

# How to Format Court Documents

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## Should I use this?

**Yes, if** you are doing your own court papers for a court case.

## Are there rules for how court papers should look?

Yes.

**General Rule 14 -- Format of Papers Filed with a Court** says:

- You must use letter-sized (8½ x 11 inches) white paper. You must write or type on only one side of the page.
- All handwriting must be readable.
- The first page must have a margin of at least three inches from the top and one inch from the other 3 sides. Each page that follows must have at least one inch for each margin.
- Your papers should not have any highlighting or colored marking.

**Civil Rule 10(e)** has format recommendations.

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- ❖ Each county has its own **local rules**. Your local court rules may be online at [http://www.courts.wa.gov/court\\_rules/?fa=court\\_rules.local&group=local](http://www.courts.wa.gov/court_rules/?fa=court_rules.local&group=local). If not, ask the clerk about the rules. Local rules may have other requirements.
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## What if I do not follow these rules?

**General Rule 14** – It depends. The Court Clerk's office may reject and return your papers. They may fine you. The delay the return of your papers causes could make you miss a court deadline.

**Note:** Forms on the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) website have the required margins, but are not on pleading (numbered) paper. Some counties require “pleading paper.” Check your county’s local rules. See if you must use pleading paper. If you are using an AOC form, you can buy pleading paper at an office supply store and copy your form on to it.

## What is a pattern form?

For many different kinds of cases, the AOC created forms that you must or should use. It is easier than creating your own form. The AOC may change (update) forms after the law changes or for other reasons.

## Should I use up-to-date forms?

**Yes.** Pattern forms are available for many commonly used documents. Using a pattern form will assure the format is correct.

**Before buying or using a pattern form,** make sure it is the latest version.

The revision date is in the footer in the lower left corner of the form, just above the form number. **Example:**

RCW 26.09.020  
Mandatory Form (07/2017)  
FL Divorce 201

Your county's superior court may have its own forms you should use. Get those from the clerk and/or at the law library.

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❖ The [AOC website](#)'s forms should be current.

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## What are my county's rules?

You can find state rules and many local rules at [http://www.courts.wa.gov/court\\_rules/](http://www.courts.wa.gov/court_rules/). Rules starting with **GR** are statewide rules for all courts. Rules starting with **CR** are statewide rules for civil (not criminal) cases in superior court.

You may also need to follow local rules. See the shaded box in "Are there rules for how court papers should look?"

If yours is a family law case, and your county has a courthouse Family Law Court Facilitator, that person can help you follow local rules.

## What if I do not follow my local rules?

- You may be fined.
- The clerk may return your documents to you without filing you.
- The clerk may determine that your paper/material is improper or inappropriate for filing or scanning. The court may order the paper sealed or converted to an exhibit.

## Why should I review my papers before filing?

To look for things that might cause the clerk to reject your papers, such as:

- The caption does not match the case title
- The document is missing the case caption
- The case number is wrong
- You left out pages
- You set a hearing on a day the court cannot hear it
- You reversed the parties' names on the case caption
- Your papers do not comply with [GR 14](#)'s requirements for filing
- You are trying to file an order, decree, judgment or bond that the judge has not signed yet
- You are trying to file discovery documents (you do not have to file those)

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❖ "[Doing Discovery: Interrogatories and Requests for Production](#)" has more info.

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## What if I have questions that this did not answer?

If your county has a family law facilitator, they may be able to help you.

For legal help:

- Apply online with [CLEAR\\*Online](#) - <https://nwjustice.org/get-legal-help> or
- Call CLEAR at 1-888-201-1014

CLEAR is Washington's toll-free, centralized intake, advice and referral service for low-

income people seeking free legal assistance with civil legal problems.

- **Outside King County:** Call 1-888-201-1014, weekdays 9:15 a.m. - 12:15 p.m.
- **King County:** Call 211 for info and referral to an appropriate legal services provider, weekdays 8:00 am – 6:00 pm. You may also call (206) 461-3200, or toll-free, 1-877-211-WASH (9274). You can also get info on legal service providers in King County through 211’s website, [www.resourcehouse.com/win211/](http://www.resourcehouse.com/win211/).
- **Persons 60 and Over:** Seniors age 60 or over may call CLEAR\*Sr at 1-888-387-7111, regardless of income.

Assets limits may apply. Seniors in King County may call 2-1-1.

Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers can call CLEAR or 211 (or toll-free 1-877-211-9274) using the relay service of their choice.

CLEAR and 211 will conference in free interpreters when needed.

Free legal education publications, videos and self-help packets covering many legal issues are available at [www.washingtonlawhelp.org](http://www.washingtonlawhelp.org).

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