

Important Tips for Pro Se Litigants Sac & Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa Tribal Court



1. The court staff and judges cannot give you legal advice
 - They cannot tell you:
 - Whether you should file a specific paper.
 - What words or phrases you should use in a paper.
 - What persons you should file a lawsuit against.
 - How much money to ask the other party for.
 - What questions to ask witnesses or other parties.
 - Whether to appeal a judge's decision.
 - How to fill in a form for a person involved in a case.
 - The meaning of laws or court decisions.
 - They cannot perform legal research for a person involved in a court case.
 - They cannot predict the outcome of a case, a paper filed, or some other action in a case.

2. You cannot talk to the judge unless all parties and attorneys are present
 - You cannot communicate with the judge about your case by email or regular mail – unless you send copies of your email or regular mail to the other people involved in your case.
 - You cannot talk with the judge about your case by telephone or in-person unless all other parties are on the phone at the same time or in the same room together.
 - This standard is important because it prevents a person or an attorney from giving information to a judge that the other side does not know about.

3. If you want to give the judge information you think is important for your case, or you want the judge to take some action related to a case, you must:
 - a. PUT THE REQUEST IN WRITING.
 - b. Make enough copies for you and all the other parties.
 - c. Take the papers to clerk's office. The Clerk will stamp each copy and keep one.
 - d. Deliver a copy to each of the other parties or their attorneys. Keep a copy for yourself.

4. Be Prepared
 - Keep copies of all the papers you file in court and the ones you get from the other party.
 - Know what evidence you need to prove your case.
 - Bring papers and witnesses that will help you win your case.
 - Bring at least three copies of each document you want to use as evidence – one for you, one for the other party, and one for the judge. The Judge ultimately decides what is or is not acceptable as evidence.

- If a witness refuses to come to court to testify, you can ask the court to issue a subpoena. It's an order requiring a person to come to court. Be sure to ask the clerk's office for a subpoena several days before your court hearing.
- Bring physical evidence, if there is any. This might include a canceled check, contract, or invoice. If your case involves damaged property, bring the damaged item or a photograph of it.

5. Be on Time

- If you are not in court when your case is called, and the other party is present, the judge might enter a judgment against you, in favor of the other party.

6. Know the court rules

- Judges CANNOT MAKE EXCEPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT ATTORNEYS. You could lose your case if you do not follow the correct procedures.
- When you file a paper at the clerk's office, you MUST MAIL OR DELIVER A COPY OF THAT PAPER TO THE OTHER PARTY (or parties) or the other party's attorney. Always keep a copy for your records.

7. Be courteous and respectful

- A judge can hold a person "in contempt of court" for bad behavior. This could result in a fine or time in jail.
- Wait for your turn to speak. Do not interrupt the judge or the other party.

8. Dress appropriately

- You should dress as if you're going to a job interview. Remove your hat or cap while you are in the courtroom or in the judge's office.