

AI Praxis: Learn, Engage, Advocate

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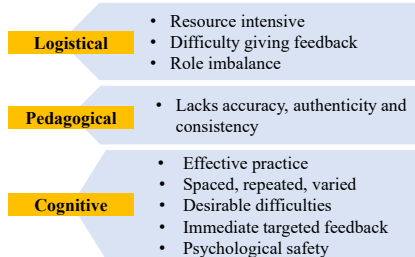


See how it works in under 5 minutes!

Teaching Trial Advocacy at NUS Law

Trial Advocacy is a semi-compulsory law course offered every Semester 2, enrolling about 135 students every year. Part of the Trial Advocacy module requires students to learn about questioning witnesses through the process of evidence-in-chief and cross-examination in a mock trial setting. Evidence-in-chief and cross examination requires legal practitioners to formulate questions in order to elicit oral evidence from witnesses on the stand at trial, and are core skills for any aspiring litigator.

Traditionally, evidence-in-chief and cross-examination skills are taught using pre-recorded video critiques and role-play. Traditional methods are limited for logistical, pedagogical, and cognitive reasons.



Introducing AI to Trial Advocacy

Our solution was to develop Gen-AI chatbots to simulate courtroom scenarios. In Semester 2 of AY2024-2025, 2 chatbots were developed: one for examination-in-chief, and one for cross-examination.

1. Pedagogical motivations

The objective was to provide every student with consistent, realistic practice opportunities without the logistical complexity of conducting breakout-group role-plays.

2. Chatbot development

The chatbots operate on the ScholAistic platform, enabling students to access it outside class for additional practice or assessment. These chatbots were designed using detailed prompts that specify case facts, witness personality, and behavioural parameters, ensuring it maintains character and responds naturally throughout interactions. Students can focus on developing questioning techniques, confident that the "witness" will respond reliably every time.

3. Implementation at lectures

The chatbots were introduced in the lecture at week 8 of the semester – meaning that students had already been introduced to skills relating to examination-in-chief and cross-examination. Students are briefed on the use of the chatbots, and given time to experiment with them during class time. They then undergo a discussion and peer review of their approach towards questioning the "witness", followed by a debrief by the course convenors.

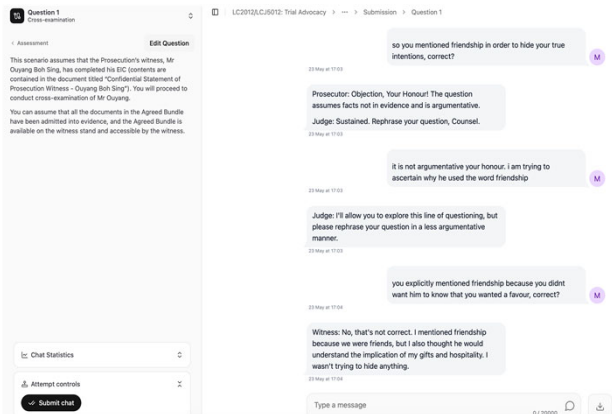


Image 1: The chatbot in operation. The Prosecutor is the lawyer acting for the State, which brings the criminal charges, while the Judge is the one hearing the case. Both the Prosecution and the Judge are played by the chatbot.

Results

The implementation led to several key improvements. Students could individually practice in a low-stakes setting, rich in curated 'learning moments'. The chatbot responds naturally – sometimes evasively, sometimes defensively – forcing them to think on their feet. For many, it was their first chance to try out their own questioning strategies.

Student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Over 85% rated each chatbot's usefulness at 4 out of 5 or higher, noting that the practice felt realistic and supported their learning objectives. Students observed that:

- "The witness was quite realistic and didn't divulge too much, which encouraged me to pursue more refined questioning."
- "It helped me practice developing question sequences because I could formulate my next question based on the chatbot's response."
- "The best aspect is that it knows all the hypothetical facts and can engage realistically. Without it, I would need to train someone to learn all the facts before practicing."

The perceived effectiveness of the chatbots for specific practice areas was also positive.

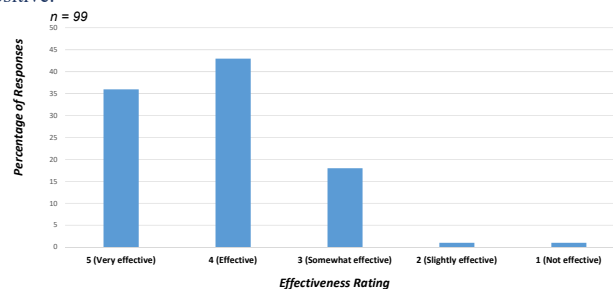


Image 2: Perceived Effectiveness of the Cross-Examination Bot for Practicing Response to Objections.

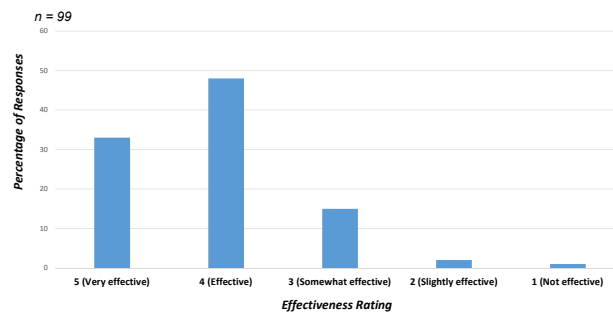


Image 3: Perceived Effectiveness of the Cross-Examination Bot for Practicing Leading Questions.

Challenges

While students engaged actively with the chatbots during class, very few continued to use it afterwards. This may be because working through a practice case on top of assessed coursework demands significant time and effort, and students naturally prioritise the case they will be graded on. This suggests two needs: first, to make it clearer that the chatbot sessions not only address case-specific challenges but also build transferable questioning skills; and second, to integrate chatbot use into the training with clear incentives, such as follow-up exercises or reflection activities.

Future Developments

The current text-based model can potentially be extended to include voice, which would make the experience more immersive. Students have also commented that they would like to obtain feedback for their practice attempts, and we are looking into including AI-generated feedback to increase the utility of the chatbots.

Our overall findings suggest the chatbooks hold significant potential within legal education, and can provide scalable, interactive practice opportunities that help students develop crucial advocacy and communication skills in controlled, realistic environments.