

Relax, make it easy on yourself:

It's easy to learn how to conduct yourself in a courtroom. It is even easier if your trial is before a judge with no jury.

Most judges try to make the language and court procedures easy to understand. There are several things you can do to make your case go more smoothly.

Remember preparation is key. Stay calm, state the facts, and present your argument.



This brochure, prepared by Acadiana Legal Service Corporation, is intended to inform and provide general information, not to advise. If you have a specific legal problem you should not try to apply or interpret the law without the aid of a licensed attorney who knows the facts because the facts may change the application of the

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SELF REPRESENTATION

How To Get Ready For Your Day In Court



Acadiana Legal Service Corporation

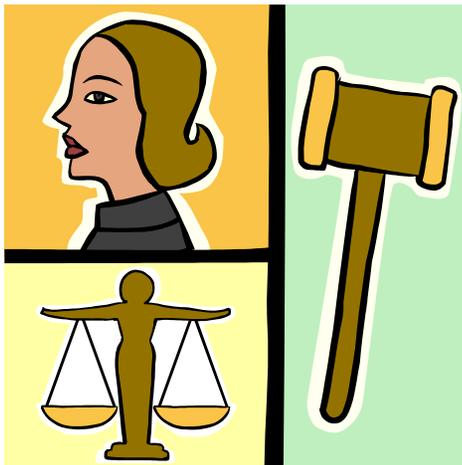


Before your court date:

Before your court date you may want to go to the same court and watch other cases to become familiar with the environment and see how a trial works

You may also find a book or search the internet for explanations of court procedure. This will help you make a **Trial Notebook** in which you summarize what you have learned and outline each major part of your trial.

In your **Trial Notebook** you can organize parts of the trial such as: who will testify; a list of questions to ask witnesses; and points you want to cover.



“and justice for all”

During your trial:

Keep the following rules of behavior in mind during your trial:

- Call the judge “your honor” not “Judge Smith”
- Don’t interrupt the other side in your case
- NEVER interrupt the judge.
- Don’t repeat what you’ve said before.

Following these rules will help ensure your trial goes as smoothly as possible.

Who goes first?

Most trials start with each side BRIEFLY saying what they expect to prove. The plaintiff (the one who filed suit) starts off by testifying about what happened and then supports it with other witnesses and evidence. When the plaintiff is finished, the defendant has a turn to present his testimony, witnesses and evidence

How to question a witness:

Start by showing how your witness has firsthand knowledge about the event in question. You must show that your witness observed, heard, smelled, touched or tasted whatever he is testifying about.

For example, show that your witness was on the spot and overheard the contractor you are suing talking about the details of your repair job.

During your trial:

Kinds of questions to avoid:

Your witness can’t testify to what he overheard someone else say. This is called “hearsay” and is not likely to be allowed.

You must ask questions which let your witness explain whatever it is he knows that supports your case, without you putting words in his mouth. That would be called “leading the witness”.

Cross Examining and Closing:

After each witness testifies (for either side), the other side gets to ask them questions to try to bring out favorable things, or to make the judge doubt the witness remembers correctly or is telling the truth.

When both sides have had their turn, each one usually gets to make a BRIEF closing statement explaining why he thinks he should win.

What if a lawyer shows up?

If the other side has a lawyer he will likely have an advantage because he will be much more familiar with the proceeding than you. Don’t let this scare you. Stay confident and assert yourself.

Without apologizing state your reason for not having a lawyer and note that you are relying on the judge to apply the right law.