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## What to Expect When Meeting with a Lawyer

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When a legal concern arises, hiring a lawyer may be the smartest option. Most lawyers meet with clients for an initial consultation. Initial consultations essentially serve as an opportunity to determine if you want to hire a specific attorney to handle your case and offer you legal advice. If it's your first time meeting with a lawyer, you may not know what to expect and how things will work.

It's common for potential clients to be nervous or anxious when scheduling an initial [consultation with an attorney](#). As a result, it can seriously benefit you to know what to expect when consulting with an attorney. What follows is a guide covering the basics of attorney-client consultations for the purpose of helping you navigate meetings and communications with your lawyer, or a lawyer that you are looking to hire. It will also discuss how to understand the fees and services that come with legal representation.

### 1. How do you prepare for your meeting with a lawyer?

Being prepared for your meeting with a lawyer can help relieve tension and increase your general comfort about the upcoming meeting. It is also essential to focusing your meeting with a lawyer so that he or she can give you accurate and relevant advice regarding your claim or legal matter.

To be best prepared for your meeting, you should gather all of the significant and relevant legal documents that relate to your case. If your lawyer has sent you forms to complete or requested certain documents, ensure they are accurate and completed to the best of your ability in advance and be sure to bring them with you to your meeting with a lawyer. It is common practice for attorneys to distribute client information sheets that need to be filled out before a client's initial consultation. Completing paperwork, such as questionnaires and intake forms, helps your attorney narrow down what questions he or she will ask you, ensuring that your meeting time is spent productively. If you have received legal documents, either from the court or an opposing party to your case, it is important to bring these with you so that the attorney can review them and better understand your case.

It is also recommended that you write down a brief timeline of the events. This can help refresh your memory before your meeting with a lawyer and set the foundation for you to think about what you would like the outcome of the case to be. Creating a timeline can also serve as a good reference point, or a checklist, for gathering all of the necessary documentation. Additionally, a timeline of the events surrounding your case is extremely useful to an attorney during and after your initial consultation. The process of creating a chronological order of events can help you, and your attorney, strengthen your legal arguments. Having a clear visual representation helps all parties involved in the case to have a better understanding of the sequence of events.

You can also refer to your brief timeline of events to build a list of all the concerns and questions you may want to communicate during the [meeting with your attorney](#). For example, you may be curious as to what kind of strategy the attorney is going to recommend for handling your legal matter or who else will have access to your case file and confidential information? It's typically common to ask what the lawyer charges as a fee for his or her services. You may also want to get clarity on any additional costs that you may be expected to pay.

Some attorney's websites may provide information that can answer some basic questions that people commonly ask about the consultation or appointment process. While it may not be perfectly applicable to your situation, it can provide you with some basic legal vocabulary and an understanding as to different types of cases. You can also read about a firm's attorneys—including things such as their educational and professional credentials. Asking questions about this information can being to cost you money if the lawyer explains it to you, but the tips and information on an attorney's website are accessible at no charge.

### 2. What should you expect the meeting with your attorney to be like?

First and foremost, it is important to remember that lawyers are people, too! They understand that it can be nerve-racking to [meet with an attorney](#) for the first time—especially when the meeting involves disclosing private information and discussing sensitive matters. Keep in mind that lawyers are looking to help you with your legal issues and ultimately help you come to a resolution that satisfies you.

Most initial consultations are scheduled for one hour, but the length of your actual appointment time may vary. The complexity of your case, and how much information you have prepared in advance, usually determines how long your appointment lasts. Your first meeting with an attorney is an opportunity to share your story and obtain a powerful tool—legal representation. While it is important to tell your story, it is also important to get comfortable with each other. It is strongly suggested that lawyers and clients attempt to build a relationship with open communication, honesty, and trust. In addition to some general "getting to know you" questions, the attorney will ask you questions that are designed to focus the discussion on the background facts of your case that he or she feels are relevant or significant. He or she will take time to understand your current situation, develop your case, and work with you to decide how to resolve your claim.

