



How to Read a Court Notice

A Plain-Language Guide to Understanding Court Papers in Kentucky

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For: Kentucky residents, families, and incarcerated individuals

Purpose: Education & information only — not legal advice

WHY THIS DOCUMENT EXISTS

Court notices are often confusing, intimidating, and easy to misread.

People miss court dates, misunderstand deadlines, or panic — not because they don't care, but because the notice itself is hard to understand.

This guide is designed to help you:

- Understand what the notice is
- Find what matters most
- Know what (if anything) you need to do next
- Avoid missing important dates or deadlines

You do not need legal training to use this document.

WHAT IS A COURT NOTICE?

A court notice is an official paper sent by a court to inform you about something related to a case.

It may:

- Schedule a court date
- Notify you of a filing or decision
- Provide instructions or deadlines
- Inform you of a required action

■ ■ Important: Not all court notices require immediate action — but some do. This guide will help you tell the difference.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE COURT AND COUNTY

Look at the top portion of the notice.

You should see:

- Name of the court (District, Circuit, or Family Court)
- County (example: Henderson County, Jefferson County)
- State: Kentucky

Why this matters:

- Court procedures vary by court type
- The clerk's office you contact depends on the county

STEP 2: FIND THE CASE NUMBER

The case number is one of the most important pieces of information on the notice.

It is usually labeled:

- "Case No."
- "Case Number"
- "Action No."

Write this number down exactly as shown.

Why this matters:

- Clerks, attorneys, and courts will ask for it
- It helps you track filings and documents
- It distinguishes your case from others

STEP 3: IDENTIFY WHAT TYPE OF NOTICE THIS IS

Most court notices fall into one of these categories:

■ **Scheduling Notice**

Sets a court date, time, and location. Often titled “Notice of Hearing” or “Notice of Appearance”.

■ **Order**

A judge has made a decision. May require compliance (for example: conditions, deadlines).

■ **Filing Notice**

Informs you that something was filed in your case. May or may not require action.

■ **Summons or Citation**

Requires you to appear or respond. Often has strict deadlines.

If you’re unsure which type it is, assume it is important until confirmed otherwise.

STEP 4: LOOK FOR DATES, TIMES, AND DEADLINES

Circle or highlight any of the following:

- Court date
 - Time you must appear
 - Deadline to file or respond
 - “By” or “No later than” dates
- Missing a court date can result in serious consequences, including:
- Warrants
 - Additional charges
 - Negative outcomes in your case

If no date is listed, the notice may be informational — but you should still keep it.

STEP 5: READ FOR REQUIRED ACTIONS

Look for phrases such as:

- “You are ordered to...”
- “You must...”
- “Failure to comply may result in...”
- “Shall appear...”

If the notice tells you to do something, write down:

- What action is required
- When it must be done
- Where it must be done

STEP 6: CHECK HOW THE NOTICE WAS SENT

Notices may be sent:

- By mail
- Given to you in court
- Provided through jail administration
- Sent to an attorney on record

Why this matters:

Courts usually consider notices valid once sent.

“I didn’t see it” is often not accepted as an excuse.

STEP 7: WHAT TO DO IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE NOTICE

If something is unclear:

- Contact the court clerk listed on the notice
- Have your case number ready
- Ask what the notice means, not for legal advice

You can say:

"I received a notice in case number _____. I need help understanding what action is required."

STEP 8: WHAT NOT TO DO

- Do not ignore the notice
- Do not assume it doesn't apply to you
- Do not throw it away
- Do not rely on guesses or second-hand advice

Keep all notices together with your other court documents.

IF YOU ARE INCARCERATED

- Notices may be delayed through jail mail
- Deadlines may still apply

If possible:

- Notify your attorney
- Ask jail staff about legal mail
- Document when you received the notice

FINAL TIPS

- Keep a folder for all court papers
- Write dates on a calendar immediately
- Bring notices with you to court or legal meetings
- If in doubt, ask the clerk

IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

This document is for educational and informational purposes only.

It does not provide legal advice and does not replace an attorney.

Court procedures may vary by county and case type.