would like to schedule a practice moot, please contact the McBaine Student Directors to make arrangements. You may not record or attend the practice oral argument of another student until you are eliminated, and then only during the semifinal and final rounds. The final round is the only official round open to viewing.

You may not have another person attend an oral argument for the purpose of advising you about the substance of the argument or the questions asked, nor may you attend an oral argument for those purposes.

III. ELIGIBILITY

All second- and third-year J.D. students and Traditional- and Thesis-Track LL.M. students enrolled at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law are eligible to participate. First-year students may not participate. There are no prerequisite classes or tryouts. Students are welcome to consult with the Directors before applying but are not required to do so. Students are officially deemed competitors upon enrollment in the course and submission of the side preference sheet.

IV. REQUIRED FORMS

Commitment & Side Preferences Form: You may either indicate a preference to represent one side of the case (Petitioner or Respondent), or you may indicate that you have no preference. We take preferences into consideration but cannot guarantee everyone will receive their first choice for logistical reasons. Additionally, you will indicate your agreement to abide by the Rules. Sides will be announced via email to all competitors. If you fail to submit this form by the required deadline and do not notify the organizers that you still wish to compete, you may be dropped from the competition and replaced by a student on the waitlist.

V. LEGAL RESEARCH

- A. *Open Universe with Restrictions:* Competitors are not limited to a closed, specified universe of legal authority, as in some other moot court competitions and in first-year written and oral advocacy. You may cite any relevant legal authority, subject to the requirements of the McBaine Honor Code (See Rule I, above).
- B. *Affirmative Duty to Report Potentially Related Materials:* You have an affirmative duty to ask immediately about any questionable material. Please send any such questions to the Directors.

VI. SCORING, AWARDS, & COMPETITION ADVANCEMENT

- A. *Scoring and Awards:* Judges will score the oral arguments on the quality of the presentation and arguments, not on the merits of the case. There are four awards available:
- Champion, given to the Final Round winner
 - Finalist, given to the other Final Round competitor
 - Best Petitioner Brief, given to the author of the strongest brief for Petitioner
 - Best Respondent Brief, given to the author of the strongest brief for Respondent

Sample scoring sheets will be available on the Competition website. These scoring sheets list the criteria judges and brief graders will consider, as well as the maximum number of points they may award for each part of the brief and argument. The completed scoring sheets are confidential and will not be released to the students.

Briefs will be graded by practicing attorneys. Each brief will have no fewer than two graders. Grading will be done on a blind review basis, where each brief will be assigned a number known only to a non-grader administrator before being given to each grader.

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Although a student may not advance to later rounds of oral argument, they may still win a Best Brief award based solely on the quality of the written brief. A separate panel of appellate specialists and/or faculty members will review the three highest-scoring briefs from each side, and this independent review of the top briefs will determine the recipients of the Best Brief awards.

B. *Advancement from Preliminary Rounds:* During the preliminary rounds, all competitors will argue twice before judging panels – once during Round 1, and again during Round 2.

Students advance to the elimination rounds based on the combined strength of their written brief and their oral argument. With brief score and oral argument score given equal weight, the four highest-scoring competitors from each side will advance to the first of the elimination rounds, the Quarterfinal.

C. *Advancement from Elimination Rounds:* During the Quarterfinal and Semifinal rounds, students advance to the next round based on the quality of the oral argument. The two highest-scoring quarterfinalists from each side will advance to the Semifinal. The highest-scoring Petitioner and Respondent will then advance to the Final round, where a panel of three esteemed judges will preside.

Advancing competitors for each subsequent round will be announced following the last scheduled argument of the current round. For example, Quarterfinal results and Semifinal pairings will be announced following the last scheduled Quarterfinal argument. At the conclusion of the Final Round arguments, the judges will retire to deliberate, then return to announce the winner of the McBaine Competition. All awards will be announced, and prizes will be presented at this time.

VII. BRIEFS

The following rules are drawn from the U.S. Supreme Court rules whenever possible. In many instances, “local” rules have been substituted by necessity.

A. *Substantive requirements*

i. A brief on the merits shall contain, in the order here indicated:

a. *The questions presented for review:* The questions shall be set out on the first page following the cover, and no other information may appear on that page. The questions need not be set out verbatim according to the Record. The brief may not raise additional questions not resolved by the decision of the appellate court.

