



**PRO SE HANDBOOK
CHAPTER 0: PREFACE
(ALL-IN-ONE DOCUMENT)**

FEDERAL BAR ASSOCIATION
ACCESS TO JUSTICE TASK FORCE

{10/23/2019}

"A HANDBOOK FOR PRO SE LITIGANTS"

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PRO SE HANDBOOK
FROM THE FEDERAL BAR ASSOCIATION

CHAPTER 0 PREFACE

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ITEMS 0.00 through 0.01



0.00 | INTRODUCTION

Representing Yourself in Federal District Court:

A Handbook for Pro Se Litigants

PRESENTED BY: Federal Bar Association, Access to Justice Task Force

This is an informational handbook. This handbook is a guide for self-represented litigants. It is not legal advice and should not be considered as such. Do not cite to this handbook in your filings with the Court. The Court will not consider this handbook as legal authority. Do not contact the Clerk's Office with questions about this handbook. The Court will not answer questions about the handbook's content or how it may pertain to an individual case. Those seeking guidance concerning a federal action should consult with an attorney.

Special acknowledgement and appreciation is extended to the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York and the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, for permission to adopt portions of their pro se litigant handbooks. This handbook may serve as a form for district-specific handbooks.

This Handbook is designed to help people with filing civil lawsuits in federal court without legal representation. Proceeding without a lawyer is called proceeding "pro se," a Latin phrase meaning "for oneself." Representing yourself in a lawsuit can be complicated, time consuming, and costly. Failing to follow court procedures can mean losing your case. For these reasons, you are urged to work with a lawyer if possible.

Do not rely entirely on this Handbook. **THIS HANDBOOK IS MEANT TO BE USED FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY AND DOES NOT CONSTITUTE LEGAL ADVICE.** This Handbook provides a summary of civil lawsuit procedures and may not cover all procedures that may apply in your case. It also does not teach you about the laws that will control your case. Make sure you read the applicable federal and local court rules and do your own research at a law library or online to understand your case. This Handbook identifies the location of resources you can access, free of charge, to do research.

The United States District Court Clerk's Office staff can answer general questions, but they cannot give you any legal advice. For example, they cannot help you decide what to do in your lawsuit,



tell you what the law means, or even advise you when documents are due.

Warning to Incarcerated or Detained Persons:

Please note that some parts of this handbook will not apply to actions filed by incarcerated or detained persons. Detained litigants are often required to comply with different statutes and Court rules. These rules may include—but are not limited to—the use of Court-approved forms where applicable and the exhaustion of administrative remedies prior to filing suit.

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0.01 | TIPS FOR PRO SE LITIGANTS

There is a lot to learn in representing yourself in federal court, but here are some key pointers.

1. Read Everything.

Read everything you get from the Court and the other side right away, including the papers you get from the Clerk's Office when you file. It is very important that you know what is going on in your case and what deadlines have been set.

2. Meet every deadline.

If you do not know exactly how to do something, try to get help and do your best. It is more important to file/submit required documents and responses on time, than to do everything perfectly. You can lose your case if you miss deadlines. If you need more time to do something, ask the Court in writing for more time as soon as you know that you will need more time it and before the deadline has passed.

3. Use your own words and be as clear as possible.

You do not need to try to sound like a lawyer. In the documents you file with the Court, be specific about the facts that are important to the lawsuit. When you cite a case that you believe supports your position, explain to the Court why that case applies or is similar to your case.

4. Always keep all of your paperwork and stay organized.

Keep paper or electronic copies of everything you send to and/or file with the Court. Also, keep everything you receive from the Court, the other side, or anyone else relating to your case. When you file a paper in the Clerk's Office, bring at least the original and two copies so that you can keep a stamped copy for yourself. Know where your papers are located so that you can use them to work on your case.

5. Have someone else read your papers before you submit/file them.

Be sure that person understands what you wrote; if not, rewrite your papers to try to explain yourself more clearly. The judge may not hear you explain yourself in person and may rely only on your papers when making decisions about your case.



6. Be sure the Court always has your correct address and phone number.

If your contact information changes, contact the Clerk's Office in writing immediately. Always include your case number on any paperwork that you submit to the Court.

7. Omit certain personal identifying information from documents submitted to the Court for filing.

All documents filed with the Court will be available to the public on the Internet. Protect your privacy and that of other individuals you refer to in your documents by not including in documents you send to the Court any of the following: social security and taxpayer identification numbers, names of minor children, dates of birth, and financial account numbers. If your lawsuit involves a minor, you must identify them by their initials only.

8. Check the Court's website.

Courts will sometimes have a specific webpage for pro se litigants that includes useful forms and other helpful information specific to that Court.

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APPENDIX



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ORIGINAL SOURCE

<u>#</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Link</u>
1	Original Source	https://USCourts.gov

INTERACTIVE VERSION(S)

<u>#</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Link</u>
1	HTML Version	TextBookDiscrimination.com/Handbooks/ProSe/US/C00

ADDITIONAL PRO SE RESOURCES

<u>#</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Link</u>
1	DOAH Handbook	TextBookDiscrimination.com/Handbooks/ProSe/DOAH/
2	FL Bar Handbook	TextBookDiscrimination.com/Handbooks/ProSe/FLBar/
3	USCA11 Handbook	TextBookDiscrimination.com/Handbooks/ProSe/CA11/
4	USFLMD Handbook	TextBookDiscrimination.com/Handbooks/ProSe/USFLMD/

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Congratulations! You're now **booked up** on Chapter 0 of the Florida Bar Association's Pro Se Handbook!

