



Court Procedures

Hon. Charles R. Eskridge III

These procedures apply to civil and criminal actions assigned to Judge Charles Eskridge.

When serving the summons and complaint or removal papers, Plaintiff must serve these procedures together with the Court's Order for Conference and Disclosure of Interested Persons.

Direct inquiries regarding any case assigned to Judge Eskridge to:

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1. Applicability and compliance

- a. **Cases applicable.** These procedures apply to all civil and criminal cases assigned to Judge Charles Eskridge except for the following categories of cases:

- Prisoner civil rights;
- Habeas corpus;
- Administrative agency appeals;
- Miscellaneous government cases, such as subpoena enforcement, forfeiture, and the like; and
- Miscellaneous matters, such as motions to quash.

- b. **Strict compliance.** The Court requires strict compliance with these procedures. Use them together with the Local Rules and the Federal Rules of Civil and Criminal Procedure, with preference to these procedures on any inconsistency.

Failure to follow these procedures and applicable rules may subject counsel and client or *pro se* parties to appropriate relief or dismissal.

- c. **Forms.** Visit the Court's website and review the available forms. Use these forms when applicable.
- d. **Additional information.** Additional information, forms, and the Local Rules are available on the website of the Southern District of Texas. A directory of useful numbers for the Office of the Clerk is Attachment 1.
- e. **Service.** Plaintiff must formally serve these procedures with the summons and complaint. File proof of service.
- f. **Additional requirements in removed cases.** Review Form 1 to see the necessary information required in removed cases.

The removing party must make certificate of service and provide the additional information within ten days of removal. The Court may summarily remand for failure of compliance.

2. Electronic filing and service

- a. **E-filing required.** All parties must file documents through the Case Management/Electronic Case Filing System pursuant to LR5.1 and CrLR49. Obtain and follow the Administrative Procedures for Electronic Filing in Civil and Criminal Cases from the website of the Southern District of Texas.
- b. **Service.** For parties represented by counsel with CM/ECF credentials, filing through the CM/ECF system constitutes sufficient service on other parties. For other parties, provide formal service in compliance with applicable rules.

3. Emergencies

- a. **Ex parte applications in civil cases.** The Court doesn't entertain *ex parte* applications for restraining orders unless the initiating party satisfies the requirements of Rule 65(b).
- b. **Filing and service.** File any application for restraining orders or other immediate relief through the CM/ECF system. In addition to service required by rule, the initiating party must in good faith attempt immediate informal service on the opposing party by any available means, including forward of the application to last-known mail and email addresses.
- c. **Communication.** Make all related communications through the Case Manager via telephone or email.
- d. **Disposition.** The Case Manager will present the application to the Court after receiving written affirmation from the initiating party of contact with the opposing party and availability of all parties for a conference before the Court. Alternatively, the initiating party may provide written explanation that no legal requirement for such contact applies.

The Court orders conference or hearing as determined advisable. The Court will direct relief and discovery as determined advisable.

- e. **Emergency motions.** File emergency motions on the CM/ECF system. Then send a copy by email directly to the Case Manager so that it quickly reaches the Court's attention.

Motions for extension of deadlines aren't emergencies.

4. Consent to proceed before Magistrate Judge in civil cases

- a. **Agreement required.** The parties by agreement may elect to proceed before the Magistrate Judge assigned to the Court.
- b. **Required form.** Use Form 2 to give consent to proceed before the Magistrate Judge.

Follow the instructions. Don't alter the form.

5. Informal communication with the Court

- a. **Informal communication disfavored.** The Court disfavors informal communication about cases except as stated in these procedures. Don't address substantive issues in informal communication. Address such issues only through written filings and in-person conferences and hearings.

Neither the Case Manager, the Law Clerks, nor other personnel provide legal advice or predict what the Court will do on a given matter.

