

# HOW TO FILE AN APPELLANT'S BRIEF

**NOTE:** If there are any words or terms used in these instructions that you do not understand, please visit Illinois Legal Aid Online at [ilao.info/glossary](http://ilao.info/glossary). For more information about going to court including how to fill out and file forms, call or text Illinois Court Help at 833-411-1121 or go to [ilcourthelp.gov](http://ilcourthelp.gov).

More information and resources for civil appeals are available at: [ilcourts.info/appl-resources](http://ilcourts.info/appl-resources). There is also a Guide for Appeals to the Illinois Appellate Court for Self-Represented Litigants at: [ilcourts.info/aoic-appl-guide](http://ilcourts.info/aoic-appl-guide).

## What is an Appellant's Brief?

An *Appellant's Brief* tells the appellate court why the trial court should not have entered an order or judgment against you.

## Who can use the Appellant's Brief form?

The *Appellant's Brief* is filed by the appellant. If you filed the *Notice of Appeal (Civil)*, you are the appellant (your opponent is called the appellee).

## When do I file the Appellant's Brief form?

- In general, your *Appellant's Brief* must be filed within **35 days** after the record on appeal is filed.
- **SPECIAL DEADLINES IN CERTAIN CASES:**
  - Appeals involving parental responsibility or parenting time (custody or visitation), or relocation of a child have **shorter deadlines**. The appellate court clerk's office will give you the schedule that applies to your case.
- If you need additional time, you may file a *Motion* with the appellate court to ask for an extension of time, but you will need to give the appellate court a good reason. See Supreme Court Rule [361\(f\)](#). Motions for extensions of time must be filed **before** the due date of the document you are seeking an extension of time to file. However, the appellate court is not required to give you an extension.

## Where can I find the forms I need?

You can find the forms you need at: [ilcourts.info/appl-forms](http://ilcourts.info/appl-forms).

## What are the costs to file my Appellant's Brief?

None.

## Is there a page or word limit?

- Yes. The *Appellant's Brief*—not including the cover, the table of contents and statement of points and authorities, the certificate of compliance, the proof of delivery, and the appendix—must be no more than 50 pages or 15,000 words.
- If you need more than 50 pages or 15,000 words, you may file a *Motion* with the appellate court to ask for permission to file an *Appellant's Brief* with more

pages or words. You must file a *Motion* asking for more pages or words **before** your *Appellant's Brief* is due.

## How do I fill out the Appellant's Brief form?

- Fill out the form online or print it and fill it out by hand. If you fill it out by hand, you must print neatly.
- You will have to add pages to the form, particularly in the appendix, and you might have to remove pages from it. If you have access to a computer with a PDF editing program (e.g., Adobe Acrobat), you can add and remove pages electronically. Otherwise, you will have to print out the form and add and remove pages by hand.
- The *Appellant's Brief* form contains several sections. The instructions for each section are:

### Cover page (1<sup>st</sup> page)

- The first page (cover) must be white.
- Check the top box if the appeal involves parental responsibility or parenting time (custody/visitation rights), or relocation of a child.
- Enter the appellate court case number (which you received from the appellate court clerk) and the appellate court district.
- Provide the name of the trial court case. If the case was given a name beginning with "In re" (e.g., "In re Marriage of Jones"), enter that name. Then, enter the names of the plaintiff/petitioner (the party who filed the trial court case) and the defendant/respondent (the party against whom the case was filed). Finally, show which party is the appellant and which party is the appellee.
- Enter the trial court county, case number, and judge's name.
- Enter your name, address, phone number, and email address (if you have one). The email address you put on the form is where important legal documents will be sent to you. You should use an email account that you do not share with anyone else and that you check every day. If you do not check your email every day, you may miss important information or documents from other parties or from the court.
- Show whether you would like a chance to present oral argument (see **Step 4 below**).

### Table of Contents and Points and Authorities

- Each section of the *Appellant's Brief* is listed for you. When you have completed all sections and added page numbers, you must come back to this list and enter the page number where each section starts.
- List the title of each argument next to each numbered point (Point 1, Point 2, etc.). Your argument titles should state the mistakes you think the trial court or the jury made.
- Below each argument title, under "Authorities," you must list the cases, statutes (laws), etc., you use to support each argument. You may first need to write

your argument section, which comes later in your *Appellant's Brief*.

