

Representing yourself as a plaintiff for the first time requires thorough preparation, organization, and adherence to courtroom etiquette. As the plaintiff, you must prove your case by presenting facts, evidence, and relevant laws clearly to the judge. The most important preparation is to arrive early, stay calm, be respectful, and speak directly to the judge.

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Here is a guide to help you prepare for your first appearance:

## **1. Pre-Court Preparation**

**Organize Evidence:** Bring the original and at least two copies of every document (contracts, photos, emails, receipts) you plan to present.

**Prepare a Timeline:** Create a chronological list of events to help you tell your story clearly and concisely.

### **Structure Your Argument:**

Write down your opening statement and key points. Focus on facts rather than emotions.

**Understand the Law:** Research the legal principles that apply to your case.

**Practice:** Rehearse what you want to say without just reading from a script.

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## **2. Courtroom Etiquette and Procedure**

**Dress Professionally:** Wear formal, conservative business clothing to show respect for the court.

**Arrive Early:** Get to the courthouse 30-45 minutes early to clear security and find your courtroom.

**Address the Judge:** Use "Your Honor" "Judge" or "Sir/Ma'am".

**Do Not Interrupt:** Never speak over the judge, the defendant, or the defendant's lawyer.

**Turn Off Devices:** Ensure your phone is off before entering the courtroom.

## **3. During the Hearing**

**Opening Statement:** Briefly explain what your case is about and what you plan to prove.

**Presenting Facts:** Stick to the facts, be concise, and explain how the law supports your claim.

**Witnesses:** If you have witnesses, know what questions you will ask them.

**Cross-Examination:**

You may be expected to ask the defendant or their witnesses questions. Keep questions simple and relevant.

If You Don't Understand: If a term is used that you do not understand, ask the judge to explain it.

Swearing In: You will likely be asked to take an oath or affirm that you will tell the truth.

**4. Key Tips for Success**

Do Not Argue: If the judge rules against you on a point of evidence, do not argue; move on.

Bring Note-Taking Supplies: Bring a pen and paper to note points made by the other side so you can address them when it is your turn.

**Consider a Support Person:**

You may be allowed to have a "McKenzie Friend" (a support person) with you for advice.

Serve Documents: Ensure the defendant has received copies of all evidence you filed with the court.