SELF-HELP CENTER PUBLIC EDUCATION BOOKLET

What to Expect as a Self-Represented Plaintiff or Defendant in a Civil Trial (without a jury)

This booklet is intended to be an informative and practical resource for understanding the basic procedures of Civil Court. The statements in this booklet do not constitute legal advice and may not be cited as legal authority. This booklet does not take the place of the Minnesota Rules of Civil Procedure, the Minnesota Rules of General Practice, the Minnesota Rules of Evidence, or the individual practices of the judicial officers of this Court. All parties using this booklet are responsible for complying with all applicable rules of procedure. If there is any conflict between this booklet and the applicable court rules, the court rules govern.

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Introduction

This booklet is for parties representing themselves and preparing for trial in a civil case. **Trials are complicated, but this booklet is meant to make them more understandable.**

Most civil trials do not involve a jury. Instead, a judicial officer decides the case. A jury is used only if a jury is allowed for that type of case, a party requests a jury, and that party pays the jury fee. This booklet does **not** cover issues related to juries.

In addition to reading this booklet, you are encouraged to:

- **Watch a trial.** Most trials are open to the public.
- **Get advice from a lawyer.** You can find information about free legal advice clinics, hiring a lawyer, and other options for legal advice on our Find a Lawyer Help Topic (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Find-a-Lawyer.aspx).
- **Go to a law library** (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Law-Libraries.aspx).
- **Review the Civil Actions Help Topic** (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Civil-Actions.aspx).
- **Contact a Self-Help Center** (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Self-Help-Centers.aspx).

Communicating with Court Staff and Judicial Officers

It is important that you communicate with court staff and judicial officers appropriately. Court staff are ready to help you in whatever way they can. Their role is to provide you with information, not legal advice. For specific information about what court staff can and cannot do, visit the What Court Staff Can and Cannot Do for You Help Topic (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/What-Staff-Can-Do.aspx).

"Ex parte" is a Latin phrase meaning "on one side only; by or for one party." An ex parte communication is when a party to a case, or someone involved with a party, talks or writes to or otherwise communicates directly with the judicial officer about the issues in the case without the other parties' knowledge. Judicial officers cannot consider ex parte communications in deciding a case unless expressly allowed by law. This helps judicial officers decide cases fairly since their decisions are based only on the evidence and arguments presented to the court and the applicable law. The rule ensures that the court process is fair and that all parties have the same information as the judicial officer who will be deciding the case.

Please be respectful when communicating with court staff and judicial officers.

Phases of a Civil Case

While there is really no such thing as a "typical" case, many civil lawsuits will include the phases listed below. This booklet will cover only the Pretrial phase and the Trial phase in detail. Many other hearings may happen before the trial or instead of a trial. A trial is not the same as a motion hearing. This booklet does **not** explain what happens at other court hearings. Carefully read all orders and letters from the court to understand what is expected at each hearing. If you have questions, contact a Self-Help Center (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Self-Help-Centers.aspx).

- **Initial phase:** In this phase, the plaintiff serves paperwork ("Summons" and "Complaint") to start the court case, and the other party or parties, called the defendant, serves a response ("Answer"). The Complaint makes legal claims against the defendant and states the facts and reasons why the plaintiff should get what they are asking for in the case. The defendant may also bring claims of their own ("counterclaims") against the plaintiff.
- **Discovery phase:** During this phase, the parties exchange information and learn about the strengths and weaknesses of the other side's case. Discovery can be done formally or informally. It may include many different methods, such as email requests, interrogatories, requests for production of documents, depositions, and requests for admission.
- **Pretrial phase:** In this phase, the parties start getting ready for trial. They get their evidence and witnesses in order, and they may file motions with the court to resolve the case or narrow the issues for trial. This is also when the parties may try to settle the case. In some cases, the court may order that the parties try Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). These settlement efforts may happen at any point in the case.
- **Trial phase:** During this phase, the case is heard by the judicial officer (or a jury). This could last for a couple of hours or a couple of months, depending on the case's complexity. Parties present their evidence, including witnesses and exhibits, and the judicial officer decides the case and issues an order.

- **Post-trial phase:** During this phase, one or both of the parties might appeal the judgment from trial, or the winning party might try to collect the judgment.