- You may raise as many arguments as you like, as long as they are reasonable.
- The form includes room for 3 arguments. If you are making more than 3 arguments, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Points and Authorities* forms into the main form.

#### Nature of the Case

State why the lawsuit was filed and how the trial court or the jury ruled.

#### Issues Presented for Review

- State the title of each argument again in the form of a question you want the appellate court to answer.
- If you are making more than 3 arguments, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Issues Presented for Review* forms into the main form.

#### Jurisdiction

- State why the appellate court has the power to hear your appeal.
- The appellate court has the power to hear an appeal only if the trial court's judgment is appealable under an Illinois Supreme Court Rule.
- Tell the appellate court which rule applies and why.
- State the filing dates of the trial court's judgment, its rulings on any motions that were filed after the judgment, and your *Notice of Appeal (Civil)*, so the appellate court knows whether you filed your *Notice of Appeal (Civil)* on time.

#### Statutes (Laws) Involved

- If your case involves a statute (law), constitutional provision, treaty, ordinance, or regulation, state the language and the number (e.g., 735 ILCS 5/2-615) of each provision so others can find that language. The number of a provision is also called the citation.
- If you need more room, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Statutes (Laws) Involved* forms into the main form.

#### Statement of Facts

- Tell the appellate court what happened in the trial court from beginning to end. Include the page numbers of the record on appeal where the information you include is located.
- Do not argue or comment.
- Do not use facts or information from documents that are not in the record on appeal.
- If you need more room, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Statement of Facts* forms into the main form.

#### Argument

- For each argument, state:
  - The title of your argument;
  - Check the box(es) next to the standard(s) of review that the appellate court must apply to each argument. "Standard of review" means how much

weight the appellate court must give to the trial court or jury rulings. The standard of review depends on the type of mistake that was made by the trial court or jury:

- A "de novo" standard of review means the appellate court will decide the issues fresh, as if it were the first court to decide them.
- A "manifest weight" standard means the appellate court will look at whether the trial court's or jury's decision is totally unreasonable compared to what the evidence showed.
- An "abuse of discretion" standard generally means the appellate court will give the benefit of the doubt to the trial court's decision, especially if it is a close call.
- The law that applies to the case;
- How the law applies to the facts; and
- What you want the appellate court to do.

- Include cases, statutes (laws), rules, etc. that support your arguments.
- Your arguments must be specific and complete. The appellate court will not consider arguments that are vague or incomplete.
- If you are making more than 3 arguments, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Argument* forms into the main form. If you are making less than 3 arguments, remove any extra pages in this section.

#### Conclusion

- Check the box or boxes to tell the appellate court what you want them to do. If you check "other," be sure to explain what you want the court to do.
- Sign the form and print your name.

#### Certificate of Compliance

- Enter the length of your brief (number of pages or words) and check the box to show whether you counted the pages or words.
- Certify that you have followed the rules for briefs, especially the page or word limit, by signing the certificate of compliance.

#### Proof of Delivery

Tell the appellate court how you are sending your *Appellant's Brief* to the other parties (see **Step 1 below**).

#### Appendix

Provide:

- A table of contents that lists everything in the appendix and the page on which everything appears (you will first have to add all documents to your appendix, then number the pages );
- A list of the contents in the record on appeal and the pages of the record where they appear. You will list these on the pages that follow the "Appendix" page. The contents include the common law record (the documents filed in the trial court); the report of proceedings (the transcript of the trial court hearings), if any; and the name of each witness who

testified along with the page numbers where their questioning begins;

- The plaintiff's complaint, the trial court's judgment, and your *Notice of Appeal (Civil)*; and
- Any other important documents from the record. Be sure to list those materials in the table of contents for the appendix.
- If you need more room, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Common Law Record*, *Additional Report of Proceedings*, or *Additional Index of Witnesses* forms into your *Appellant's Brief*.
- After you complete your appendix, you must number your appendix pages at the bottom in order (A-1, A-2, etc.) and then fill in the page numbers in your table of contents.

