

GUIDELINES FOR TRIAL AND OTHER PROCEEDINGS IN THE COURTROOM  
JUDGE GENE E.K. PRATTER

TRIAL COUNSEL: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY. SHARE THESE GUIDELINES WITH YOUR CLIENTS AND COLLEAGUES WHO WILL BE PARTICIPATING IN TRIAL.

**Preface**

Compliance with these Guidelines is expected and will be appreciated. These Guidelines are not intended to be exhaustive; they may be curtailed or modified in some cases. Deviations, or requests for deviations, will be discussed at the pretrial conference(s).

Civility is the key to behavior in court – that includes everyone: the Judge, staff, lawyers and witnesses. If there are complaints about anyone’s civility, please bring the matter to the immediate attention of the Court by asking for a conference in Chambers.

**Promptness**

1. The Judge makes every effort to commence proceedings at the time set. Promptness is expected from counsel and witnesses. Known scheduling issues, or requests for scheduling changes should be raised with the Court at the earliest possible time. Schedule changes will be announced as soon as they are known.

2. During jury deliberations, counsel must be present or available on 15 minutes’ notice to counsel’s office. Otherwise, the right to be present may be waived, and counsel’s absence may be taken as counsel’s consent for proceedings to take place in the courtroom during counsel’s absence.

**Courtroom Decorum**

1. Keep the proceedings low-key and reasonably formal. It is not a circus, a stage for dramatic ability or an oratorical contest. It should be a dignified proceeding at all times.

2. Rise when the jury or the Judge enter and leave the courtroom.

3. Address all remarks to the Judge, not to opposing counsel. Colloquy or argument between or among attorneys is prohibited.

4. Rise when addressing the Judge and when making objections. (This calls the Judge’s attention to objecting counsel and makes it much easier for the court reporter.)

5. When offering a stipulation in a jury case, first confer with opposing counsel.

6. Do not exhibit familiarity with witnesses, jurors, or opposing counsel. Do not use first names for witnesses, parties or opposing counsel. During jury argument, do not address any juror individually or by name.

7. Do not bring food or beverages into the courtroom without the Court's express advance permission. (During lengthy proceedings the Court will allow counsel to keep unobtrusive mints and the like at counsel table.) Do not allow witnesses, co-counsel, legal assistants or visitors to chew gum, bring in packaged snacks, etc. Water will be available on the witness stand and on counsel tables.

8. When court is in session, do not address the reporter, ESR operator or Courtroom Deputy. All requests made of court personnel should be addressed to the Court.

9. Stand a respectful distance from the jury at all times.

10. Address the Court as "your Honor," not "Ma'am".

11. TURN OFF all cell phones, Blackberries, pagers or similar devices. These devices must remain off in the courtroom unless the Court gives express permission to the contrary. Do not operate Blackberries, text messaging devices or similar equipment to transmit at any time during any proceeding in the courtroom.

### **Statement of the Case**

Each party shall submit a "statement of the case" for use by the Court at the beginning of voir dire to advise the jurors of the nature of the case and the issues to be decided by the jury. The statement should be brief (normally two or three paragraphs in length) and neutral in tone and content.

### **Opening Statements**

Confine opening statements to what counsel expects the evidence to show. It is not proper to use the opening statement to argue the case, instruct as to the law, or explain the purpose of an opening statement. Presumably the Court has already done so. Unless the case is unusually complex, the average time for an opening statement should be about 30 minutes.

### **Voir Dire**

The Court will conduct voir dire of the jury. Counsel may be permitted to ask brief follow-up questions of the jurors. If allowed, use generic questions of the entire panel or address random jurors who raise a need for an individual response. Do not attempt to question each juror or condition jurors unless the Court specifically authorizes such a procedure. Typically the Court conducts individual follow-up voir dire at side bar with counsel and the specific juror.