Settlement

Many cases settle before the trial day or even on the day of trial. "Settle" means that the parties involved reach an agreement and the judicial officer approves the agreement. You may be asked many times, at different parts of the case, to try to settle your dispute. The judicial officer may require all parties to meet or to attend a form of ADR, such as mediation, to try to reach a settlement before the trial starts.

The judicial officer may also schedule a "Pretrial Conference" to talk with the parties about the trial issues and evidence and take steps to speed up the actual trial. You should attend the Pretrial Conference prepared to offer a solution to settle the case and to consider settlement offers from the other side. Each time you have a hearing, including at the trial, you can expect the judicial officer to ask you and the other party what you have done to try to settle the case.

As part of the pretrial work, you and the other side might create a list of facts you agree on. This is referred to as "Stipulated Facts." Agreeing that certain things are true will shorten the time it takes to try the case and can help limit the number of witnesses needed.

A settlement allows the parties to find creative solutions that fit their needs and allows parties to have a "known" result in their case. Going to trial means the judicial officer or jury decides the outcome of the case instead of the parties. If you and the other party reach an agreement before the trial, call your judicial officer's clerk right away.

- Review the Settle Out of Court Help Topic (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Settle-Out-of-Court.aspx) or the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Help Topic (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/AlternativeDisputeResolution.aspx) for more information.

Role of the Judicial Officer (Judge or Referee)

The judicial officer's role is to oversee the trial, and make sure that both sides have an opportunity to be heard as the rules of procedure and evidence allow. In a civil trial without a jury, the judicial officer also decides if the plaintiff has proven their case, and what the award or

outcome will be. The judicial officer and their staff can give you general guidance, but if you are representing yourself, you need to decide what topics to cover, what evidence is important, and what questions to ask of witnesses.

The judicial officer must be neutral. In other words, the judicial officer must be fair to both sides. They may ask a question of a witness to clarify something, but they generally will not take over and ask all questions they think are important. It is your case, and you decide what you want the judicial officer to hear and see.

Rules of Evidence and Rules of Civil Procedure

The judicial officer will conduct the trial using the MN Rules of Civil Procedure (revisor.mn.gov/court_rules/cp/), the MN Rules of Evidence (revisor.mn.gov/court_rules/rule/ev-toh/), and the MN General Rules of Practice (revisor.mn.gov/court_rules/gp). Law libraries (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Law-Libraries.aspx) also have books that explain more about the rules and include parts of court cases that have interpreted the rules (case law).

No one can predict exactly which rules will come into play, but some of the rules that most frequently apply are discussed below. The judicial officer is required to follow these rules, and so are you and all other trial participants.

The basic idea of the MN Rules of Evidence is to make sure that the evidence is trustworthy. It would be unfair to everyone if the judicial officer relied on questionable evidence when deciding the case. In most trials, testimony from witnesses is used as evidence. The witness takes an oath and promises to tell the truth, and because the witness is present, they can be asked questions ("cross-examined") by the other side. The "hearsay" rule of evidence requires that the person who made a statement be present at the trial to testify. Generally, you can't testify about what someone else told you. There are important exceptions to this rule spelled out in the MN Rules of Evidence (see Article 8 – Hearsay).

Rule 901 of the MN Rules of Evidence addresses what is needed for a document, a photograph, telephone and computer record, or a physical object to be reliable and allowed as evidence. Usually, for evidence of this type to be admitted (meaning allowed to be considered in court), you need a witness to explain how the document or information was created and to

testify that the information really is what it appears to be (that it is authentic). You must ask the witness questions to "lay a foundation." This means that your questions should allow the witness to cover what the item is, who created it, and when, where, and why it was created. Some documents can be admitted into evidence without a witness, such as a certified copy of a public record (see Rule 902 of the MN Rules of Evidence). If the judicial officer admits the item into evidence, it becomes part of the trial record.

Another important concept in the MN Rules of Evidence is relevancy (see Article 4 – Relevancy and Its Limits). If evidence is not relevant to the case, the judicial officer will generally not allow it. Relevant evidence helps the judicial officer decide if your story is true. If evidence is not relevant to the case, it is generally not allowed. If your witness is testifying and you hear something like, "Objection your honor, that testimony is irrelevant," you need to be able to explain why what the witness is saying is important in helping the judicial officer decide the case. If the judicial officer decides that the questions being asked will help them make a decision, they will say something like, "Objection overruled. Witness, you may continue answering the question." If the judicial officer "sustains" the objection, the witness cannot answer the question.

