

INSTRUCTIONS

Answer or Answer and Counterclaim

The following court forms will be used to respond to a lawsuit:

- ✓ *Answer or Answer and Counterclaim (court form CIV302)*
- ✓ *Affidavit of Service (court form SOP105)*

Important Notices and Resources:

The Court provides forms and instructions as a general guide to the court process. The instructions explain the steps and address common questions, but are not a comprehensive guide to the law. This form may not address all of your needs or concerns.

You are responsible for your own case. Court employees can provide general information on court rules, procedures and practices but are prohibited from giving legal advice.

If you do not understand the forms and instructions, you may contact the MN Courts Self Help Center at www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp or by calling 651-259-3888.

If you are not sure if you should file court papers or if you have questions not addressed in the instructions, you should talk to a lawyer. For lawyer referral information see www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp/?page=252. For information about courthouse projects providing brief legal advice see www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp/?page=251.

Helpful materials may be found at your public county law library. For a directory, see <http://www.lawlibrary.state.mn.us/cllppubdir.rtf>. For more information, contact your court administrator or call the Minnesota State Law Library at 651-296-2775.

Who Should Use This Form?

This *Answer* form is used to respond to the initial papers (*Summons and Complaint*) that started a civil lawsuit. In a civil lawsuit, the party suing is called the Plaintiff and the party being sued is called the Defendant.

Do **not** use this *Answer* form to respond to a lawsuit in Conciliation Court, or for family, juvenile, criminal, probate or guardianship cases. The court has specific answer forms for some cases, and you should use a specific form if one is available. Forms are available at www.mncourts.gov/forms.

Some of the specific answer forms are:

- *Answer to Eviction Complaint*
- *Response to a Conciliation Court Claim*
- *Answer to Divorce Petition*

The most common use for this *Answer* is to respond to a lawsuit in District Court that says you owe money for services or purchases, or have breached a contract or done something else to injure the party suing you. The suit may ask for a money judgment or an order requiring some action (called “specific performance”). All civil cases are complicated and you are strongly encouraged to get help from a lawyer. This *Answer* form is provided with the idea that you will first get legal advice on what to say in the Answer. It is not a “do-it-yourself” form.

Note: Corporations and LLCs must be represented by an attorney in District Court. An officer or shareholder cannot sign the *Answer* or appear in Court.

If you have questions about whether a specific Answer form is available, call the Minnesota Courts Self Help Center at 651-259-3888. For more information about what to expect in a civil case, you are strongly encouraged to read “Civil Actions in District Court” at: www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp and a booklet available there entitled “What to Expect as a Self-Represented Plaintiff or Defendant...Civil Trial (without a jury).”

What Should I Do When I Receive a *Summons and Complaint*?

When you are served with a *Summons and Complaint*, a lawsuit against you has started even if nothing has been filed with the Court. A *Summons and Complaint* may be served upon you personally, left at your residence with someone who resides with you who is of “suitable age and discretion”, or served by mail if you sign and return a document called “*Acknowledgment of Service*.”

If you want to contest the lawsuit, you must prepare a written *Answer* and arrange for someone (not you) to serve it on the party suing you. If an attorney signed the *Complaint* on behalf of the party suing you, your *Answer* will be served on the attorney.

The *Summons* you received states your deadline for responding. In most civil cases you have 20 days from the date you were served with the *Summons and Complaint*. If you do not serve an *Answer* on the Plaintiff within this time period, the Plaintiff can ask the court for a default judgment against you without further notice to you.

The attached form may be used to answer a *Complaint*. The information which follows is not legal advice. Each case is unique and **you are strongly advised to contact a lawyer for legal advice as soon as possible**. Court employees are neutral and are not allowed to give legal advice to either party. The *Answer* form includes legal terms that are not explained or defined in detail in these instructions. If you need help understanding the terms, deciding what to write on the form, or deciding if you should contest the lawsuit, please talk with a lawyer or do your own research at a law library. (See page 1 for links to lawyer referral and libraries.)

