

Client Counselling Competition

Preparation Guide

India Edition — For law students competing at intra-college, inter-college, and national level

Client Counselling Competitions (CCCs) test your ability to advise a simulated client — understanding their problem, identifying legal issues, proposing solutions, and building trust — all within a limited time. This guide covers everything you need to prepare thoroughly: the format, the skills, the session structure, judging criteria, and common mistakes to avoid.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE COMPETITION FORMAT

- Confirmed the competition format — individual or team (usually pairs)
- Understood the session duration — typically 20–30 minutes with the client
- Confirmed whether there is a pre-session problem or the problem is disclosed only at the start
- Understood the debrief or reflection round — many competitions include a 5–10 minute judges' Q&A after the session
- Confirmed whether written materials (notes, advice sheet) may be submitted
- Read the competition rules carefully — some prohibit certain resources or require specific disclaimers
- Identified whether the problem area is pre-announced or kept general — prepare across multiple areas

Common CCC Formats in India

- NLIU Client Counselling Competition — one of the most prestigious national-level CCCs
- NUJS, NALSAR, and Symbiosis law schools regularly host inter-college CCCs
- Louis M. Brown International Client Counselling Competition — international format followed by many Indian NLU
- Intra-college rounds often use simpler fact patterns; national rounds involve complex multi-issue problems

2. THE FOUR PHASES OF A CLIENT COUNSELLING SESSION

01

Opening — Build Rapport and Set the Tone (2–3 minutes)

- Greet the client warmly and introduce yourself and your partner clearly
- Explain confidentiality — assure the client that what they share stays between you
- Set a brief agenda: 'Today we will listen to your situation, ask a few questions, and try to give you some initial advice'
- Make the client feel comfortable — they are often nervous; your tone sets the session

02

Information Gathering — Listen and Probe (8–10 minutes)

- Let the client speak first — do not interrupt; use open-ended questions to encourage them
- Listen for both legal facts and emotional cues — note what distresses them most
- Ask clarifying questions to fill gaps: dates, parties involved, documents signed, prior action taken
- Identify the client's primary goal — what outcome do they actually want?
- Take brief notes — do not write so much that you lose eye contact with the client

Legal Analysis — Advise Clearly and Practically (8–10 minutes)

03

- Summarise the facts back to the client to confirm your understanding
- Identify the key legal issues in plain language — avoid heavy jargon
- Outline the available legal options and the pros and cons of each
- Advise on the most practical course of action given the client's goals and circumstances
- Mention any immediate steps the client should take — preserve evidence, avoid certain actions, etc.
- Be honest about uncertainty — never overstate the strength of a legal position

Closing — Confirm and Reassure (2–3 minutes)

04

- Summarise the advice given and the next steps clearly
- Ask if the client has any remaining questions or concerns
- Explain what happens next — referral, further research, follow-up meeting
- End on a reassuring note — the client should leave feeling heard and helped

3. KEY SKILLS JUDGES EVALUATE

Criterion	Weight	What judges look for
Client Rapport	High	Warmth, active listening, eye contact, non-verbal engagement, putting the client at ease
Information Gathering	High	Quality of questions asked, ability to identify hidden or unstated facts, avoiding leading questions
Legal Accuracy	High	Correct identification of legal issues, accuracy of advice, awareness of relevant Indian laws
Communication Clarity	High	Plain language, no unnecessary jargon, clear explanation of legal options to a layperson
Practical Advice	Medium	Actionable next steps, realistic options, awareness of cost and time implications for the client
Empathy & Sensitivity	Medium	Acknowledging client's emotional state, not being dismissive, showing genuine concern
Teamwork (if pairs)	Medium	Balanced participation, smooth handoffs, no talking over each other
Closing & Summary	Medium	Clear recap of advice, confirmed next steps, client left feeling reassured

4. LEGAL AREAS COMMONLY TESTED IN INDIAN CCCS

- Family law — divorce, maintenance, child custody under Hindu Marriage Act, Muslim Personal Law, Special Marriage Act
- Property disputes — co-ownership, succession, tenancy, transfer of property
- Consumer disputes — defective goods, service deficiency, e-commerce fraud under Consumer Protection Act 2019
- Employment issues — wrongful termination, salary disputes, workplace harassment under POSH Act 2013
- Contract disputes — breach of agreement, non-performance, fraud or misrepresentation
- Criminal matters — FIR filing, bail, anticipatory bail, domestic violence under Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act
- Start-up and business issues — co-founder disputes, IP ownership, investor agreements
- Cybercrime and data issues — online fraud, privacy breach, IT Act 2000 provisions

Preparation Tip — Legal Areas

- Prepare a one-page summary of each area above: key statute, key rights, and key remedies
- Focus on what a layperson would want to know — not the technicalities of pleading
- Practise identifying the primary issue quickly — most problems have one main issue and two or three secondary ones

5. QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES — WHAT TO USE

- Open-ended questions to start: 'Can you tell me what has been happening?'
Encourages the client to speak freely — never begin with yes/no questions
- Probing questions to dig deeper: 'When did this first occur? Were there any documents signed?'
- Clarifying questions to resolve ambiguity: 'Just to confirm — you said the agreement was verbal, not written?'
- Empathetic acknowledgement before moving on: 'That sounds like a very difficult situation — thank you for sharing that'
- Funnel technique — start broad, gradually narrow to specific facts
- Silence as a tool — do not rush to fill pauses; clients often share more when given space
- Summarising back: 'So if I understand correctly...' — confirms facts and shows you are listening

DO

- Use the client's name naturally during the session
- Nod and maintain eye contact to signal active listening
- Acknowledge emotions before moving to legal analysis: 'I understand this must be stressful'
- Divide roles clearly if competing in pairs: one leads questioning, one leads advising
- Give the client options — never just one solution
- Admit when something requires further research rather than guessing

✗ DO NOT

- Do not interrupt the client mid-sentence — wait for natural pauses
- Do not use legal jargon without immediately explaining it in plain language
- Do not make definitive guarantees: never say 'you will definitely win this case'
- Do not ignore the emotional dimension of the problem — client counselling is not just legal advice
- Do not speak for more than your partner — unbalanced teams lose marks on teamwork
- Do not look at your notes constantly — it breaks trust and rapport
- Do not rush the advice phase — a hurried conclusion feels dismissive

6. PREPARATION SCHEDULE — 4 WEEKS BEFORE COMPETITION

W1

Week 1 — Build Your Knowledge Base

- Study the top 8 legal areas commonly tested (see Section 4) — one per day
- Create a quick-reference sheet: statute, key rights, remedies, and time limits for each area
- Read 5–10 past CCC problem sets from Indian competitions to understand the style
- Watch recordings of Louis M. Brown Competition finals if available online

W2

Week 2 — Develop Your Technique

- Practice the four-phase structure with a partner using simple fact patterns
- Focus specifically on information gathering — time yourself on this phase
- Work on plain-language explanations: take a legal concept and explain it to a non-lawyer in 60 seconds
- Record a mock session and review your body language, tone, and question quality

W3

Week 3 — Full Mock Sessions

- Run at least three full 25-minute mock sessions with a classmate acting as the client
- Ask a faculty member or senior student to judge and give structured feedback
- Practise with unexpected twists — clients who are emotional, evasive, or reveal new facts mid-session
- Refine your opening and closing — these are often the weakest parts of student sessions

W4

Week 4 — Polish and Simulate Competition Conditions

- Simulate the exact competition format: timed, unfamiliar problem, formal setting
- Focus on transitions between phases — the handoff between partners should feel natural
- Review feedback from Week 3 mocks and specifically drill your weak areas
- Rest well before the competition — fatigue visibly affects empathy and listening quality

7. ON THE DAY — CHECKLIST

- Arrived early — confirmed room, format, and any last-minute rule changes
- Read the problem carefully — underlined key facts and spotted hidden issues
- Divided roles with your partner before entering — who opens, who leads advising

- ❑ Carried a notepad and pen for discreet note-taking during the session
- ❑ Maintained calm, professional body language from the moment you entered the room
- ❑ Introduced yourself and your partner clearly at the start
- ❑ Gave the client time to speak before moving into questions
- ❑ Managed time — kept an eye on the clock without making it obvious
- ❑ Closed with a clear summary and confirmed next steps
- ❑ In the debrief: answered judges' questions calmly, acknowledged any gaps in your advice honestly

💡 Debrief Round Tips

- Judges often ask: 'What would you have done differently?' — be honest and self-aware
- If you missed a legal issue, acknowledge it and explain what you would advise on it now
- Do not be defensive — judges reward students who reflect critically on their own performance
- The debrief is not an interrogation; treat it as a professional conversation about the session

8. COMMON MISTAKES THAT COST MARKS

- ❑ **Jumping into legal advice before gathering enough facts**
Advising without fully understanding the problem is the most penalised mistake in CCCs
- ❑ **Using legal jargon the client would not understand**
Terms like 'res judicata', 'injunction', or 'tortious liability' need plain-language explanations
- ❑ **Ignoring the emotional dimension of the problem**
A client going through divorce or job loss needs acknowledgement — not just a legal briefing
- ❑ **One partner dominating the entire session**
Judges score team dynamics — unequal participation is penalised heavily
- ❑ **Overpromising outcomes to reassure the client**
Saying 'you will definitely get custody' is both inaccurate and unethical
- ❑ **Failing to identify the client's actual goal**
The client's legal rights and their desired outcome are often different — identify both
- ❑ **Running out of time before giving any advice**
Practise time management — the advice phase must not be cut short
- ❑ **Forgetting to close the session properly**
Ending abruptly without a summary or next steps leaves the client confused and judges unimpressed

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