Even relevant evidence may be kept out in some situations. A judicial officer may not allow evidence if it is repetitive and slowing down the trial. For example, a judicial officer may allow 1 or 2 photos showing the condition of a roof, but not allow 20 photos showing basically the same thing.

Witnesses

You are responsible for making sure your witnesses appear for the trial. Plan ahead. The judicial officer will not reschedule the trial to let you arrange for witnesses you could have contacted earlier. You should contact your witnesses as soon as the court schedules your trial date.

Witnesses must be available the day of the trial. Some witnesses may not be allowed to testify. They must be able to offer admissible evidence, which means that a witness must have first-hand knowledge of what they are going to testify about. For example:

1. Your witness, Mary, testifies that the blue truck ran a red light.

2. An objection is made because of lack of personal knowledge.
3. You then ask Mary how she knows the blue truck ran the red light.
    - If Mary says something like, "My friend was there and told me about it," Mary's statement will not be allowed into evidence because she does not have first-hand knowledge.
    - If Mary saw the truck run the light, she has firsthand knowledge.

Even if the testimony is admissible, if multiple witnesses are repeating the same information, the judicial officer may not allow them all to testify due to time concerns.

Sometimes a party will call an "expert witness" to testify in the case. An expert is someone with scientific, technical, or other special knowledge about a certain topic (for example, a roofing contractor, medical doctor, engineer, chemist, etc.). Experts often testify to give their professional opinion about a fact of the case, such as the speed of impact of a car crash or the side effects of using a prescription drug. Rule 702 of the MN Rules of Evidence requires that reliability of the expert's testimony be established. To do that, you must "lay the foundation" of the expert's qualifications on the topic by asking questions about their education and professional experience. As with all evidence, the expert's testimony is also subject to the hearsay rule and other MN Rules of Evidence.

Subpoenas and Witness Fees

The only way to try to guarantee that a witness will come to court to testify or bring documents to court is to use a subpoena. A subpoena is a court order telling someone to appear in court and/or produce documents or records. If you need to subpoena a witness, review Rule 45 of the MN Rules of Civil Procedure. If your witness agrees to come to court, you do not need a subpoena. If you need to subpoena a witness, do so as soon as possible.

To get a subpoena, you need to request it from court administration in the county where your case is filed and pay a small fee for each subpoena). Court administration will prepare the subpoena. Next, you will need to arrange for someone else (not you) who is 18 years or older to serve the subpoena on the witness, along with the witness fee (you will need to pay the witness fee).

As explained on the subpoena form, if you subpoena a witness, you will need to pay that

witness $20 per day, plus mileage, if applicable. The fee for mileage is set by law and is stated in Minn. Stat. § 357.22 (revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/357.22). Some witnesses served with a subpoena may also be entitled to reasonable compensation for their time, in addition to mileage and the $20 witness fee. Review the Subpoenas Help Topic (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Subpoenas.aspx) and Rule 45 of the MN Rules of Civil Procedure (revisor.mn.gov/court_rules/cp/id/45/) for more information about subpoenas.

If you have an order waiving the court filing fees (called a "Fee Waiver" or "In Forma Pauperis"), and you cannot afford to pay the witness fees, you can ask the court to pay the witness fees for you. To do this, fill out a Supplemental Affidavit for Proceeding In Forma Pauperis and file it with court administration. A judicial officer will decide who pays the witness fees - you or the court. Review the Fee Waiver Help Topic (mncourts.gov/Help-Topics/Fee-Waiver-IFP.aspx) for more information.

Witness fees and mileage apply only to witnesses who are subpoenaed. To put it simply:

- SUBPOENA: You DO have to pay witness fees and mileage.
- NO SUBPOENA: You DO NOT have to pay witness fees and mileage.

Preparing Evidence

Evidence includes witness testimony, your testimony, and documents, pictures, or other objects. Documents, pictures and other objects are called "exhibits." Generally, evidence, including exhibits, must be presented the day of trial. Evidence cannot be submitted after the trial (except by order of the judicial officer in some unusual situations). Judicial officers often send the parties a "Scheduling Order" requiring them to exchange "Exhibit Lists" and "Witness Lists" by a certain date. The judicial officer may also require the parties to show each other their exhibits before the day of trial. This allows both sides to better prepare for trial.

