

**TRIAL GUIDELINES**  
**Judge Matthew Rambo**  
**Court of Common Pleas**  
**Geauga County, Ohio**

Different judges have different rules, procedures, and preferences. The purpose of these trial guidelines is to assist counsel in preparing for trial and in presenting his or her case. Although some of the items are direct to jury trials, the guidelines where appropriate, are intended to be applicable to bench trials or hearings. If you believe that a guideline is not practical or needs to be modified for a particular matter or if you have a question regarding a guideline, please bring it to the Court's attention prior to trial.

**GENERAL**

1. Counsel and parties are expected to be present and ready to enter the courtroom at the time scheduled for trial. On the first day of a jury trial, counsel and parties shall be present at least thirty minutes before the scheduled time.
2. It is not unusual that more than one trial or hearing is scheduled for the same day. Court staff will **not** inform you whether your case is primary. If we become aware that another case is likely to proceed and your case will not be going forward, we will inform all counsel as soon as possible. However, you must assume that your case is primary and will be heard on the scheduled day unless you are advised otherwise.
3. Domestic Relations cases are not automatically scheduled for a pretrial. If you believe that a pretrial would be helpful in settling or narrowing issues, please request that one be scheduled.
4. Motions for continuances must be in writing and should state whether opposing counsel has been consulted. If a continuance is being sought because of a scheduling conflict, evidence of the conflicting event must be attached. In the case of matters in other courts, the hearing notice must be attached. Continuance requests must be accompanied by a proposed judgment entry.
5. Please instruct parties and witnesses to dress appropriately. Shorts, t-shirts, sweatshirts, etc., are not acceptable, nor is the wearing of coats, jackets, or hats in the courtroom. Also, please ask you parties and witnesses to not chew gum while testifying or addressing the Court.
6. Pagers, cellular phones, portable radios, and similar devices should be left out of the courtroom or rendered inaudible. A beeping pager or ringing telephone may well become property of the Court.
7. Please do not talk at the same time as the Judge, opposing counsel, or a witness. As good as the Court Reporter is, she cannot write more than one speaker at a time. If you wish to have testimony read back, ask the Judge, not the Court Reporter.
8. Examination of witnesses shall be done either from the lectern or from counsel's table. Counsel will only approach the witness stand to hand an exhibit to a witness or to point out something in an exhibit. Exhibits, photographs, notepads, etc. will **not** be placed on the rail of the jury box during a jury trial.

9. Refer to counsel, parties, and witnesses as Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms. Except for children, first names should be avoided.
10. Please refrain from attempting to influence the jury or the Court by means of facial expression, noises, sighing, stage whispers, editorial comments, or eye-rolls.
11. During short-term recesses and breaks, do not leave the second floor without informing the Court's Bailiff, Reporter, or Secretary that you are doing so.
12. Only one attorney per party shall approach the Bench for a sidebar conference. Please keep your voice down and turn away from the jury.
13. Don't make any speaking objections in a jury case except for an explanatory single word or two (e.g. "hearsay," "leading," "no foundation,") DO request a sidebar conference if you must expound on your objections.
14. Opposing counsel are not expected to respond to an objection unless requested to do so. Although counsel are normally expected to stand when addressing the Court, it is not necessary to do so when objecting.

## **WITNESSES**

1. Please have **four** copies of your witness list available prior to the trial, one for the Judge, one for the Bailiff, one for the Court Reporter, and one for opposing counsel. The witness list should have the correct spelling of the witness' name and a current residence or business address, if known.
2. It is counsel's duty to have witnesses present to avoid any delay in the proceedings. If a witness cannot be available until a certain time or must leave, make arrangements with the Court and opposing counsel to take a witness out of turn. Do not expect an early recess because trial went faster than anticipated and you have run out of witnesses.
3. Be sure and instruct witnesses to answer audibly and to say "Yes" or "No" not "yeah" or "uh-huh".
4. In trials to the Court, written curriculum vitae, marked as an exhibit, will usually suffice for the qualifications of an expert witness.
5. Inform the Court in advance of trial if counsel believes it may be necessary to *voir dire* a witness as to qualifications or for any other reason.
6. When questioning from a deposition transcript, refer the Court and opposing counsel to the page and the line numbers.
7. If a witness is expected to use scientific or technical terms, it would be helpful to supply the Court Reporter with a glossary of those terms.
8. When possible, witnesses should prepare diagrams or drawings before trial or during breaks. If a witness intends to use audio-visual equipment, please make advance arrangements with the Bailiff.