- b. **Case Manager as main point of contact.** Direct all informal communications to the Court through the Case Manager. Unless stated otherwise below, use the following:
 - Letters to initiate discovery and scheduling disputes under Section 15;
 - Letters or email for other minor procedural questions;
 - Email or telephone for matters requiring prompt attention; and
 - Fax only with prior permission of the Court.
 - c. **Law Clerks.** A Law Clerk may contact counsel with a specific inquiry at the Court's direction. Don't initiate contact with the Law Clerks unless returning a message. Don't discuss matters beyond the indicated subject.
 - d. **Status inquiries.** Seek answers when possible from the District Court's website or its directory at Attachment 1.

Review information on status of documents, entry of orders, and docket entries on the CM/ECF system prior to contacting the Court. Direct filing questions to the Office of the Clerk.
 - e. **Service and filing.** Prior to or with delivery of any letter or email to the Court, use the same means to provide a copy to all other parties. Don't file copies of letters or email on the CM/ECF system. The Court docket or directs filing as determined advisable.
6. **Court copies**
- a. **When required.** Promptly submit a courtesy copy of:
 - Documents of fifty pages or more in length, including exhibits;
 - Documents filed under seal regardless of length;
 - Documents pertaining to matters being heard by the Court within seven days of filing; and
 - Joint Pretrial Orders and other trial material.
 - b. **Form.** When providing copies of filings over fifty pages, print double-sided and submit in a binder. Organize exhibits and attachments by tab at the right margin. Use the smallest binders that comfortably hold the material, but not larger than four inches. Divide into multiple binders when necessary.

Provide courtesy copies marked with the file-stamped CM/ECF system docket number unless submitted on an urgent basis.
 - c. **Delivery to chambers.** Mail or hand-deliver courtesy copies to the

attention of the Case Manager with a transmittal letter specifying the content.

Don't file transmittal letters. Mail or email a copy of such letters without attachments to all other parties.

7. Attorney appearances

- a. **Notice of appearance.** All counsel who wish to receive CM/ECF notices must file a notice of appearance. Inclusion of names in the signature block of a pleading doesn't constitute notice of appearance.
- b. **Attorney in charge.** Counsel designated of record as *in charge* must attend all settings or send a designated alternate.
- c. **Appearance at hearing.** Any counsel or *pro se* party who appears at a hearing or conference must be:
 - Fully familiar with the facts and the law applicable to the case;
 - Prepared to argue any pending motion and to discuss any anticipated motion; and
 - Authorized to bind the client to stipulations relating to the appearance.
- d. **Failure to appear.** Failure to appear when notified of a setting may subject the attorney and/or the party to sanctions, including dismissal for want of prosecution or other appropriate order or judgment.
- e. ***Pro hac vice* admissions.** Include the applicant's averment of familiarization with these procedures and the Local Rules with any application for *pro hac vice* admission.

Don't seek *pro hac vice* admission for an attorney located within the Houston area.
- f. **Conduct.** The guidelines for professional conduct set forth in the Local Rules are Attachment 2. All counsel and *pro se* parties must always observe these guidelines. Bring contrary conduct to the Court's attention immediately.

8. Telephonic participation

- a. **Limitation of use.** Except for disputes under Section 15, the Court disfavors telephonic appearances.
- b. **Written request.** Submit requests establishing good cause for telephonic appearance by email reasonably far in advance.
- c. **Land line required.** Make any telephonic appearance by land line. The Court prohibits use of cellular or speaker phones absent unusual circumstances.

9. Initial settings and filings in civil cases

Observe LR16.1. In addition:

- a. **Initial settings.** Review Form 3 to see the form of Order for Conference and Disclosure of Interested Parties.

The Court promptly issues this order to:

- Establish the parties' Rule 26(f) meet-and-confer deadline;
- Establish the filing deadline for the Joint Discovery/Case Management Plan; and
- Set the date for the Rule 16 initial pretrial conference.

- b. **Joint Discovery/Case Management Plan.** Review Form 4 to see the form of Joint Discovery/Case Management Plan.

All parties must sign and counsel for plaintiff must file a single, completed joint plan. Follow Rule 26(f) in all respects. Parties proceeding *pro se* or counsel with knowledge of the case and authority to address substantive and scheduling matters must attend the conference between the parties.

- c. **Scheduling and Docket Control Order.** Review Forms 5a and 5b to see the form of Scheduling and Docket Control Order applicable to individual and class actions.