The judicial officer cannot investigate or gather evidence. It is your responsibility to have all the evidence available and present it during trial.

You will generally not be allowed to use your phone to present evidence (for example, showing the judicial officer text messages or pictures on your phone). You need to be prepared ahead of time to present any evidence in the proper format.

Review the Exhibits Help Topic (www.mncourts.gov/MNDES) for more information about how to present your evidence, including information about MNDES, the MN Digital Exhibit System used in the MN Judicial Branch.

Marking Exhibits

At the trial, each party's exhibits will need to be "marked." Exhibits are marked by placing a sticker on the document or object with consecutive numbers (for example, "Exhibit 1," "Exhibit 2," "Exhibit 3," etc.). Sometimes, exhibits are marked before the trial day. Some judicial officers prefer that the court clerk or court reporter mark the exhibit when it is offered at trial. Sometimes the judicial officer or their clerk will assign exhibit numbers for each party to use. Check the Scheduling Order or connect with the clerk to see if the judicial officer has a preference.

Exhibit and Witness Lists

Even if the judicial officer does not order them to be exchanged before the trial, it is a good idea to create Exhibit and Witness Lists. The Exhibit List is a listing of all the documents and objects you plan to offer into evidence at the trial. A Witness List is a listing of all the witnesses you plan to have testify at the trial. You can find Exhibit and Witness List forms at www.mncourts.gov/forms in the Civil category.

Creating a list will help you organize your case before the trial, and during the trial you can check the list to help avoid forgetting anything. As mentioned above, the judicial officer may also require you to give an Exhibit and/or Witness List to the other side before the trial.

Trials will generally be held in-person. Keep in mind that if your trial is held remotely, different requirements for exhibits may apply. On the day of an in-person trial (or before, if ordered to do so earlier), you must have the original document or object, and at least 3 copies of any documents. One copy is for the judicial officer, one copy is for you, and one copy is for the other party (you will need more copies if there are additional parties). During the trial, the witness will be looking at the original document, and the original will be offered into evidence, but you need to have copies available for all parties to look at while the witness is testifying. If the judicial officer admits (accepts) the document into evidence, it becomes part of the trial record.

Trial Notebook

Attorneys often create what is called a "trial notebook," and you can too. This helps you organize all the parts of your case (Opening Statement, Witness List, Exhibit List, copies of exhibits, questions you plan to ask each witness, Final Argument, etc.). Before creating your trial notebook, think about what you need to prove. A two-column chart can be helpful. On the left, list each fact that supports your case. On the right, list the evidence that will prove each fact. Use the chart as you decide what evidence you will need, and as you create a list of questions for each witness. The trial notebook is just for your use. You do not give a copy to the judicial officer or to the other parties.

Trials are scheduled for a set period of time. If the Scheduling Order does not tell you the length of the trial, contact court administration to see how much time is scheduled for the trial. Knowing how long you have for the trial will help you prepare. You need to be organized and figure out how long you want to spend with each witness and topic.

The Trial

At the trial, things will happen in this order:

- Opening statements
- Plaintiff's case-in-chief (witnesses and exhibits)
- Defendant's case-in-chief (witnesses and exhibits)
- Final arguments (also called closing statements)

Be on time for your trial and make sure you know in advance if your trial is in-person or remote. If it is in-person, allow yourself extra time in case you run into traffic or weather issues, and allow time to find parking and go through security when you enter the courthouse. If your trial is virtual, make sure you test your technology ahead of time and allow plenty of time to log in. If you are not in the courtroom (in-person or virtual courtroom) when the clerk calls your case, you may lose the case by "default" (by not appearing). If you have an emergency or are delayed, call court administration, and let them know. Even if you call, the court may hold the hearing without you, and you could lose by default.

Be prepared that your trial may take longer than expected. If your trial is in-person, it is a good idea to take a bus or park in a ramp instead of at a meter to avoid worrying about an

expired meter. Arrange for childcare and let your employer know that you might be delayed, if needed. There is a possibility that unanticipated or emergency situations will come up that your judicial officer will need to handle. This means your trial may be delayed or interrupted.