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- b. A table of contents and table of cited authorities.
 - c. A concise statement of the case, setting out the facts material to the consideration of the questions presented, with appropriate references to the record (i.e., “R. at [page]”).
 - d. A summary of the argument, suitably paragraphed. The summary should be a clear and concise condensation of the argument made in the body of the brief; mere repetition of the headings under which the argument is arranged is not sufficient.
 - e. The argument, exhibiting clearly the points of fact and of law presented and citing the authorities and statutes relied on.
 - f. A conclusion, specifying with particularity the relief the party seeks.
 - g. An appendix may be included that contains the text of pertinent statutory authority.
 - h. References to cited legal authority shall conform to Bluebook standards.
 - i. A brief shall be concise, logically arranged with proper headings, and free of irrelevant, immaterial, or scandalous matter.
- ii. Every document shall bear on its cover, in the order indicated, from the top of the page:
- a. The docket number of the case
 - b. The name of this Court
 - c. The caption of the case
 - d. The nature of the proceeding and the name of the court from which the action is brought (e.g., for a merits brief, “On Writ of Certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Xth Circuit.”)
 - e. The title of the document (e.g., “Brief for the Petitioner” or “Brief for Respondent”)
 - f. The name and address [e-mail address is sufficient] of the attorney who is counsel of record for the party concerned.
 - g. Note: A sample cover shall be distributed to competitors in advance of the brief’s due date.
- iii. The body of every document shall bear at its close the name and signature of counsel of record. By signing the brief on the merits, the attorney of record affirms that he or she has complied with the Berkeley Law Honor Code and with all provisions of this document.

B. Formal Requirements

- i. Page Size, Line Spacing, and Margins: The brief must be on an 8 ½ by 11-inch page. The text must be double-spaced, but quotations more than two lines long may be indented and single-spaced. Headings and footnotes may be single-spaced. Margins must be at least one inch on all four sides. Page numbers may be placed in the margins, but no text may appear there.

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- ii. Typeface: Twelve-point type in a common and readable typeface (such as Times New Roman or Century) must be used. Any footnotes shall also conform to this requirement.
 - iii. Type Styles: A brief must be set in a plain style, although italics or boldface may be used for emphasis. Case names must be italicized or underlined.
 - iv. Length: A principal brief must be between 25 and 40 pages. Only the substantive brief counts toward the page limit (i.e., the statement of the case, summary of the argument, the argument itself, and conclusion). This excludes the question presented, table of contents, and table of authorities, which should be paginated with small Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, iv, etc.). This also excludes the appendix pages, which should be numbered with an "A-" preceding each numbered page (A-1, A-2, etc.).
- C. Minimum Standards: We firmly believe that every McBaine participant has the talent and resources necessary to write a persuasive and legally sound brief that far exceeds the minimum standard for credit in this exercise. A brief that fails to address major cases and statutes referenced in the lower court opinions and the record will be considered substandard and will result in a No Credit grade.
- D. Brief Deadline and Late Briefs: An electronic copy of your final brief in PDF form must be emailed to the Competitions Program Director, the McBaine Academic Director, and the Competitions Associate by the brief deadline, which will be posted on the 2026 McBaine webpage. **If a brief is not submitted to all three contacts listed here**, four points will be deducted. **If a brief is late**, for each and every half-hour (with any fraction thereof rounded up) that the brief is late, two points will be deducted from the brief score. Given that competition is tight, a late brief will most likely prevent a competitor from advancing to the elimination rounds. Failure to successfully submit a brief will result in a No Credit grade.
- E. All requests for clarification, rescission, or additions to these rules must be presented in writing to the Directors.

VIII. ORAL ARGUMENT

- A. All competition rounds are planned to be hosted at Berkeley Law and in person.
- B. *Preliminary Rounds, Quarterfinal Rounds, Semifinal Rounds*: Each student will have 20 minutes to present an oral argument. Petitioner shall present first, followed by Respondent, followed by Petitioner's rebuttal. Petitioner may reserve up to three minutes of their time for rebuttal, but must notify both the timekeeper and the judges prior to commencing argument. The rebuttal should directly address the points that the respondent raises.
- C. *Final Round*: Each finalist will have 30 minutes to present their oral argument. The petitioner may reserve up to five minutes of his or her time for rebuttal. Rebuttal should directly address the points that the respondent raises.

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D. *Conflicts*: Any competitor who believes that a judge on her or his panel may have a conflict of interest in judging her or him shall inform the Directors.

E. *Unavailable Participant Policy*: In the unlikely event that a McBaine participant becomes unavailable to compete in person, the participant should notify the Directors as soon as possible. Unfortunately, the logistics involved in hosting this competition do not permit us to host a hybrid or makeup round. We ask that the participant send an email disclosing as much information as possible about their unavailability in that situation to the Directors. Hopefully, we do not find ourselves in this situation, but we do want to make every effort to be transparent about next steps if a participant becomes unavailable to participate in the competition.

If the unavailable participant cannot attend a preliminary round, then other McBaine competitors will be contacted with the opportunity to participate in the open oral argument slot to ensure the opponent of the unavailable competitor can still compete in the round.

If the unavailable participant cannot attend an advancing round, the resulting open oral argument slot would then be made available to the next highest scoring McBaine participant from the same side. If an advancing participant's unavailability is caused by extraordinary circumstances, such as an unforeseen medical condition or other materially changed circumstance, then the student may still refer to themselves as a McBaine quarterfinalist, semifinalist, or finalist, as applicable.

IX. CONTACT INFORMATION

McBaine Student Directors mcbainecomp@law.berkeley.edu

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