



Small Claims Court: It's Easier than You Think

For a \$21.00 filing fee, you can begin a small claims court action that culminates in a hearing in six weeks. You can bring an action for damages up to \$2,500. To start, go to the District Court Clerk's office in the district where your opponent resides or does business. You'll complete a one page "Claim." Next you need to "serve" your opponent with a copy of the claim by having an unrelated person hand deliver it, or by sending it registered mail, signed for by your opponent.

Before your hearing, you'll want to organize any supporting paperwork and arrange for witnesses to attend with you. Plan your arguments and write a list of questions for your witnesses. You might want to spend one afternoon watching other small claims court actions.

On the day of your hearing, arrive early. You and your opponent can speak with a trained mediator for free, if you wish. If not, you'll go before the judge when your case is called. Be brief and tell the judge why and what you are owed. The judge will allow you to show your papers, tell your story and question your witnesses. The other side may question you or your witnesses, before being given the opportunity to present testimony, witnesses and written proof. You'll get a chance to ask questions of them later. The judge will either mail you the results or tell you at the hearing.

Small claims court actions are terrific for situations such a minor fender-bender with an uninsured driver for property damage, or in a dispute with a business about a defective product, or to collect from someone who owes you money. Neither side can bring a lawyer, and the process is meant to be informal. So, don't be afraid to give it a try if you feel wronged.