Courtroom Behavior

You do not have to buy new clothing for court but remember that it is a formal place, and you want to be conservative and respectful in dress and behavior. Do not bring children unless the judicial officer has told you to bring your children to the trial.

Certain behaviors are not allowed in a courtroom (whether it is in-person or virtual) because they are noisy, distracting, or disrespectful. You should not chew gum, eat, sleep, listen to earphones, use a cell phone (except in silent mode in some cases), carry a weapon, or use a camera, including cell phone cameras (unless otherwise allowed). Some courts do not allow cell phones in the courtroom, even if they are turned off.

During the trial, you should listen carefully to the judicial officer and the other party. Ask the judicial officer for permission to speak. You should talk directly to the judicial officer, not to the other party. When you talk to the judicial officer, start by saying, "Your Honor." Speak loudly and clearly and remember that only one person can speak at a time. A court reporter is taking down everything said during the trial, and they can only record one speaker at a time. Avoid arguing with or interrupting another person and try to control your emotions.

Opening Statement

Opening statements are the first part of a trial. For your opening statement, briefly summarize what the case is about, what outcome you will ask for, and what evidence you will present. The evidence consists of witness testimony and exhibits the judicial officer receives in evidence.

The opening statement is not your testimony. Testimony is given later, under oath. The opening statement is not a time for making your arguments. That comes later in the closing argument (also called final argument). In some cases, the judicial officer may not allow the parties to make opening statements, especially if the case is simple and the time available for the trial is short.

Plaintiff's and Defendant's Case-in-Chief

After the opening statements, the plaintiff presents their evidence. This is called the plaintiff's case-in-chief. When the plaintiff is done with all their witnesses and evidence, it is then the defendant's turn to present their case-in-chief.

Your case-in-chief may consist only of your testimony under oath, or it may include the testimony of other witnesses. If you have other witnesses, tell the judicial officer who will testify first, second, third, and so on. The judicial officer may also ask you to summarize what each witness will say before the witness is called. Be prepared to explain in a few sentences how the testimony of each witness is important to your case.

Direct Examination

When you call a witness to testify, you must ask them questions. This is called "direct examination." It is helpful to have a list of questions to refer to as you do your direct examination of each of your witnesses. You can tell your witnesses before the trial what you plan to ask so your witnesses are prepared.

During direct examination, you should ask only one question at a time. It is difficult for the witness to respond to complex or compound questions (multiple questions asked at the same time). Also, keep in mind that you cannot testify while asking your witness questions; you can only testify if/when you are a witness on the stand and placed under oath. Often, the whole story does not come out until several witnesses have testified. The judicial officer may make notes to remember the testimony of each witness, and in your final argument, you can explain how all the evidence fits together.

Sometimes a witness is hostile or not answering as you expected. Do not argue with a witness. Just ask questions.

Cross-Examination

When you are finished asking questions (direct examination) of your witness, tell the judicial officer. The other party (or their lawyer if they have one) will then ask questions of the witness. This is called "cross-examination." The questions asked during cross-examination must be related to the testimony the witness just gave in direct examination. Cross-examination is used to clarify the witness' testimony and can also be used to undermine or discredit the

testimony. For example, if a witness testified that the roof leaked 3 days after the contractor put on a new roof, you might ask in cross-examination if it is true that a storm blew a large tree over and broke a hole in the roof 3 days after the contractor put in the new roof.

Cross-examining a witness can be difficult. Non-lawyers often have trouble asking questions of the witness instead of making their own statements or arguments. Like in direct examination, you cannot testify when you are cross-examining a witness. You can only ask questions of the witness. The judicial officer may give you another chance to get it right or may say something like "you can testify when you are on the stand as a witness" and end the cross-examination.

Redirect Examination (also called Rebuttal)

After the other party cross-examines your witness, you may ask the witness more questions in what is called "redirect examination," or "rebuttal," but those questions must be related to something discussed on cross-examination. Do not feel that you must ask questions on redirect examination. It is fine to say that you have no further questions.

Testifying as a Witness in Your Own Case

If you testify as a witness in your case, you will take an oath and usually sit in the witness box (if your trial is in-person). After you are sworn in, the judicial officer will let you testify in a narrative fashion (telling the facts of the case as a story). When you are finished with your testimony, the other party (or their lawyer if they have one) will be able to ask you questions on cross-examination. The judicial officer may also ask you questions.