Step 1
Fill out the *Answer or Answer and Counterclaim* form

Read each paragraph of the *Complaint*. For each paragraph of the *Complaint*, you must admit, deny, or state that you do not have enough information to answer the statements. You will make these admissions and denials on the *Answer*.

1. If all statements in a paragraph of the *Complaint* are false, you will “deny” that paragraph by writing the number of the paragraph in your *Answer* at #1.
2. If all the statements in a paragraph are true, you will “admit” that paragraph by writing the paragraph number in your *Answer* at #2.
3. If the paragraph is partly true and partly untrue, list the paragraph number in your *Answer* at #3. Then write down at #3 the statements in the *Complaint* paragraph that you agree are true.
4. There may be statements you cannot admit or deny, because you do not have enough information to know if the statement is true or false. List these statements or paragraph numbers in your *Answer* at #4.

Remember: you must admit, deny, or address each paragraph in the *Complaint*.

5. Affirmative Defenses

Court Rules direct the Defendant (you) to raise all Affirmative Defenses in the *Answer*. You may have a defense, but not an Affirmative Defense. Your defense may simply be that the statements

in the *Complaint* are false, and you deny them. An Affirmative Defense is a new set of facts that would defeat the other party's claims even if the facts in the *Complaint* are true.

Example: The Complaint says you owe Computer House \$4,000. You went through bankruptcy and the \$4,000 debt was discharged in the bankruptcy. Although you admit that you bought a computer and did not pay the \$4,000, you can check "Discharge in bankruptcy" and explain that you are no longer responsible for the debt because it was discharged in Bankruptcy Case No. 12311 in March 2010.

In this example, you admit that the facts in the *Complaint* are true, but you have an Affirmative Defense (Discharge in Bankruptcy).

Some Affirmative Defenses can be raised later in an *Amended Answer*, but you should plan to raise all defenses now. Read through the Affirmative Defenses listed in the *Answer* at #5. If any apply to your case, check the box and then provide the facts to support the defense in the space provided. If you need more space, attach a separate sheet of paper.

If you think you have any sort of defense to the *Complaint*, you should get advice from a lawyer to determine whether it is an Affirmative Defense.

6. Counterclaims

Paragraph 6 of the *Answer* asks about counterclaims. If you do not have a Counterclaim, check the box Defendant has no Counterclaims.

The Plaintiff is suing you based on a set of facts included in the *Complaint*. If you think that the Plaintiff should be paying you instead of suing you, you may have a Counterclaim. In the Counterclaim, you must state facts that, if proven to be true, will support your request for a judgment against the Plaintiff. You must also state what "relief" or outcome you want the judge to order.



If you include a Counterclaim and the court determines that your claim was frivolous or not supported by law, you could be ordered to pay fines, costs or attorney fees for the other party. On the other hand, failing to include a Counterclaim could prevent you from suing later. If you have a counterclaim ***arising out of the same facts that are in the Complaint***, you generally must state your Counterclaim in your Answer. You should talk to a lawyer for help deciding if you have a counterclaim.

7. Adding Parties to the Lawsuit

Rule 14 of the Minnesota Rules of Civil Procedure addresses *when* it is proper to add new parties to the lawsuit and *how* to do it. New parties are called "Third Party Defendant" or "Third Party Plaintiff". Adding parties is complicated. Court staff cannot answer questions on this topic. Ask

a lawyer for help if you think another person or entity should be a party to the lawsuit. As the Defendant, you can add defendants only if the new defendant is liable to you (instead of to the Plaintiff.)

8. Relief

The paragraph that starts with “WHEREFORE” is called the “prayer for relief.” This is where you write what you want the judge to order. Standard relief language is included on the form. Select the relief you are requesting by checking the box.

Step 2 **Sign the *Answer* or *Answer and Counterclaim* form**

After you complete the *Answer* form, you must read the acknowledgment and then sign and date it. If an attorney is representing you, the attorney will sign instead.

Step 3 **Make Copies of the Form**

Make one copy of the dated and signed *Answer* for yourself and one copy for each Plaintiff and any Defendant other than you.

