

Preparing for Court

In Indiana, the Courts are open to each and every person. Although there is no requirement that a person have a lawyer to go to Court, you are encouraged to talk with lawyer to make sure you know your rights and all your legal options. Courts have a lot of rules and procedures that have to be followed. If you do not follow the rules, you may not be able to give the judge all of the information you want to about your case. If you represent yourself, you must be prepared. When preparing for your Court hearing, keep in mind the following things.

Before your Court date

1. Read over all of your court documents. Be familiar with all the documents that you and the other side have submitted to the Court.
2. All parties in a court action must be given proper notice of all pending matters and hearings. Make sure you deliver a copy of each document or piece of information that is filed or delivered to the court to the other party. It is your responsibility to do this in most instances, not the courts. Failure to provide notice of a hearing or to give the documents to the other party could delay your case.
3. Review and research the statutes, rules or procedure, and case law that apply to your type of case. You need to be prepared “legally” for court. The Court will require you to follow the same rules and procedures that an attorney must follow.
4. Often it is helpful to observe another case similar to yours in the same court at some point before your hearing date so that you can see how the court conducts its proceedings.
5. Gather all the papers you want the judge to see. Make several copies to take to Court. The court may not be able to consider all of your information if it is not properly presented to the court as required by court rules. For information on how to properly admit documents and testimony into evidence at trial, see the [Indiana Rules of Evidence](#) and the [Indiana Rules of Trial Procedure](#).
6. Decide who you want to testify in Court on your behalf. Remember, in Court, you cannot tell the judge what someone else said, so if you need that statement introduced in Court, the person who made the statement needs to testify.
7. Write out your questions in advance. Go over your questions with your witnesses ahead of time. This will prepare both you and them for the actual hearing.
8. Create an outline or a brief summary of your side of the case. It may be helpful to prepare a brief list of your main points so you will be sure you state all that is necessary.

On the day of your Court date

1. Be on time. Better yet, arrive early for your court hearing. However, be prepared to wait in case earlier cases take longer than expected. Give yourself plenty of extra time to [get to the Courthouse](#). Most courts have metal detectors at their entrances, so it may take extra time to enter the Courtroom. Any bags or packages that are brought to court are subject to inspection. Weapons, beverages, food, and cellular phones are not permitted. When you come to court, bring copies of any papers you want the Judge to see. The court will keep any item or papers offered in evidence.
2. Dress appropriately. It is important for you to dress in a manner that shows respect for the Court and for the legal proceeding that is taking place. Plan to dress as though you were going to an important job interview or attending a special occasion.
3. Be respectful to everyone. Call the Judge "Your Honor." Always stand when the Judge or other judicial officer enters or leaves the bench. Address all comments to the Judge, except when you are questioning a witness.
4. Listen carefully and wait your turn to speak or respond. Do not interrupt others when they are talking. Everyone will get a chance to tell their side of the story. Be polite even if you do not agree. If you have an objection to testimony or documents presented to the court, your objections have to be made according to court rules and procedures.
5. An official record will be kept of the courtroom proceedings. All of your comments will be recorded. Be sure to speak clearly, slowly, and at a volume that can be heard and understood.
6. If other people are coming with you to court, only bring people who are needed for your case as a witness and maybe a few people to support you. Remember that the appearance and behavior of anyone who joins you in the courtroom will reflect directly on you and your case. Therefore, your friends and family members should dress and act appropriately to show respect for the Court and the important proceedings of which you are a part.
7. Do not bring children with you to court, unless you are specifically asked to do so by the Judge, an attorney or the Guardian ad Litem(GAL) or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), or if you receive a subpoena for the child, or unless the child is a witness in the case or will provide information to the judge at the hearing.
8. Be prepared to offer a brief summary of your side of the case. You need to tell the judge exactly what you want.
9. When asking your witnesses questions, it is helpful to start by asking them their name and address. If their job is important to your case, you may want to ask them what their occupation is, what their educational degrees are, and how long they have been doing their job. Then you can ask the specific questions that will bring out the information they have about your case.
10. You have the right to ask the other side and their witnesses questions during the hearing. You also have the right to object to testimony or documents/information presented to the court by the other side. However, you have to state the reason for any objection under the appropriate court rules or Rules of Evidence.

If you need any special arrangements with regard to disabilities or special needs, such as an interpreter, call ahead to the clerk's office or court office. By making arrangements ahead of time for any speech and hearing disabilities, vision problems, handicap accessibility, or language barriers, you can help to ensure that you will receive the best service possible from the Courts.

We truly want your experience with the Indiana Judicial System to be a pleasant one. The better informed and prepared you are, the more likely it is that you will have a positive experience and achieve the results you are hoping for in your case.