Introducing Evidence

In addition to witness testimony, you may have documents or objects you want to use as evidence. Paperwork you may have filed with the court before the trial is not evidence. If you want the court to use something as evidence, list it as an exhibit in your Exhibit List and offer it as evidence at the trial.

To offer an exhibit as evidence, you usually need a witness who can tell the court about the exhibit. For example, if you have photos, the person who took the photos should testify about them, if possible, to explain when and where the photos were taken. You can be the witness if you have enough knowledge about the exhibit.

Objections

Objections are challenges. Usually, objections are made because a party believes the evidence is not admissible according to the MN Rules of Evidence. You (and the other party) can object to questions, witness testimony, or exhibits that you believe do not comply with the rules of evidence and procedure. If you want to object, you should say, "Objection," very clearly to the judicial officer. The judicial officer will ask you to explain why you object, and then the other party will get to respond. If either side objects to something, all questioning should stop immediately (if a witness is testifying, the witness should stop talking immediately). You must have a valid reason to object, according to the MN Rules of Evidence. "The person is lying" is not a valid objection.

- If the judicial officer **sustains** the objection, the witness cannot talk about whatever was objected to.
- If the judicial officer **overrules** the objection, the witness can go ahead and talk about whatever was objected to.
- If you don't understand the judicial officer's ruling on an objection, ask them to explain.

If you have a key piece of evidence and the other side objects to it, the judicial officer will decide if that evidence is admissible and should become part of the trial record. If the judicial officer rules against you, you might be able to correct the problem. For example, if the objection was based on "lack of foundation" for a document, you might be able to ask the witness questions to explain what the document is and show that it is authentic so that you can get the document admitted into evidence. Do not expect the judicial officer to tell you what to do or say to correct the problem. It is your job to make the legal arguments, and the judicial officer's job is to make a ruling (decision). You should study the MN Rules of Evidence before the trial and get advice from a lawyer if you are not sure how to get key evidence into the record.

Final Argument (also called Closing Statement or Closing Argument)

After all the evidence is given, you and the other party will be allowed to make final arguments. During your final argument, explain what you are asking the court to do, and how

the evidence presented supports your requests. If you want a money judgment, for example, tell the judicial officer how much money you want, and summarize the evidence to show why you should get that amount. A common mistake is to prove that you were harmed (damaged), but then not prove why the amount of money you want makes sense. For example, if your home repair was done improperly, you need evidence (such as contractor bids or testimony) to show what it will cost to correct the mistake and get the result you were promised. Showing that the work was done improperly is not enough. You must prove the amount of damages.

You may comment on any evidence that was presented at the trial (your evidence and the other party's evidence) and tell the judicial officer what you think that evidence means. You are not allowed to tell the judicial officer any new facts about the case during final argument, as the opportunity to present evidence is over by this point.

The plaintiff has the burden of convincing the court (called the "burden of proof") that their requests should be granted. The plaintiff will speak first, and then the defendant will speak. The judicial officer may put a time limit on the final arguments.

Burden of Proof

As mentioned above, the party who started the lawsuit has the burden of proof. If the defendant counter-sued, the defendant has the burden of proof for their requests. **If you have the burden of proof, it is your responsibility to provide evidence that shows the court that you should win the case.** If the evidence weighs in favor of the other party, or if the balance is equal, you have not met your burden of proof, and the court will not give you what you asked for.

Decision

The judicial officer decides the outcome of a case when there is no jury. They will listen to all the testimony presented during the trial and review all the exhibits. They will decide what facts were proven, and whether you are entitled to the relief you seek.

Sometimes parties ask permission to file a "legal brief" after the trial is over, or a judicial officer may ask for legal briefs. A legal brief is a written paper in which a party (or their lawyer if they have one) cites the law and tries to convince the judicial officer that the law supports the outcome that party wants. Briefs usually refer to statutes and case law. They cannot contain

new evidence. A law librarian may be able to show you sample legal briefs and explain the basics of legal research. If legal briefs are allowed or requested by the judicial officer, they will be due by a set date.

After the trial is over, and after legal briefs (if any) are submitted, the judicial officer has 90 days to make a written decision. When you receive the written decision, it is very important that you read it thoroughly. There could be time-sensitive information and it is important to understand what your obligations are, if any, in the written decision.