Step 4 **Have copies of the *Answer* served on the other party**

A copy of your *Answer* must be served on each Plaintiff’s attorney. The attorney signed the Complaint served on you, and included his/her address. If the Plaintiff does not have an attorney, the plaintiff will have signed the Complaint and your *Answer* must be served on the Plaintiff. Do not serve the Original *Answer* (the paper you actually signed) because the original must be filed with the court.

Service of your forms must be completed in the time stated in your *Summons and Complaint*. The time period starts the day after you were served. For example, if you were served with a *Summons* on Monday that says you have 20 days to respond, start counting your 20 days on Tuesday (Day 1). The 20th day is the last day your *Answer* can be served on time. Service is complete upon hand delivering or mailing a copy of your *Answer* to the Plaintiff’s attorney (or the Plaintiff, if there is no attorney).

You are responsible for arranging to have the *Answer* served but you must get someone else to do the service. Anyone over the age of 18 who is not involved in the lawsuit can serve the papers by mail or by personal service (hand delivered). You can ask a friend to serve the papers, or hire the Sheriff or a private process server.

Personal Service

- If an attorney signed the *Complaint*, the papers can be hand delivered to the attorney or given to an employee of the attorney who is authorized to accept service of process for the attorney.
- If the Plaintiff (other party) is representing him or herself, the *Answer* can be hand delivered to the Plaintiff at any location, or left at the Plaintiff's home with an adult or other person of "suitable age and discretion" who lives there with the Plaintiff. For additional information about serving papers, see Minnesota Rules of Civil Procedure, Rule 4 Service.

Service by Mail

- A copy of your *Answer* is placed in an envelope addressed to the Plaintiff's attorney (or the Plaintiff, if there is no attorney) with your return address on the envelope and is then sent by First-Class Mail. The server must drop the letter in the mailbox or give it to the postal worker. The address for the Plaintiff's attorney or Plaintiff is on the *Complaint*, as part of Plaintiff's signature block.

Step 5

Complete the *Affidavit of Service* Form

After the *Answer* is hand delivered or mailed, the person who did the service must fill out an *Affidavit of Service* form and sign in front of a notary. You must have an *Affidavit of Service* for each party served. The *Affidavit of Service* does not get sent to the other parties.

Step 6

Filing your *Answer* and *Affidavit of Service* with the Court

Keep the original *Answer* and the *Affidavit of Service* with your important documents. If you receive a "Notice of Judicial Assignment" or other letter from the court, it means that the Plaintiff has filed the *Summons and Complaint* and that you must file your original *Answer* and *Affidavit of Service* with the court.

At the time you file your *Answer* and *Affidavit of Service* you are required to pay a filing fee. This fee varies by county. If you cannot afford the filing fee, you may request a fee waiver. Forms and instructions for the Fee Waiver are available at: www.mncourts.gov/forms and from Court Administration. Court Administration cannot accept your *Answer* for filing unless you pay the fee or get a fee waiver order signed by a judge.

Step 7 Settlement or Trial

After you serve your *Answer*, the Plaintiff may contact you to discuss settling the case without a trial. Most cases settle. If you do not hear from the Plaintiff, you can call the Plaintiff's attorney or the Plaintiff and suggest settling the case. If Plaintiff has an attorney, the attorney signed the Complaint and you will find contact information below the signature, usually on the last page.

If you are representing yourself, keep in mind that you can get help from an attorney at any stage. You can hire an attorney to help with some or all parts of your case. For example, if you get a settlement offer, you may want to consult with an attorney on whether to accept the offer, or make a counteroffer.

At each court hearing, the Judge will ask if you have tried to settle and will likely require mediation or arbitration.

Do not ignore anything you receive from the Plaintiff or the court. You may need to respond in writing to additional documents. You may need to attend several court hearings before a trial.

Again, more information about "what to expect" is available at www.mncourts.gov/selfhelp under the "Civil Actions (in District Court)" topic.