Regardless of whether your legal issues involve a personal injury, criminal defense, divorce, or bankruptcy law issue, it is a client's responsibility to be honest and as accurate as possible when relaying the events and facts of your case to your attorney. Honesty and [full disclosure](#) are always important when meeting with an attorney. Lawyer's offices are safe environments where attorney-client privilege and confidentiality rules apply. Whatever you discuss during the your meeting with a lawyer stays private. If you have questions about attorney-privilege and client confidentiality, do not hesitate to ask your attorney to explain it to you.

Failure, to be honest, can significantly impact your case—there's even a chance that you may be unable to win your lawsuit. The outcome of the case could go unfavorable if any unanticipated information or evidence comes out. When your lawyer is fully aware of the facts of your case, he or she is able to best determine whether you have a valid claim, and then continue on to prepare strong arguments to support your case.

It can be difficult to recall what was discussed during the meeting with an attorney. Even though you are meeting with him or her to share your story, your lawyer will have a lot of information to share with you in return; they will answer your questions, debunk legal myths, and offer peace of mind. Taking notes on important discussion topics during your consultation can help you remember key points from the conversation. For example, there may be follow-up information or paperwork that the lawyer asks you to acquire in order to proceed with your case. Everything the attorney says may feel important, but don't feel the need to try to get everything down. It's more important to listen to the lawyer's advice and be able to ask any questions that may arise.

If the lawyer determines that you have a valid legal claim, and is willing to take your case, it is likely that you will be presented with a retainer agreement. This will usually be presented to you at the end of your initial consultation. Your attorney should explain the terms of the retainer agreement to you and you should not sign it until you are sure that you understand it. Basically, this agreement is a contract that stipulates your obligations to the attorney, as well as the attorney's duties to you. Some of the duties that may be listed in a retainer agreement include: protocol for communicating with you about the status of your case, the approximate rate the attorney is charging you for his or her legal services, any payments that are required at the onset of representation, and the frequency in which you are expected to make payments.

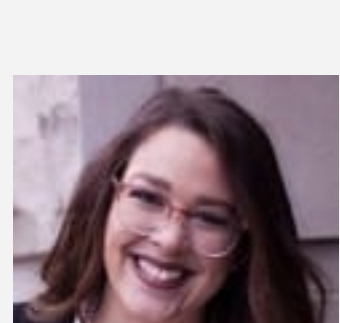
### 3. What should you know about making payments to your lawyer?

There are two ways that [clients pay attorneys](#). The first way is called a "retainer," where the client pays the attorney in advance for his or her legal services, and when the lawyer has worked for the full amount of the retainer, the client pays the attorney at their hourly rate. Retainers are most common in cases that don't involve claims for money—usually criminal defense, divorce, and bankruptcy claims.

It's normal for lawyers with more practice experience to charge higher fees than newer attorneys. Sometimes, an attorney may be able to work out a payment plan so that you can make reasonable payments over time. If you are unable to afford the fees that your lawyer outlines in their contract, ask the attorney whether he or she is willing to come to an alternative agreement regarding fee payment.

In cases like personal injury or workers' compensation claims—cases seeking money—it is common for lawyers to stipulate to a set "contingency" fee in a "contingent fee arrangement." When an attorney agrees to work on a contingency basis, he or she agrees to accept a fixed percentage of the amount recovered by the client. Percentages vary, sometimes depending on professional experience, but it is typical that attorneys working on a contingency fee basis be paid one-third (33%) of the amount recovered. During your meeting with an attorney, he or she will explain that a contingent fee agreement means that if you lose, you don't have to pay the lawyer for his legal representation. However, the lawyer's services are different from filing fees and court costs. Regardless of the case outcome, clients are typically responsible for paying these additional expenses.

At the close of your meeting with a lawyer, you should make sure that you have shared all the necessary information and raised all of your questions and concerns. Ideally, you should leave the consultation feeling comfortable with contacting your attorney, clear about the next steps in your case, and confident that your legal matter is in competent hands. Although meeting with a lawyer can be intimidating, being prepared and knowing what to expect can help you navigate the process successfully.



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