

CHAPTER 6

ORAL ARGUMENT

Oral argument is an opportunity for one or both of the parties to appear before the Court of Appeal and argue the merits of their case. At oral argument, each party has the opportunity to clarify the points made in their brief, re-emphasize what they think is most important about their arguments, and answer questions from the panel of three justices who ultimately decide the case. Oral argument is not a time to restate the facts of the case or repeat parts of the brief. The justices know what you said in your brief. They frown on arguments that merely repeat what they read in the briefs. Oral argument is the time to make sure that the Court understands the key issues of the case.

Requesting oral argument

Once the briefing process is complete, the Court begins reading the briefs and considering the issues on appeal. When the Court feels that it understands those issues, it sets a case for oral argument. The court notifies the parties that their case has been placed on an oral argument calendar for a specific date and asks the parties if they wish to argue the case orally. Unless directed to do so by the court, oral argument is optional. On this calendar notice, some divisions in the Second District may ask for an initial estimate of the time you need for argument. (CRC, rule [8.256\(b\)](#).) Others wait until you are in the courtroom to ask for your time estimate. You should let the court know right away if you cannot attend court on the assigned date. In order to formally request oral argument, you must return this calendar notice promptly to the Court of Appeal by mail, in person or electronically. (See [Appendix 7](#).) Some Divisions in the Second District require [Proof of Service](#) on the other parties in the case when you return the calendar notice. Read the notice carefully to determine if you must serve the calendar notice, indicating whether you want oral argument.

Preparing for oral argument

The best way to prepare for oral argument is to review your case as thoroughly as possible. You should look at the record again and the arguments in the briefs so that you are very familiar with your case in the event one or more of the justices asks you questions about the facts or the legal argument. Make an outline of the points you wish to emphasize and the responses you would make to possible questions the court might raise or arguments that opposing counsel might raise. Review your opponents brief and prepare responses to the strongest points in their argument. Be prepared to be flexible.

You need to review all of the items you have cited in your brief to make sure nothing has been overruled by the California Supreme Court and that there are no new court decisions or new statutes that might affect your case. If you do have new authority, you should let the court and opposing counsel know what it is in writing before the argument. This is most important if you intend to mention the new material in your oral argument. If you learn of the new case or other authority well in advance of oral argument, you may wish to ask the court for leave so that you and opposing counsel can file supplemental letter briefs concerning the new authorities before the matter is heard. You may make such a request with an informal letter to the court as long as you send a copy to opposing counsel.

If at all possible, you should take the time before your argument date to come to the court and observe oral argument. Oral argument is held most weekdays, but you can check the oral argument calendar online. If you cannot access the internet or need more information, you should call the clerk's office to confirm the date you wish to come since you may have selected a morning or afternoon when calendar is not scheduled. Argument is open to the public so you don't need special permission to attend.

Oral argument

Argument is held before a panel of three justices. Oral argument in Divisions 1-5 and 7-8 is held at the Court of Appeal, 300 South Spring Street, Los Angeles, CA 90013. The courtroom is located on the third floor. Oral argument before Division 6 is held at 200 East Santa

Clara Street, Ventura, CA 93001. When you arrive for oral argument you will go through security, enter the courtroom, and check in with the court clerk, giving your name and a time estimate. The maximum time for argument in the Court of Appeal is 30 minutes for each side (CRC, rule [8.256\(c\)\(2\)](#)), although in complex cases it may be longer.

Once in the courtroom, sit in the audience until your case is called. When the justices enter the courtroom all persons rise. The presiding justice or the most senior justice sits in the middle and calls the calendar. Generally, but not always, the cases are heard in order with the cases taking the shortest time going first.

The Second District sits on the bench in Divisions that are comprised of four justices. Of the four, however, only three sit on the panel for any one case. Those three justices write the opinion that decides the outcome of the appeal. The names of the three justices on the panel for your case are available in the printed court calendar that is distributed at the Court on the day of oral argument. You can see the names of all the justices on nameplates that sit on the front of the bench.

When your case is called, walk to the podium area. The appellant sits at the table to the left of the podium and the respondent sits at the table to the right of the podium. The appellant argues first. If you are the appellant and wish to save part of your argument time to answer the respondent's argument, tell the justices that before you start your argument and tell them how long you want for that purpose. Be aware the justices generally will stop you when you have used up the time you told them you wanted for argument. When that occurs you should do no more than complete the sentence you are speaking. If you are the appellant and have requested time for rebuttal you are limited in the rebuttal to talking about only those arguments that the respondent has used. You may not present any new arguments at that time.

Often counsel will begin with the words "may it please the court." Whether you start with that or not, you should identify yourself saying that you are self-represented. By the time of oral argument, the three justices on the panel who hear your case are familiar with the facts of your case, the arguments you have raised and the law involved. Thus, there is no need for you to repeat anything that you have already told

the court in your briefs. If you do not have anything to present other than what is in your briefs you should waive oral argument.

If, however, you have decided to argue orally, you should proceed in a conversational tone, limit your comments to things which happened during the trial that you believe were in error and are part of your appeal. You may not bring up any brand new argument or fact that was not included in the record or in your brief. But you can attempt to clarify any points that might have been unclear in your brief or so complicated that they might be difficult to understand. As in the briefs, your oral argument should refer back to legal authority for justification. Be as clear and to the point as possible. During your remarks one or more of the justices may ask you questions. If so, stop what you are saying and answer the question. If you do not know the answer to the question, just say so.

Refer to the justices as “Justice [Last Name]” if you feel comfortable identifying them by name, or simply as “Your honor.” Be respectful to the justices; do not raise your voice, pound on the lectern, or use inappropriate language. Being respectful of the Court can only help your case.

After all the briefs have been filed and oral argument, if requested, has been held, the case is “submitted.” If you do not request oral argument, your case will be submitted at the same time as the cases that were argued on the same oral argument calendar. After the case is submitted, the court does not accept any further information about the case. (CRC, rule 8.256(d).) The justices on the panel discuss the case, and decide what they think is the correct disposition. A decision is then filed within 90 days after the end of the month in which the case is submitted.