The Court typically sets dates and enters the appropriate order approximately one week in advance of the initial pretrial conference. Confer in good faith and prepare to discuss adjustments at conference with reasons in support. The Court will not grant wide variance but will consider reasonable modification.

- d. **Specialized discovery protocols.** The following forms typically apply in the indicated actions:

- Form 6, Initial Discovery Protocols for Employment Cases Alleging Adverse Actions;
- Form 7, Initial Discovery Protocols for Fair Labor Standards Act Cases Not Pledged as Collective Action; and
- Form 8, Initial Discovery Protocols for Post-Disaster First-Party Property Insurance Disputes.

The Court requires these discovery protocols unless otherwise ordered. Prepare to discuss their usefulness and any modifications at the initial pretrial conference.

- e. **Initial pretrial conference.** The Court sets an initial pretrial conference between sixty and ninety days from filing of the case. Plaintiff may request reasonable continuance if it has not perfected service.

The Court may cancel the conference when determined advisable. Any party may request reinstatement by joint or individual letter or email with explanation why the conference remains necessary.

Prepare to discuss all matters covered by Rules 16 and 26(f), the Joint Discovery/Case Management Plan, and the Scheduling and Docket Control Order. Prepare to argue any pending motions.

- f. **Orders of dismissal for want of prosecution.** The Court may dismiss for want of prosecution any defendant upon whom plaintiff hasn't perfected service within ninety days after filing the complaint pursuant to Rule 4(m).

10. Continuances

- a. **Approval required.** The Court modifies the Scheduling and Docket Control Order only upon motion establishing good cause. Agreements on continuance of deadlines don't bind the Court.

Requested changes must include recommended dates to adjust all deadlines following the first modification.

- b. **Discovery deadlines.** Parties may agree to extension of discovery deadlines without seeking approval when the extension doesn't affect the Docket Control Order or other deadline set by the Court.
- c. **Vacation requests.** The Court respects and seeks to accommodate vacation and family requests if made well in advance of a hearing or trial setting.

11. Expedited trial alternative in civil cases

- a. **Appropriate matters.** Many cases aren't complex and require neither substantial discovery nor lengthy trial. The Court provides the option of an abbreviated scheduling order and expedited bench or jury trial to afford less expensive proceedings in such matters.

- b. **Simplified discovery.** All parties must agree to streamline discovery by:

- Foregoing interrogatories and requests for admission;
- Producing documents according to targeted and agreed document requests;
- Taking no more than three depositions per side, limited to three hours per deposition; and
- Proceeding without experts.

The parties may modify these discovery limits by agreement so long as Court intervention is not necessary.

- c. **Abbreviated motion practice.** The Court will not entertain motions under Rules 12(b) or 12(c) but will entertain motions under Rule 56.

- d. **Request.** Advise by letter as soon as possible to request this alternative. The Court endeavors to set a date for trial within six months of service of the complaint or on a longer timeline as requested.

12. Protective orders and filings under seal

- a. **Protective orders.** Review Form 9 to see the form of Standard Protective Order.

The Court typically enters this order upon motion of either party after considering any requested modifications. If any party believes the matter requires a different form of protective order, jointly confer in good faith regarding appropriate terms and file either a joint or opposed motion for entry.

Upon entry of a protective order, the parties' confidentiality designations govern disclosure and use of documents produced during discovery.

- b. **Motion required to seal.** A presumption exists as to public access to judicial records. The Court disfavors the filing of any pleading, brief, or supporting material under seal. Seek alternate permission by motion establishing good cause as follows.

Under seal, file the at-issue pleading, brief, or other material. On the public record, separately file a motion to seal. Prepare and attach to the motion a redacted version of the material suitable to and proposed for filing on the public docket. In the alternative, establish cause why redaction isn't possible.

Identify all under-seal filings on the CM/ECF system with an informative title and designation of SEALED. For example, *Motion for Summary Judgment (SEALED)*. Absent alternate permission, don't simply identify a document as *SEALED DOCUMENT* without explanation.

- c. **Disposition.** The Court promptly considers such motions and directs filings under seal or on the public docket as appropriate.

