

# Checklist – Preparing for Court

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Going to court can be a stressful experience, especially for self-represented litigants. Proper preparation is key to ensuring your case is presented clearly and effectively. This checklist is compiled from general legal aid resources and is intended to help you organize your efforts [1].

## Pre-Hearing Preparation (At Least One Week Prior)

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Category	Action Item	Details
Case Organization	Review all documents.	Read every document you have filed and every document you have been served. Be familiar with the claims, defenses, and any deadlines [1].
	Organize your evidence.	Gather all original documents and evidence you plan to use. Make at least two copies: one for the judge and one for the opposing party [1]. For government records, obtain certified copies [1].
	Prepare your argument outline.	Write down the key points you want to make, including dates, names, addresses, and dollar amounts. This outline will serve as a guide so you do not forget anything important [1].
Logistics	Arrange for special needs.	If you require an interpreter or have accessibility needs (e.g., wheelchair access), contact the court clerk at least one week in advance [1].
	Check on witnesses.	Confirm that any witnesses you plan to call are aware of the date, time, and location, and are prepared to testify.
	Know your desired outcome.	Clearly define what you want the court to do. This will help you evaluate any settlement offers or focus your presentation [1].

# On the Day of the Hearing

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Category	Action Item	Details
<b>Arrival</b>	<b>Be on time.</b>	Arrive at the courthouse at least <b>30 minutes early</b> to allow time for security screening and finding the correct courtroom [1].
	<b>Check in.</b>	When you find your courtroom, immediately check in with the clerk or court officer [1].
<b>Courtroom Conduct</b>	<b>Dress respectfully.</b>	Wear clean, neat, and conservative attire. Remove hats and silence all electronic devices before entering the courtroom [1].
	<b>Show respect for the Judge.</b>	Look at the Judge when speaking. Do not interrupt the Judge or speak when it is not your turn. If you do not understand a question, politely say, “I don’ t understand” [1].
	<b>Speak clearly.</b>	When asked to speak, state your name clearly. Speak loudly enough for everyone to hear. You must speak your answer out loud; do not simply nod or shake your head [1].
	<b>Handle objections.</b>	If a lawyer says “objection,” stop talking immediately and wait for the Judge to rule on the objection before continuing [1].

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## References

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[1] LawHelp.org. *Preparing for Court*. <https://www.lawhelp.org/resource/preparing-for-court>