

## What to Wear to Court or “You only get once chance to make a first impression”.

It is important to look your best in court.

You don't want to look like you just rolled out of bed.

Recognize that most judges are middle-class and have been practicing law for many years. The Judge will usually wear a black robe when they are on the bench. You need to dress conservatively, dignified, and discreetly as a sign of respect for the judicial system.

Here are some basic ideas of appropriate courtroom attire & behavior:

### What NOT to wear to court:

#### Clothing --

- Sleeveless or muscle shirt
- Exercise outfit
- Nothing sexy or too dressy – tight tops, short skirts, sequins, slinky top, revealing tops – nothing you'd wear out on a Saturday night!
- Sundress or strapless dress
- Crop tops – cover your belly button
- Any top with spaghetti straps
- T-shirts (especially ones with beer, drug or sexual references)
- Anything you'd wear to the zoo or to do yard work
- Athletic attire – especially baseball caps
- Jeans – unless they are the only long pants you own
- Clothing that is too small or too large
- Clothing that reveals your underwear
- Shorts or cut-offs  
(Most Courts will NOT allow you to enter the courtroom if you are wearing shorts.)

#### Hats

#### Footwear:

- Flip-flop sandals
- Athletic shoes
- High heel spikes
- Open-toed shoes
- Anything you'd wear at the beach

Sunglasses – unless medically prescribed

Lots of jewelry – especially if it makes noise when you move

#### Hair

- Wet & messy
- Dirty
- Unnatural dye job
- Hairnet and/or curlers
- Weird or unusual haircut

#### Hygiene:

1. Look dirty or unshaven
2. Cologne and perfume – use very little – too much and everyone will wonder what you are trying to cover up!
  - Smelling like cigarette smoke
  - Smelling like pot – that's a totally different problem!
  - Smelling of alcohol – again that's a totally different problem!

Nails – extremely long nails on both men & women, neon or bright nail polish

#### Tattoos & Piercings

- Hide the tattoos

- Remove the jewelry BEFORE entering the courtroom
- Bare legs or shoulders showing

#### Ideas of what to wear to the courthouse:

Conservative dress – something you would wear to church, work or a nice social function. (If you wear a uniform to work, it is usually ok to wear to court – unless you wear shorts to work.)

Wear clothes that fit – if you have gained or lost a lot of weight, please buy something new for your courtroom appearance

Men:

- Suit with tie
- Sports coat
- Long-sleeve button-down shirt with a collar and long pants
- Wear a belt or suspenders to keep up your pants

Women:

- A nice dress or woman's business suit
- A conservative pants suit
- Conservative top and long slacks

Jewelry – less is more – remove all piercings

(If you claim you have no money, then wearing lots of jewelry is unwise)

Nails – neat and clean. Neutral nail polish.

Shoes – closed toe & conservative.

Hair – Schedule a haircut 2 weeks before the court appearance. Look neatly groomed. If long, tie it back. No hairnets, rollers or combs.

Hygiene

- Brush your teeth & use mouthwash.
- Men – shave before court & trim your mustache/beard.
- Women – wear very conservative make-up.
- Use soap & water liberally before coming to court .
- Deodorant – you will be nervous so be prepared.
- If you perspire a lot, bring a handkerchief or whatever to look “cool and confident”.

Cover tattoos

#### Courtroom Etiquette

- Turn off your cell phone and/or pager!
- When sitting in family law court do not rest your elbows on the tables at any given time. Sit up straight. Slouching is a signal that you don't care about what is going on and you'd rather be home or doing something else.
- Pay attention. Look interested. Take notes.
- If there is a court reporter is being used, be sure to be sure he/she can hear your answers.
- When addressing the Judge use the term “Your Honor”.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Look the Judge in the eye.
- Don't “doodle” – you can write notes (keep them small so opposing counsel and the Judge can't read them).
- Don't talk while court is in session.
- Don't roll your eyes or make faces.
- Don't speak when someone else is talking.
- Do not chew gum or smack on candy.

#### Language

- Don't mutter under your breath.
- Don't make threats.
- Don't say “To tell you the truth...” – makes you sound like a liar

- No slang or expletives.
- No hysterical outburst or screaming -- anywhere in the courthouse.
- No snide comments.
- No snippy or sarcastic answers – If you are asked if you do drugs and you answer “yes” the transcription of the hearing will be “yes” even though you did not mean it!
- Don’t sigh and make noises.
- Do speak slowly and clearly Give concise answers – don’t ramble.
- Think before you talk.
- Be prepared to explain to the Judge why you want what you want. You can make notes to stay organized. Be prepared to have your notes entered into evidence if you use them when you testify – so don’t write anything on them that you don’t want the Judge to read.
- If the Judge instructed you to stop talking – stop talking!
- If you don’t understand, ask the Judge to explain it to you.
- If you need an interpreter, ask at the beginning of the hearing!

#### Additional Courtroom Etiquette

- Be punctual - or better yet, be early.
- Don’t bring books or magazines to read.
- Remain in attendance in the courtroom until excused.
- Stand when the judge (or jury) enters or leaves the courtroom.
- When the Judge calls your case, stand up and announce “present”.
- The Judge can only talk to you when all parties are present. Don’t attempt to talk to the Judge unless all sides are present in the courtroom.
- Address others only by their titles and surnames, including lawyers, witnesses, and court personnel.
- Bring a note pad and pen to take notes.
- Breathe.
- If you are thirsty, ask for a drink of water or bring a bottle of water with you.
- If you might need something, bring it to court with you. If you left your paperwork at home the Judge won’t wait for you to go home to get it.
- Only people with first-hand knowledge (they personally heard, saw, smelled, etc.) can testify – if you have witnesses, bring them. A notarized statement won’t work!
- You will go through a metal detector before you can enter the courthouse – so no guns, knives, or mace.