

# 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 [illinoislegalaid.org/lexicon/glossary](http://illinoislegalaid.org/lexicon/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).

## 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. However, in cases involving custody of a child, for example, the appellate court may shorten that time. Be sure to ask the appellate court clerk's office for 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. However, the appellate court is not required to give you an extension and may throw out your appeal if you do not file your *Brief* on time.
- For more information see the Guide for Appeals to the Illinois Appellate Court for Self-Represented Litigants: [ilcourts.info/AOICAppealsGuide](http://ilcourts.info/AOICAppealsGuide).

## What costs will I need to pay to file my *Appellant's Brief* form?

- None.

## Is there a page or word limit?

- Yes. The *Appellant's Brief*—not including the cover, the statement of points and authorities, the certificate of compliance, the proof of service, 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 a *Brief* with more pages or words.

## 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 email address (if you have one) and mailing address you put on the *Appellant's Brief* 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.
- The *Appellant's Brief* form contains several sections. The form contains instructions for each section. The sections are:

### Cover

- Check the top box if the appeal involves custody, visitation, or removal of a child.
- Enter the appellate court case number (which you will receive 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, and phone number. You may also enter your email address, but, if you do, the court may use it to send you important documents. Therefore, you should enter your email address only if you check your email frequently.
- Show whether you would like a chance to present oral argument (see Step 4 below).
- The cover must be white.

### Points and Authorities

- State the title of each argument (each reason why you think the trial court's decision or the jury's decision is wrong).
- List the authorities (cases, statutes (laws), etc.) that you will use to support each argument.
- You may raise as many arguments as you like, as long as they are reasonable.
- If you raise an unreasonable argument, the appellate court may strike the *Brief* or impose penalties.
- 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.
- If you are making more than 3 arguments, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Issues* 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 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.
- 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;
- The standard of review (the level of deference the appellate court must give to the trial court or the jury);
- The law that applies to the case;
- How the law applies to the facts; and
- What you want the appellate court to do.

Include statutes (laws), rules, and cases that support your argument. 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.

### Conclusion

- State what you want the appellate court to do.

### Certificate of Compliance

- Certify that you have followed the rules for briefs, especially the page or word limit, by signing the Certificate of Compliance.

### Proof of Service

- Show how you are sending your *Brief* to the other parties. (see Step 1 below)

### Appendix

Provide:

- An index to the record on appeal, including 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 list of testifying witnesses;
- The plaintiff's complaint, the trial court's judgment, and your *Notice of Appeal (Civil)*; and
- Any other relevant materials from the record, noting those additions in the table of contents for the appendix.

If necessary, fill out and insert one or more *Additional Common Law Record*, *Additional Report of Proceedings*, or *Additional Index of Witnesses* forms into the main form.

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

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

- You must send your *Brief* to the other parties in the case. However, if any party has a lawyer, you must send your *Brief* to the lawyer.
- If you and the person you're sending the *Brief* to have an email address, you must send it by email or by notification through the e-filing system. If you or the person you're sending the *Brief* to does not have an email address, you may give it to the other parties by personal hand delivery, mail, or third-party commercial carrier (for example, FedEx or UPS).

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

- You must file the *Appellant's Brief* with the trial court by the filing deadline that applies to your case.
- You must electronically file (e-file) court documents unless (1) you are an inmate in a prison or jail and you do not have a lawyer, (2) you have a disability that keeps you from e-filing, or (3) you qualify for an exemption from e-filing.
  - You will qualify for an exemption if: (1) you do not have internet or computer access at home and it would be difficult for you to travel to a place where you could use a computer; (2) you have trouble reading or speaking in English, or (3) you tried to e-file your documents, but you were unable to complete the process because the equipment or assistance you need is not available.

- If you qualify for an exemption, fill out a *Certification for Exemption from E-Filing* found here: [illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms/](http://illinoiscourts.gov/documents-and-forms/approved-forms/).
- File the original and 1 copy of your forms and the *Certification* with the trial court clerk's office in person or by mail.
- To e-file, create an account with an e-filing service provider.
  - Visit [efile.illinoiscourts.gov/service-providers.htm](http://efile.illinoiscourts.gov/service-providers.htm) to select a service provider. Some service providers are free while others charge a processing fee. For instructions on how to e-file for free with Odyssey eFileIL, see the self-help user guides here: [illinoiscourts.gov/self-help/how-to-e-file/](http://illinoiscourts.gov/self-help/how-to-e-file/).
- If you do not have access to a computer or if you need help e-filing, bring your form to the trial court clerk's office or appellate court clerk's office where you can use a public computer terminal to e-file your form. For more help, including how to fill out and file forms, call or text Illinois Court Help at 833-411-1121 or go to [icourthelp.gov](http://icourthelp.gov).
- You can bring your forms on paper or saved on a flash drive. The terminal will have a scanner and computer that you can use to e-file your form.

**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 generally is 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. 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.