## Witnesses

1. It is unnecessary to greet or introduce oneself to adverse witnesses. Commence cross-examination without preliminaries. The right to cross-examine is neither a right to examine crossly nor to ask the witness to pass on the credibility of another witness.
2. Examine witnesses while seated at counsel table, standing behind counsel table, or at the lectern, as directed by the Court. Generally, the Court expects counsel to use the lectern.
3. Do not approach a witness or the bench without leave of Court.
4. Do not hover over a witness, even when permission has been granted to approach the witness. Maintain a respectable distance from the witness.
5. If there is need to point to an exhibit or to use the easel when asking a question, return to counsel table or the lectern as soon as possible. Do not linger in the well of the court.
6. A whiteboard, white paper, chalk, pens, pointer, screen, TV and VCR are available. However, if counsel wants an x-ray viewing box, tape recorder or similar equipment, counsel must furnish it or make arrangements with the Courtroom Deputy at least one day in advance, preferably no later than the final pretrial conference.
7. Treat witnesses with fairness and consideration. Do not shout at, ridicule or otherwise abuse witnesses. Do not engage in argumentative “talking over” a witness who attempts to explain an answer. If appropriate, counsel should ask the Court to curtail the witness who is unresponsive.
8. Do not ever, by facial expression or other conduct, exhibit any opinion concerning any witness’ testimony. Counsel are to admonish their clients and witnesses about this common occurrence.
9. Do not ask the reporter/ESR operator to mark testimony. Address all requests for re-reading of questions and answers to the Judge.
10. If a witness is on the stand at a recess or adjournment, have the witness back on the stand ready to proceed when Court is resumed.
11. Do not delay proceedings by writing out witnesses’ answers during questioning. Charts and diagrams, where possible, should be prepared in advance, but counsel may use the writing board for opening statements and closing arguments.
12. Where a party has more than one lawyer, only one may conduct the direct or cross-examination of a given witness.

## **Objections**

1. When objecting, state only that there is an objection and briefly specify the ground(s). Do not use objections to make a speech, recapitulate testimony, or to guide the witness.
2. Do not argue an objection until the Judge grants permission or requests argument.
3. Give the Judge advance notice if there is reason to anticipate that any question of law or evidence is difficult or will provoke an argument.
4. Sidebar or chambers conferences during trial are not to be utilized for discussion of evidentiary issues that could be conducted at court recesses. If the issue is important enough to justify interruption of the trial, the jury will be excused and the matter heard in open court.

## **Exhibits**

1. All exhibits normally should be marked in advance.
2. If counsel desires to display exhibits to the jury, sufficient additional copies must be available to provide each juror with a copy. Alternatively, use enlarged photographic, projected copies or juror notebooks. When copies have been provided (as expected), the law clerk or Courtroom Deputy will hand out copies to the jurors.
3. Each counsel is responsible for any exhibits secured from the Deputy. At each noon-time or end-of-the-day adjournment, return all admitted exhibits to the Deputy. It is strongly recommended that counsel work together to make sure at least one extra set of clean exhibits is available in the courtroom.
4. If at all possible, let the Deputy know in advance the exhibits your next witness will be using.
5. Do not approach the witness with an exhibit without permission from the Judge.
6. Show documents and other exhibits, where practical, to opposing counsel before their use in court.
7. In a rare case, when it is necessary to mark an exhibit in open court, ask that the Deputy so mark it and briefly describe the nature of the exhibit.
8. Exhibits not previously offered at the pretrial conference should be offered in evidence when they become admissible rather than at the end of counsel's case.
9. When referring to an exhibit, mention the exhibit number so that the record will be clear.

10. Counsel must review and certify on the record that what goes to the jury is correct before closing arguments.

11. Ordinarily, exhibits will be returned to counsel at the end of trial.

### **Depositions**

1. All depositions used at the trial must be in accordance with the Local Rules.

2. Portions of depositions used for impeachment may be read to the jury during cross-examination, with pages and lines indicated for the record before reading. The witness should be asked whether he or she was asked the question(s) and gave the answer(s) on the date of the deposition(s).

### **Closing Arguments**

Counsel should never assert personal opinion of: 1) the credibility of a witness, 2) the culpability of a civil litigant, or 3) the guilt or innocence of an accused. Never assert personal knowledge of a fact in issue or a fact not in evidence, nor argue the “Golden Rule.”

### **Jury Instructions**

All requested instructions must be filed and served no later than the final pretrial conference or as otherwise ordered by the Court. Supplemental instructions must be filed and served as soon as the need for them becomes apparent. Attempt to agree on neutral instructions. Remember: less is better than more and “advocacy” instructions will be rejected. Joint submissions of instructions may be required.

### **Professionalism**

Remember – professionalism is paramount.