

INFORMATION FOR SELF-REPRESENTED (PRO SE) PARTIES

The following outline provides a general progression of a small claims case. Please be advised, this guide does not address all potential scenarios, hearing types, or available forms of relief that may be available. For legal advice specific to your situation, it is strongly recommended that you consult an attorney.

Step by Step Through Small Claim Court

① Service must be completed at least 7 days prior to the Pretrial Conference (Rule 7.070)

The case file must show when and how the service was completed.

Note: If the defendant is not properly served, the Pretrial Conference will be canceled. The plaintiff will need to coordinate with the Clerk of Court another attempt at serving the other party. The Clerk will reschedule the Pretrial Conference to a new date.

② Attend the Pretrial Conference

Both parties are required to attend. The conference is held remotely via Zoom video or telephone.*video is the preferred method. If the defendant fails to appear, move to step 6.

Mediation will take place during the scheduled Pretrial Conference. A Florida Certified Mediator, acting as a neutral party, will assist the parties in working toward a resolution but will not make any recommendations.

[Click here to learn more about mediation in Florida.](#)

If you reach a settlement at mediation, you will not need to attend trial. The mediator will prepare the settlement agreement, which the Court will adopt, and the case will then be closed.

③ If Mediation Fails- the case will be set for a Docket Sounding

Before a Trial date is scheduled, the parties will attend in person a Docket Sounding before the County Judge.

During Docket Sounding, the Court will review any settlement efforts, discuss the number of witnesses expected, estimate the trial duration, address exhibits or other evidence, and identify facts both parties agree on to help expedite the trial.

The Plaintiff must appear in person to avoid having the case dismissed for lack of prosecution.

The Defendant must appear in person to avoid having a Default Judgment entered against them.

The trial date and time will be provided at the Docket Sounding.

④ The Trial

You must present your case, evidence, and witnesses clearly and briefly.

The judge (not a jury, unless requested) will decide based on facts and evidence.

A Judgment will be entered in favor of one party.

[Click here to view the Florida Small Claims Rules \(Rules 7.010–7.350\).](#)

⑤ Collection

The court cannot collect money damages for you. You may wish to consult with an attorney for advice on how to collect a judgment. [Click here for information on how to collect a judgment in Florida from the Florida Department of State.](#) Refer to the *Method of Collection* on this page: [Click here to visit the Charlotte County Clerk's Small Claims Court information page.](#)

⑥ Defendant did not appear to Pretrial Conference- the case will be set for a Final Hearing



If the defendant fails to appear at the Pretrial Conference and a Default is entered, the plaintiff must submit additional documents such as an **Affidavit of Amount Owed** and a **proposed Judgment**. [Click here to access these forms.](#)

Even if a Final Hearing is scheduled, a self-represented plaintiff must still complete and submit these documents. If the Court enters a Judgment before the hearing date, the hearing will be canceled without further notice.

[Click here to check the judge's court schedule and confirm if your hearing was canceled.](#)

For information on collecting the judgment, see Step 5.

For help with forms or non-legal procedure questions, contact the Small Claims Clerk:

 (941) 637-2119 |  SmallClaims@CharlotteClerk.com