

Tips for Representing Yourself

The court is a very traditional and polite place where a certain demeanor (way of acting) is expected. When you are representing yourself, you are trying to persuade a judge that you are right. You must act and speak in a way that helps you with your case.

Before You Begin

- I. Designate a notebook and folder to hold all of your court records and forms and to record all of the activities related to the case.
 - II. Keep all of your legal papers and case related documents in one place and organized.
 - III. Keep track of all conversations you have with others regarding your case.
 - IV. Verify that you are in the correct county.

Preparing Your Forms

- I. Make sure you have chosen the correct forms for your case.
 - II. Make sure that all of the required information is attached to the forms and documents.
 - III. Make photocopies for your own records.

Preparing For Court

- I. Choosing to represent oneself in court is a big decision. In many matters it may be best to get some legal advice ahead of time from an attorney so that you are sure you are doing the right thing, and are prepared for the court hearing. If unsure, or afraid of the court process, it may be best to seek the help of an attorney for the entire process.
 - II. Dress professionally, as you would for an important event. This means that your clothing should be neat and clean, and that you are well groomed.
 - III. Do not bring your children into court.
 - IV. Do not chew gum.
 - V. Look over the forms and materials you are going to present in court. Make sure they are filled in accurately and completely and that you have made the proper number of copies for the court.

- VI. If the opposing party, or his or her attorney, requests case related information from you, you must comply. This process is called Discovery, and it must be followed to go to court prepared. It is necessary for parties to honestly share particular financial and other material with one another.
- VII. All witnesses must be present. Verify that those people you wish to serve as your witnesses will be available at the time of your hearing.
- VIII. Be sure to bring with you the notebook in which you have recorded all the related events, as well as the folder with all the case-related documents. You must also bring paper and a pen to take notes. It also is very helpful to make notes before you come to court so you are and know exactly what you want to say. You may need to prepare other necessary documents after the hearing.

Going To Court

- I. **BE ON TIME!** The court has a very busy schedule. If you are late, your case might be postponed to another date or dismissed entirely. You also could have a judgment or unfavorable ruling made against you if you are not there to defend your case.
 - II. As soon as you arrive check in at the courts front counter for assignment to a courtroom. This will allow the clerks to advise the Judge that parties are present and prepared to proceed.
 - III. You must be respectful to everyone in court. This includes the judge court staff, the other party involved in your case, witnesses, and any other people in the area.
 - IV. You should address the judge as 'Your Honor.'
 - V. Do not use profanity, argue, or verbally react to answers given in court by the judge opposing party, or attorney. You will have your turn to speak.
 - VI. The judge cannot speak to you about your case except when your case is in court and when the other party is there. Court staff can help you with questions such as when your hearing is scheduled, or if you are in the right courtroom, but they cannot give you legal advice or recommendations about what you should do.
 - VII. Always be polite to judges and court staff, and be prepared to provide any information they may request from you.

General Tips

I. Always Remember The Four Ps: **Professionalism – Punctuality – Politeness – Preparation**

- II. Be sure to provide the court with changes to your address or phone number.
- III. Respond to court notices and correspondence as soon as possible.

Following these tips will go a long way toward helping YOU help yourself in court!