13. Initial disclosures and commencement of discovery in civil cases

- a. **Initial disclosures.** Commence initial disclosures immediately. Include production of copies of all documents responsive to the categories listed in Rule 26(a).

- b. **Commencement of discovery.** The parties may commence discovery by agreement once plaintiff perfects service of the complaint on all defendants. Absent agreement, the Court will determine when to commence discovery at the initial pretrial conference.

- c. **Proportionality required.** Frame all interrogatories, document re-

quests, and requests for admissions to meet relevance and proportionality requirements of Rule 26(b)(1).

- d. Objections.** State only specific objections. Observe the following:
- Don't state boilerplate objections or include any preamble;
 - Don't state general or rote objections;
 - Don't state any objection to the extent that it might apply and instead specify all objections exactly;
 - Don't state any response as subject to a stated objection without specifying the extent to which a party withholds information on that basis; and
 - Don't state that more information will or may follow later without specifying a reasonable deadline for completion.

- e. Electronically stored information.** Review Form 10 to see the form of Standard E-Discovery Order.

The Court typically enters this order upon motion of either party after considering any requested modifications. If any party believes the matter requires a different form of order, jointly confer in good faith regarding appropriate terms and file either a joint or opposed motion for entry.

Absent other order, produce ESI in the native format kept by the producing party or in a common interchange format accessible by the opposing party. The Court initially limits production of ESI to the files of five custodians selected by the opposing party. Seek alternate limitations for more custodians only after reviewing the initial production and conferring in good faith.

- f. Supplementation.** Supplement disclosures and discovery responses as directed by Rule 26(e). The Court deals sternly with tactical supplementation delayed until near or after the close of discovery, including the striking of evidence, witnesses, claims, and pleadings as appropriate.

14. Depositions and exhibits in civil cases

- a. Number of depositions.** Seek in good faith to agree to a reasonable limitation on the number of depositions. Consider relevance and proportionality under Rule 26(b)(1).
- b. Order of depositions.** The Court presumptively permits plaintiff to notice and take the first deposition with reasonable dispatch. Absent other agreement, the parties will then alternate depositions to the extent practicable on reasonable notice with no undue delay.
- c. Time limits.** Not all depositions require the full time allotted under

Rule 30(d)(1). Seek in good faith to establish reasonable, reciprocal time limits. The Court won't tolerate wasteful or harassing use of deposition time.

- d. **Sequential numbering of exhibits.** Sequentially number each exhibit introduced at deposition without reference to party or deposition identity. Continue the sequence from deposition to deposition. For instance, if a deposition concludes at Exhibit 52, the next deposition commences at Exhibit 53.

Don't mark any document as an exhibit more than once. Absent error or oversight, each exhibit should have only one number during the case. Use that number in later depositions and on trial exhibit lists.

15. Discovery and scheduling disputes

- a. **Good faith required.** Make a serious attempt to resolve all discovery and scheduling disputes without intervention by the Court. This includes disputes to compel or quash any discovery or for protection.

Be pragmatic. Seek reasonable compromise. The Court won't hesitate to shift costs or order other relief against a party or counsel acting unreasonably or in bad faith.

- b. **Conference between lead counsel required.** Lead counsel must personally confer on all discovery and scheduling disputes as a final attempt at resolution prior to involving the Court.

- c. **Initiating letter required.** Don't bring a motion on discovery and scheduling disputes without permission. To obtain permission, the party seeking relief must submit a letter not exceeding approximately two single-spaced pages. Identify the nature of the dispute, outline the issues, and state the contested relief sought. Specify the conference between lead counsel and summarize the results.

The opposing party should promptly submit a responsive letter of similar length identifying any disagreement. Don't submit a reply letter.

- d. **Disposition.** The Court may dispose of the dispute on the letters. When determined advisable, the Court schedules a telephonic conference as soon as practicable. The Court disposes of disputes at conference to the extent possible and establishes the issues and briefing schedule of any written motion allowed.

The Court may refer discovery disputes to the Magistrate Judge, at times with referral for recommendation.

