

TIPS WHEN REPRESENTING YOURSELF IN COURT

1. Use a lawyer if you need help. Court staff cannot give you any legal advice. You may want to meet with a lawyer to discuss your case even if the lawyer does not represent you in court. You may start your case on your own, but you may find out later that you need the help of an attorney.
2. Be respectful. Try to stay calm. Do not argue, interrupt, yell or swear at the judge, the witnesses or the other party or you may be held in contempt of court.
3. Come prepared and organized. You will need to share copies of evidence, so bring at least three copies of any evidence you plan to use (photographs, letters, deeds, tax forms, etc.). Write out the questions you plan to ask and go over them with your witnesses before the hearing.
4. Arrive early. Judges like to start on time. Remember that other cases may take longer than expected, so be prepared to wait. Do not bring young children unless the court has ordered them to be there and you have another adult to watch them outside the courtroom (bring snacks, toys, food/beverages, extra diapers, etc.) The court does not provide childcare or childcare supplies.
5. Address the judge as “Your Honor” and stand when you are talking to the judge. Speak clearly and slowly, and loud enough so everyone can hear you. Ask questions when you do not hear or understand something or are confused about what you should do. Do not interrupt the judge, the witness or the other party; wait your turn to talk. Take notes so you remember important information.
6. Once your hearing starts, tell the judge in a few brief sentences what your case is about and how you plan to prove the facts of your case. This is called an opening statement.
7. Know what to ask. You can ask court officials for information about the process but court employees cannot tell you what words to write or what to say in court.
8. Make a good impression. Dressing nicely tells the court that you respect the courtroom process and care about your case. Do not wear hats, sunglasses, or portable music devices in the courtroom. Do not wear revealing clothing, tube tops, shorts, muscle shirts, torn shirts or jeans, or clothes with offensive words or pictures.
9. Do not bring food or beverages into the courtroom. Water is provided. You cannot smoke, chew gum or chew tobacco in the courtroom. Do not bring cell phones, smart phones or other communication devices to the second floor of the courthouse – leave your cell/smart phone at home or in your car. Cameras, including cell phone cameras, cannot be used in the courtroom or on the second floor of the courthouse. Tape recorders are not allowed. Do not carry pocket knives, multi-tool kits, screwdrivers, lighters, nail files, scissors, razors, guns, ammunition, syringes, pepper spray canisters, etc. You will be searched and bags, folders, purses, cases, boxes, etc., will be x-rayed. Any prohibited items will be taken from you and held by the Sheriff’s Department until you leave.

