

Certificate of Service/Mailing:

Every time you file something you must attach as a last page, a certificate of mailing/service which says that you gave it to everyone

“On X Date, I served a copy of this document on”:

- Name of Opposing (Name & Address)
- Court Clerk
- Bench copy to Judge or Commissioner (Name)

This certification has to be attached to every document (pleading) you file. You cannot leave out anyone in your distribution list.

File your documents. Most documents for family court are due 2 weeks prior to any hearing. A response, generally 1 week prior to the hearing. Rules differ so **READ THE RULES** for your specific documents.

The law library is open weekdays, at the main courthouse, across from the snack bar. Here you can find forms, books on every legal subject, and the ability to research on computer or order books from other libraries. The librarians are helpful, but they are NOT attorneys and cannot give you legal advice.

What You Should Not Do:

Don't Send letters to the Judge or Commissioner, unless you have filed the document with the clerk, given a copy to the other side and you file a certificate of mailing/service so that the Judge or Commissioner knows that they can read the document; Don't Just show up without having filed documents and expecting the court to take them from you at the hearing:

Don't Interrupt the other side

Don't Interrupt the judge or commissioner

Don't forget bring pen and paper to court

Don't Forget to read the court rules

Don't be a no show - show up for your court date. Court is not school – you cannot just not go – the court can punish (sanction) you, issue orders in your absence or sometimes dismiss your case. The court rules can tell you how to get your court date moved if you need to do that; again, read the court rules.

Not every case requires a lawyer; not everyone can afford counsel. There is a volunteer lawyers program in Clark County that may help, if you qualify. They are located at 1409 Franklin St # 101, Vancouver, WA 98660; Phone: **(360) 695-5313**

Pro Se Guide

SOME SIMPLE TIPS

To help you when you have to go to court

There is a family court help center at the Courthouse. There is a fee (\$20.00) to use the court facilitator. If you need help with family court forms consider using their services. (Fee is reduced for those on state assistance)

This brochure does not constitute Legal Advice

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Court Rules

Dress Business Casual or Formal.

No cut offs, halters, hats; shorts – Court is a place of importance to you, your case and nothing about court should suggest to you that you should dress like you are going to the beach.

No food or drink (including coffee) in the court room.

Check TV Monitors – there are 2 - one for Superior Court; One for District Court, your case is listed by your last name.

Family Court is held at the main Court house – 1200 Franklin Street and at the Family Court Annex at 601 W. Evergreen, which is two blocks south of the courthouse at Franklin and Evergreen.

District Court is for Misdemeanors and Traffic, some civil including small claims.

Superior Court is Family Court, Civil and Felony Criminal

Rules on Documents

Read the local court Rules on filing papers **BEFORE** you file so you can follow the time-lines, page length and other requirements.

The Court Clerk at the Main Court House can also give you a free brochure on FAMILY Law procedures. Ask for one!

District Court Rules can be found here:

<https://www.clark.wa.gov/sites/all/files/districtcourt/Local%20Court%20Rule/DCLocalRules.pdf>

Superior Court Rules can be found here:

<https://www.clark.wa.gov/sites/all/files/superior-court/LOCAL%20RULES%202016.pdf>

[When you want to file something in court, you need a total of 4 Copies of your documents:](#)

The Original **ALWAYS** goes to the Court Clerk.

A copy goes to the other side (Opposing).

A copy goes to the judge or Commissioner (called a bench copy). You can give to Clerk to deliver to them, but mark it as the “Judge’s copy” when you drop it off or they will not get it. Put the Judge or Commissioner’s name on the top of the first page. Clip all of the documents together that you want to go to the judge or commissioner.

You will keep a copy to refer to in court.

You will need to tell the court in writing that you gave copies to everyone (See certificate of Service/Mailing)

You **cannot** communicate directly with the judge or commissioner unless you are in court or unless it is a copy you have given to everyone in the case in advance, with a copy to your judge/commissioner. This is called a **Bench Copy**. A judge cannot read what you give them as a Bench Copy unless you have given it to the person on the other side of the case in advance.

Court Day:

Figure out where you are going:

Family Court Annex – 601 W. Evergreen

Juvenile Building – 2nd floor 500 W. 11th St.

Main Court House – 1200 Franklin Street

Arrive Early, and go to your assigned courtroom

Check in with the Court Clerk with your name and if you know it, the number your case is assigned on the docket. The Clerk is the person who sits to the right of the judge/commissioner

Bring with you – Pen and Paper so that you can write down what the judge or commissioner decides and tells you. You or the other side will be responsible for drafting an order, which writes out the ruling of the court. Do not try to rely on your memory.

Only one side (person) talks at a time.

Talk to the judge not to the other side.

While emotions are high and it is human nature to want to interrupt – DON'T; write down notes as the other person speaks and when it is your turn you will get to say your response to the judge/commissioner.

The moving party (party who brought the action or motion) talks first. When they are done, the other side gets to talk; The moving party gets one more opportunity to speak (rebuttal).

The judge/commissioner then issues a ruling.

You may get another court date to come back and enter an order about what the judge has said.