

Tips for phone and video hearings

Author

Northwest Justice Project

Last Review Date

November 20, 2024

How to get ready for and conduct yourself during a remote hearing (over the phone or by online video meetings).

Courts in Washington State can hold hearings by phone or online through a video meeting (**“remote” hearings**). Remote hearings became common starting in 2020 so courts could address health and safety risks due to the pandemic. Many courts still conduct hearings remotely.

This experience is different from an in-person hearing. In a remote, telephone, or video hearing, you can’t always see how the judge or other party reacts to what you say. Even on video conferences, some judges or parties might keep their camera off.

For general tips on court hearings and how to get ready for them, read [Practical tips for going to court](#).

How will I know if I have a remote hearing?

The court will notify you if your hearing is going to be remote. They may contact you by mail, email, or phone. Pay attention to any information that the court sends you and look for information about when and where the hearing will be. The link for the video hearing might not be shared until the day of your hearing. Or you may be told to use a general access link that is posted permanently to the court's website. Each court has its own procedures for remote hearings. The court will also let the other parties in your case know how to attend the hearing.

How do I get ready for a phone or video hearing?

You should get ready as far in advance as you can. Here are some things you should do:

- **Make sure you know how you'll join the hearing.** Find out if you'll call the court to join the hearing, and if so, how, or if the court will call you. Find out if you have to use a specific video meeting room link or if you'll use a link that is permanently available on the court's website. If you aren't sure, contact your court to ask. If you need specific technology but don't have it, tell the court ahead of time to find a solution.
- **Give your documents to the court.** Even though this is a remote hearing, you may still need to give the court documents before the hearing date, if you want to be able to talk about them at the hearing. If you need help with this, contact the court. You may be able to email the documents to the court or upload them to an online file portal.
- **Ask for an interpreter, if you need one.** You have the right to interpreter services at no cost to you for your remote hearing. Each court has a way for you to ask for an interpreter. Contact your court before your hearing to ask for an interpreter. The court will need time to

schedule the right kind of interpreter to help you during the hearing.

- **Ask for an accommodation for a disability that limits your ability to take part in the remote hearing.** Each court has a way to ask for an accommodation. Contact your court before the hearing to make this request.
- **Test all the technology** ahead of time if you can.
- **Be ready for other court goers to be in the video conference room** the same as they would be in a normal in-person court room.

Just before a phone or video hearing:

- **Try to find somewhere quiet and private** to be on the phone or on video. If you have kids, try to make sure you're not near them.
- **Join the hearing a few minutes early**, if you can. This can be a time to test the audio and video, even if you've already done it before.
- **Gather** your court papers, any notes you prepared, and paper and a pen. Read [Practical tips for going to court](#) to learn more.
- **Check how to mute and unmute** your phone line or your microphone on the video application. This is important. During the hearing, you should mute the line when it is not your turn to talk. You will want to unmute quickly when it is your turn. You might have to mute and unmute many times during a hearing.

During a phone or video hearing:

- **When you first join, listen to see what's happening.** Some hearings will have multiple people on the line. Your case may not be the only case. The hearing host may be able to tell right away that you've joined the hearing. Or the hearing host will ask everyone to identify themselves before the hearing starts. If you have a name badge option that you can

type in your name into, do that. This lets the judge and clerk know that you are present.

- **Direct all your statements and answers to the judge**, not the other person in your case. When it's your turn to talk, talk slowly and loudly so the judge can hear you clearly. If you're on video, look into the camera of your phone or computer. If you have headphones with a microphone, use them.
- On phone and video calls, it can be hard to know when it is your turn to talk. **Try very hard not to interrupt anyone**, even if the other person is saying something that you don't agree with or that isn't true. **Never interrupt the judge**. But if you have questions, it's ok to ask the judge, without interrupting anyone. You should say, "Your honor, may I say something."

If the hearing is a video hearing, here are some more tips:

- Dress neatly. Wear solid colors, if you can. This helps you look clear on video.
- Place your computer's camera at or slightly above eye level. If you're using your phone, prop it up so you can look at it without holding it.
- Try not to have a messy background behind you. A blank wall is better.
- Sit so your shoulders and upper arms show on the screen, like a newscaster.
- If you can, make sure the lighting is on your face instead of behind you.
- Use a chair that supports good posture.
- Face the camera, not the computer screen.
- If you can, use headphones that have a microphone instead of your computer speaker and microphone. The sound quality may be better.

NJP gratefully acknowledges the work of Carol Sowers. We adapted some of her NITA FAQ to create some of these tips.

WashingtonLawHelp.org gives general information. It is not legal advice. Find organizations that provide free legal help on our Get legal help page.