## **EXHIBITS**

1. Prepare an index of the exhibits, which you expect to offer. A copy of the index shall be given to the Judge, the Bailiff, the Court Reporter, and to opposing counsel. You are not required to offer exhibits in sequence, nor must you offer all of the exhibits that you have listed. However, if you have failed to list an exhibit, you may be precluded from offering it unless there is a good explanation for the omission.
2. Exhibits must be marked before trial or hearing. Plaintiff's exhibits are marked in **numerically and in alphabetical** sequence.
3. A copy of each exhibit **shall** be provided to opposing counsel before trial. Because exhibits have been exchanged before trial, it is not necessary to interrupt trial so opposing counsel can review an exhibit.
4. It is expected that you have met with witnesses and reviewed documents before entering the courtroom. The trial or hearing is not the time to ask a witness if he or she has brought the subpoenaed documents and then attempt to sort through what has been produced. Be sure that you have informed records custodians and that they may bring duplicates so that original documents don't have to be left with the Court.
5. It is the Court's practice to wait until a party is about to rest before ruling on admission of exhibits. If counsel believes it is critical to address admission of a specific exhibit prior to that time, please inform the Court in advance.
6. After direct or cross-examination of a witness, be sure that all exhibits are given to the Court Reporter. Attorneys shall not leave the Courtroom with exhibits that have been offered and identified.
7. Diagrams, charts, summaries, "blow-ups", etc. shall be shown to opposing counsel before they are shown to the Court or a jury.
8. It is not this Court's practice to publish or pass around exhibits during the trial. The jury will have the exhibits in the jury room, which provides ample opportunity to examine the exhibits.

## **VOIR DIRE**

1. The case may not be argued in any way while questioning the jurors during *voir dire*.
2. Counsel shall not engage in efforts to indoctrinate jurors.
3. Jurors may not be questioned concerning anticipated instructions or theories of law.
4. Jurors may not be asked what kind of verdict they might return under any circumstance.
5. Counsel shall not make bargains, deals, or agreements with the jurors.
6. The Court will ask the prospective jurors basic background questions. Counsel shall not repeat the questions of the Court.

7. Whenever possible, questions shall be asked collectively of the entire panel. Counsel will not ask the same question of each juror, individually.
8. Juror questionnaires are available the business day prior to the trial. You may preview the questionnaires, but copies will not be provided until the day of trial. You should not repeat questions that have already been answered on the questionnaire.
9. The purpose of *voir dire* is to have an unbiased, impartial jury. Counsel will not be permitted to inquire as to favorite movies, last book read, and items of that nature. Similarly, counsel will not share anecdotes or personal history with prospective jurors.
10. Jurors are generally NOT permitted to take notes during trial. Exceptions may apply for cases that are lengthy or complicated in nature based upon discussions between Counsel and the Court.
11. When proposed jury instructions are submitted, if the instructions are other than standard OJI, please provide citations to the statutes or cases that provide authority for the proposed instruction.
12. If proposed jury interrogatories are submitted, each interrogatory must be on a separate page and include appropriate signature lines. Do **not** number the interrogatories. Interrogatories **must** address determinative issues and **must** be based upon the evidence presented. The Court will reject proposed interrogatories, which are ambiguous, confusing, redundant, legally objectionable, unnecessary, or are not on separate pages with signature lines.