



A SHORT GUIDE

# Beginning a Court Case

The key steps to be aware of, and why you do not have to navigate them on your own.

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ENGLAND AND WALES

# Do you need to understand court procedure yourself?

## The short answer is no.

You do not need to be an expert in court procedure to bring or defend a case. When you instruct a Direct Access barrister, they can guide you through each stage, handle the technical parts, and explain what is happening in plain terms. Understanding the shape of the process simply helps you feel prepared and make decisions with confidence.

Most court cases in England and Wales follow a similar path. Here are the early steps to be aware of.

1

### Start with the pre-action stage

Courts expect both sides to try to resolve or narrow a dispute before a case is issued. This usually means setting out your position in writing and, for some types of claim, sending a formal letter before claim. Many disputes are settled at this stage, which saves time and cost.

2

### Work out where your case belongs

Different cases are handled by different courts, for example the family court, the county court, or an employment tribunal. Where your case sits affects the forms you use, the fees you pay, and how long things are likely to take.

3

### Starting the case

A case formally begins when the correct claim or application form and fee are submitted and the court issues it. The other party is then notified and given a set period to respond.

4

### The other side responds

The defendant or respondent files their response or defence. This is the point at which it becomes clear what is genuinely in dispute and what both sides already agree on.

## Building towards the hearing

5

### The court sets the timetable

The court gives directions, which is a schedule of deadlines. These cover exchanging documents, preparing witness statements, and the date of any hearing. Keeping to these dates matters.

6

### Prepare your evidence

This stage usually involves gathering your documents, sharing relevant material with the other side, and preparing witness statements. It is often the most involved part of a case, and the area where good guidance makes the biggest difference.

7

### Get ready for the hearing

Before a hearing you will usually need a hearing bundle and, in many cases, a written summary of your arguments. Knowing what to expect on the day helps you walk in feeling prepared rather than caught out.

### How a Direct Access barrister helps

A Direct Access barrister is a specialist you can instruct directly, without going through a solicitor first. They can advise you on the strength of your case, help with drafting and paperwork, represent you at hearings, and explain each step as it comes. For clearly defined issues, this route can be simpler and more cost-effective, while still giving you access to specialist expertise.

**Please note:** This guide is general information about court procedure in England and Wales. It is not legal advice and does not cover every situation, as rules and timescales vary by case type. For guidance on your own circumstances, speak to a qualified barrister.

See how Direct Access works  
[barristerconnect.com](https://barristerconnect.com)

