



NORTHWEST WOMEN'S LAW CENTER

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FORMATTING COURT DOCUMENTS

Washington State Court Rules and Forms

I. General Rule 14 -- Format of Papers Filed with a Court

As of April 1, 2001, all papers filed with a court in Washington State must have at least a 3" margin on the top and a 1" margin on the other three sides of the first page. The following pages of each document should have a 1" margin on all sides.

You can download a copy of General Rule 14 at <http://www.courts.wa.gov/rules>, under State Court Rules – Rules of General Application.

What if I don't follow this rule?

In King County, as of September 1, 2001, the Court Clerk's office will return pleadings, motions, and other papers that do not comply with General Rule 14 and/or Local Rule 10, which describe this and other format requirements for papers filed with the court. Rejected documents will be returned to the filing party. Other mistakes on documents may result in a \$15 faulty document fee (see the attached list of fines imposed by the King County Superior Court Clerk's office).

Similar sanctions may apply in other counties. In addition, the delay resulting from the return of documents could cause you to miss a court deadline.

Please note, Forms on the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) website have the required margins, but they are not on pleading (numbered) paper. State court rule 10 recommends that all documents be on numbered paper and King County local rule 10 requires numbered paper. However, failure to use pleading paper is not on the list of "faulty documents" issued by the King County Court Clerk, so this may no longer be an issue. Please check the local rules in the county where you are filing, to determine if pleading paper is required. If you are using an AOC form, you may purchase pleading paper at an office supply store and copy your form on to it.

II. Use Up-to-Date Forms

Before purchasing or using any pattern form, you should make sure that you are using the latest version of the form. The AOC website <http://www.courts.wa.gov/forms/> has the most up-to-date versions of the forms. The revision date is located in the footer in the lower left corner of the form, under the name of the form and to the right of the pattern form number. For example:

PET FOR DISSO OF MARRIAGE (PTDSS) – Page 1 of 8
WPF DR 01.0100 (7/2003) – RCW 26.09.020

Local Court Rules: Rules that apply to individual counties

You can find state rules and most local rules at this website:

http://www.courts.wa.gov/court_rules/ Rules that begin GR are statewide rules for all courts. Rules that begin CR are statewide rules for civil (not criminal) cases in Superior courts. In addition to these rules, you need to follow local rules – rules that are used in the Superior, District, or Municipal court where your case is being heard. If your case is a family law case, and your county offers a Family Law Court Facilitator at the courthouse, that person can also help you follow your local rules.

For example, here is a summary of the Snohomish County court rules about the format of documents that you file with the court.

Snohomish County Superior Court

All documents must comply with the format requirements of CR10 (e) and GR14.

All original documents shall be

- Clear, legible, and permanent, printed or typed in black or dark blue ink.
- Non-colored bond paper/ paper suitable for scanning or microfilming
- All original documents should be first impressions and not carbon copies and must bear word “original”.
- Photocopies, prints, multi-lithed, mimeographed and other comparable reproductions are acceptable.
- Any paper other than the original document must be labeled “copy”.

Standards required to help the Clerk

- Use binder clips on large documents
- One staple per document
- Do not staple documents to the pleading
- Only use yellow bond paper bottom tabs
- Use tape and not staples to affix notes/ receipts in the document

What if I don't follow my local rules?

If you do not follow your local court rules regarding the correct format, completion, and filing of court documents, you may be fined or your documents may be returned to you without being filed.

For example, in **Snohomish County**, if the clerk determines that any paper/material is improper or inappropriate to be filed or scanned, the court may order the material sealed or converted to an exhibit. And below is a list of fines that are imposed by the **King County** Clerk's Office.

King County Superior Court

NOTE: This list is not all-inclusive and judges or commissioners may also impose sanctions.

Faulty Documents Returned, No Fee Charged:

- Did not received entire document, (i.e. signature page missing)
- Does not meet GR 14 margin requirements (Pro Se's only)

Faulty Documents: (\$15 Fee)

- Case caption is missing or wrong
- Document filed in wrong county
- Unsigned order is filed
- Wrong case number
- No designation (i.e., SEA or KNT)
- Satisfaction is not acknowledged by notary
- Discovery documents can not be filed
- Assignments must be signed by creditor
- Liens must be signed by creditor and notary
- Satisfaction of Abstract filed must be certified by the Clerk where the judgment is rendered
- Documents must be on 8 1/2 by 11 paper
- No thermofax paper
- Notice of hearing filed on non judicial day
- Document does not conform to requirements, must submit confirmation of issues on correct form (*See NWLC King County Case Schedule packets*)
- Document does not contain all required signatures
- One or both of the following documents not received at time of filing (mail in only) (1) Case Cover Index Sheet (2) Case Area Designation Form
- Need original signature
- Order not signed by a King County Superior Court Judge/Commissioner

Non-Compliance: (\$30 Fee)

- Trial Date past, no final documents filed
- Arbitration award, no judgment on arbitration filed
- Missed Status Conference Hearing (*See NWLC King County Case Schedule packets*)
- No final document after settlement
- Unlawful Detainers not closed after 60 days
- Guardianship delinquency

Failure to Omit or Redact Identifiers: (Attorney fees & court costs) (*See NWLC packet Family Law Court Records and Your Privacy*)

- If a social security number of an individual must be included in a document, failure to use only the last 4 digits of the social security number.
- If involvement of a minor child must be mentioned, failure to use only that child's initials, unless otherwise necessary.
- If financial account numbers are relevant, failure to use only the last four digits shall be recited in the document.
- Failure to omit driver's license numbers.

Failure to bring case to completion: (\$30 fee)

- Parties/attorney do not appear for trial
- Do not file final order or settlement
- Do not follow case schedule (*See NWLC King County Case Schedule packets*)
- Do not file final judgment/appeal following arbitration award
- Do not comply with court ordered deadlines for reports
- Lack of action of record

Documents filed with clerk's office that require extra handling: (\$15)

- Document has errors or is incomplete and as a result requires special handling

Note: If you feel that your document was correct and that you should not have to pay a fine, you may ask the court clerk for a Faulty Document Appeal Form. You need to file your appeal within 60 days of receiving the clerk's invoice.

If you have questions about these court rules and their effect on your case, you may call the Northwest Women's Law Center's Legal Information and Referral Line at 206-621-7691 or 1-866-259-7720 for further information or referrals.

Related Materials from the Northwest Women's Law Center:

- Family Law Court Records and Your Privacy
- King County Case Schedule packets

Revised by Nona Dhawan, December 2006.