

What is “service”?

“Service” or “serving” is when someone—*not you or anyone else listed in this case*—gives a copy of your court papers to the person, business, or public entity you are suing. Service lets the other party know:

- What you are asking for;
- When and where the trial will be; *and*
- What the party can choose to do.

There are strict rules for serving court papers. This form explains how to serve these forms:

- Form SC-100, *Plaintiff’s Claim*
- Form SC-120, *Defendant’s Claim*
- Form SC-500, *Plaintiff’s Claim (COVID-19 Rental Debt)*

How is service done?

This form tells you how to serve by *personal* service or *substituted* service.

Personal service means someone gives the papers directly to the person being sued or to the agent authorized to accept service (business or public entity).

Substituted service means someone gives the papers to an adult where the person lives, works, or receives mail (including a private post office box, but not a U.S. Postal Service P.O. Box).

What if the court papers do not get served?

The judge cannot hear your case unless the court papers were served correctly.

Can the court serve the papers for me?

Yes. You can pay the court to mail your claim to the person you are suing. But if the person you are suing or the person’s agent for service doesn’t sign the U.S. Postal Service mail receipt with his or her complete name, or if someone else signs the receipt, you will have to serve again using personal or substituted service.

Who can serve?

You can ask a friend, a process server, or the sheriff. The server must be at least 18 and not listed in the case.

A “process server” is someone you pay to deliver court forms. Look in the *Yellow Pages* under “Process Serving.” The sheriff (or marshal if your county has one) can also deliver court forms. Ask the court clerk how to contact the sheriff. Or look in the county section of your phone book under “Sheriff.” You must pay the server, unless you qualify for a fee waiver.

How is *personal* service done?

Ask someone who is at least 18 and not listed in this case to personally “serve” (give) a copy of your court papers to the person or the agent authorized to accept court papers for the person, business, or public entity listed on form SC-104.

Give the server a separate *Proof of Service* form for each person, business, or public entity you are suing. And tell the server to:

- Walk up to the person to be served.
- Say, “These are court papers.”
- Give the person copies of all papers checked on form SC-104, *Proof of Service*. If the person won’t take the papers, just leave them near the person. It doesn’t matter if the person tears them up.
- Fill out and sign page 2 of form SC-104, *Proof of Service*.

How is *substituted* service done?

If you don’t want to use personal service or can’t find the person to be served, ask someone who is at least 18 and not listed in this case to serve the court papers.

Give the server a separate *Proof of Service* form for each person, business, or public entity you are suing. Tell the server to give the papers to:

- A competent adult (at least 18) at the home of and living with the person to be served *or*
- An adult who seems to be in charge where the person to be served usually works *or*
- An adult who seems to be in charge where the person receives mail (including a private mailbox, but **not** a U.S. Postal Service P.O. Box). *Note:* This is only for cases where the physical address of the person to be served is not known.

Then do the following:

- Write down that person’s name and say, “Please give these court papers to [name of person to be served].” If the person does not want to give his or her name, describe the person you served.
- Give that person copies of all papers checked on form SC-104, *Proof of Service*. If the person won’t take the papers, just leave them near the person.
- Mail another copy of the papers (by first-class mail) to the person being sued at the same address where you left the papers.
- Fill out and sign page 2 of form SC-104, *Proof of Service*.

What does the server do with the original Proof of Service form?

If a process server or sheriff served the papers, he or she can file form SC-104, *Proof of Service*, with the clerk. If the server used a different *Proof of Service* form, ask him or her to list each paper served on the form. Also make sure that the registered server will file the original directly with the court and will mail you a copy of the filed form. Take it with you when you go to court.

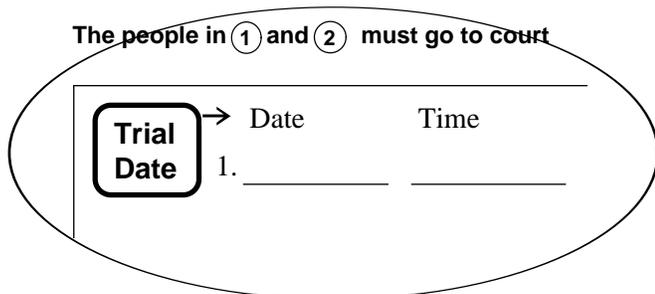
If a friend served the papers, tell him or her to give the completed form back to you. Keep a copy for your records and take the copy with you when you go to court.

You need to file the original completed *Proof of Service* form **5 days before** your trial.

When do the court forms have to be served?

- **If you are serving form SC-100, *Plaintiff’s Claim*, or form SC-500, *Plaintiff’s Claim (COVID-19 Rental Debt)***, look at the trial date on page 1. Then, look at a calendar.

For *personal* service, subtract 15 days from the trial date (or 20 days if the person, business, or public entity is located outside the county). That’s the deadline for serving your small claims forms. But you can serve the forms before the deadline.



For *substituted* service, subtract 25 days from the date the server mailed a copy of the court papers served (or 30 days if the person, business, or public entity is located outside the county). That’s the deadline for serving your small claims forms. But you can serve the forms before the deadline.

If the person, business, or public entity to be served is outside California or if you are serving a different form, ask the Small Claims Advisor for more information.

- **If you are serving form SC-120, *Defendant’s Claim***, look at the trial date on page 1. Then look at a calendar.

For *personal* or *substituted* service, subtract 5 days from the trial date. That’s the deadline for serving your small claims forms if you were served at least 11 days before the trial. If you were served 10 days or less before the trial date, you must serve at least 1 day before the trial. But you can serve the forms before the deadline.

What if I can’t get the court papers served before the trial?

If you were not able to serve your claim (form SC-100, SC-120, or SC-500) before the deadline for service, talk to your Small Claims Clerk. Each county has its own rules.

If you already served your claim on some parties but not everyone you are suing, you may need to fill out and file form SC-150, *Request to Postpone Trial*, at least 10 days before the trial date (or explain why you couldn’t meet the 10-day deadline). Then give or mail a copy of this form to all other plaintiffs and defendants listed on your court papers.

The court may postpone your trial for 15 days or more.

Who do I have to serve?

If you are suing a person (or people)—not a business or public entity—serve each person you are suing. For example, if you were in a car accident and you are suing the owner and the driver of the car, you must list the names of the owner *and* the driver on your claim and serve both people.

Examples:

If the owner and driver are the same person:
Lee Smith, owner and driver

If the owner and driver are not the same person:
Lee Smith, owner and driver
Bob Smith, owner

If you are suing a business, an association, or a public entity, read form SC-104C, *How to Serve a Business*.

Need help?

Your county’s Small Claims Advisor can help for free.

Or go to “County-Specific Court Information” at