### What do I do after I fill out the form?

#### Step 1: Send your *Brief* to all other parties.

- You must send your *Appellant's Brief* to the other parties in the case. However, if any party has a lawyer, you must send your *Appellant's Brief* to the lawyer.
- If you and the person you're sending the *Appellant's Brief* to have an email address, you must send it by email or through the e-filing system. If you or the person you're sending the *Appellant's Brief* to does not have an email address, you may give it to the other person by personal hand delivery, mail, or third-party commercial carrier (for example, FedEx or UPS).
- Complete the *Proof of Delivery* with information to show how you sent your *Appellant's Brief* to each party. The *Proof of Delivery* has room for 3 parties. If you send your *Appellant's Brief* to more than 3 parties, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Proof of Delivery* forms into the main form.

#### Step 2: File your *Brief* with the appellate court in your district.

You must file your *Appellant's Brief* by the specific filing deadline that applies to your case. If you are uncertain as to when the filing deadline is, call the clerk's office.

#### E-filing:

- Court forms are filed by electronic filing, called "e-filing." You do not have to e-file if:
  - you qualify for an exemption (see Not E-filing below) or
  - your case involves a criminal matter.
- Most people e-file their forms using Odyssey eFileIL at [ilcourts.info/efile](http://ilcourts.info/efile).
- Follow step-by-step instructions and watch videos that walk you through the steps for e-filing at [ilcourts.info/efile-info](http://ilcourts.info/efile-info).
- E-filing is easier on a computer. It may not work on a cell phone or tablet.
- If you do not have access to a computer or if you need help e-filing, take your completed forms to a public library, or a Circuit Clerk, Appellate Clerk, or

Supreme Court Clerk's office. These places offer public computers where you can e-file your forms.

- Depending on your courthouse, you can bring your forms on paper and there may be public computers with a scanner where you can turn your paper forms into electronic files.
- Librarians and courthouse staff may be able to help you e-file, but they cannot provide legal advice.

#### Not E-filing:

- Some people are not required to e-file, which means they can file paper forms at the courthouse or by mail. People who do not have to e-file are:
  - Inmates in prison or jail who do not have a lawyer.
  - People with a disability that keeps them from e-filing.
- You may also qualify for an exemption from e-filing if you:
  - Do not have Internet or computer access in your home, and it is hard for you to travel.
  - Have trouble reading, writing, or speaking English.
  - Are filing documents in a sensitive case, such as an order of protection.
  - Tried to e-file your forms, but you were not able to because the equipment or help you needed was not available.
- To get an exemption from e-filing, use the form at [ilcourts.info/appl-exempt](http://ilcourts.info/appl-exempt). If you can't print this form, then ask for it at your local courthouse.
  - File your *Certification for Exemption from E-Filing* form with your other court forms at the appellate court clerk's office or by mail.
  - Bring at least two copies of your signed court forms to the appellate court clerk's office.  
**NOTE:** Your appellate district's local rules may require a different number of paper copies. Check the local rules for your district at [ilcourts.info/appl-local-rules](http://ilcourts.info/appl-local-rules) or call the clerk's office in your district for further instructions.
  - If you need to make copies of your forms, you can do that at the clerk's office. They may charge you to make copies.

#### Step 3: Wait for the *Appellee's Brief*.

- In general, the *Appellee's Brief* is due within **35 days** after the due date for your *Appellant's Brief*. The appellee is not required to file a brief. The appellee's failure to file a brief does not mean that you will win the appeal.
- If the appellee files a brief, you may file a *Reply Brief*, which is generally due within **14 days** after the due date for the *Appellee's Brief*. Again, ask the appellate court clerk's office for the schedule that applies to your case.

- You are not required to file a *Reply Brief*. Your failure to file a *Reply Brief* does not mean that you will lose the appeal.

**Step 4: Wait for oral argument, if any.**

- After all the briefs are filed, the appellate court may send you a notice to appear for oral argument, even if you did not ask for oral argument on the cover of your *Appellant's Brief*. (If you did ask for oral argument, the appellate court is not required to have oral argument.)
- If you get a notice, arrive on time for the court date. When your appeal is called, explain your argument to the judges. Be prepared to answer any questions from the judges. After you argue, the appellee will get a chance to respond, and you will get a chance to reply.

**Step 5: Wait for the appellate court's decision.**

- The appellate court will send you a written decision. This might take several months.
- If you think that the appellate court overlooked or misunderstood any of your points, you may file a *Petition for Rehearing*, which is due within **21 days** after the date of the decision. You must point out errors in the decision; you are not allowed to just reargue your case.
- You can find the *Petition for Rehearing* form and instructions at [ilcourts.info/appl-forms](http://ilcourts.info/appl-forms).