- e. **Disputes as to electronic data.** When the dispute includes discov-

ery of electronic data, each party must have available at any conference a person with detailed knowledge of the computers and electronic databases in issue. The Court may rely on accurate responses from those individuals when ordering relief as to that aspect of any dispute.

- f. **Disputes with nonparties.** An initiating letter isn't required to seek discovery relief against a nonparty.

16. Privilege logs

- a. **Misuse of privilege logs.** Privilege logs serve an important function to protect valid assertions of privilege. But the Court doesn't tolerate their misuse.

- b. ***In camera* review available.** When a party believes an opponent has misused its privilege log, it may request that the Court make *in camera* inspection of not more than twenty documents. Bring any request by letter not exceeding approximately three single-spaced pages.

Lead counsel must confer in good faith to resolve the dispute prior to any letter. In the letter, identify the documents for review, state the grounds for challenge, specify the conference between lead counsel, and summarize the results. This letter establishes consent to *ex parte* contact between the Court and the party's opponent regarding the nature and verity of the asserted privilege.

Each party may freely submit only a single letter requesting *in camera* inspection. Submit any letter at least sixty days before the end of discovery or promptly upon receipt of any later privilege log. Seek any further or related requests according to Section 15.

- c. **Review by Magistrate Judge or Special Master.** When on review a party appears to have misused its privilege log, the Court favors referral to the Magistrate Judge to review an appropriate sample of documents. Order for complete review of all logged documents by appointment of a Special Master may follow where necessary.

The Court won't hesitate to shift costs in favor of the prevailing party in appropriate circumstances.

17. Motion practice and hearings

The Court follows the procedures for motion practice in LR7, LR10, LR11, and CrLR12. In addition:

- a. **Conference and certificate required.** Make serious, timely, good faith efforts to seek agreement on all disputed matters and requests for relief. This includes dispositive motions.

The Court will strike motions in civil cases—and may strike motions in criminal cases—that don't include a certificate of conference.

- b. Motions to dismiss or for judgment on the pleadings in civil cases.** Pleading deficiencies of a claim or counterclaim are often cured in whole or in part by a permissible amendment to the subject pleading. Before filing a motion to dismiss for failure to state a claim or counterclaim under Rule 12(b)(6), or a motion for judgment on the pleadings on a claim or counterclaim under Rule 12(c), identify such issues to the opposing party and confer in good faith to resolve them. The Court strikes motions that don't include this in the certificate of conference.
- c. Motions for summary judgment in civil cases.** The Court requires mediation or settlement conference before the Magistrate Judge within forty-five days of the filing of a summary judgment motion under Rule 56. Proceed as directed under Section 32. Failure to participate in good faith may subject a party to sanctions under Rule 16(f).

Immediately submit a joint report verifying either success or declaration of impasse by the mediator or Magistrate Judge. The Court does not consider motions for summary judgment until it receives this joint report.
- d. Motions on discovery and scheduling.** Don't bring a motion on discovery or scheduling disputes absent alternate permission obtained under Section 15.
- e. Motions to seal.** The Court disfavors but will consider filings under seal. Proceed as directed under Section 12.
- f. Submission date and briefing deadlines in civil cases.** The Court extends the submission date set by LR7.3 and typically considers opposed motions thirty-one calendar days after their filing date.

File any response within twenty-one calendar days of the motion. File any reply within ten calendar days of the response. Don't file a sur-reply absent advance permission.

Promptly advise by email of need for decision on an expedited basis or date certain. Provide reasons justifying prompt attention.

Advise by letter or email of any agreed extension of the submission date. Provide a proposed order for any agreed extension that maintains other deadlines set by the Court.
- g. Submission date and briefing deadline in criminal cases.** The Court proceeds according to CrLR12 and Rule 12 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure.
- h. Proposed orders.** Use Form 11 to prepare draft proposed orders. Include a proposed order granting or denying the requested relief

with all nondispositive motions and oppositions.

- i. **Oral argument.** Adequate motion papers are particularly important. The Court rules on most motions on the papers and sets oral argument when determined advisable. Counsel may jointly or individually advise by email of any request for oral argument together with circumstances to justify it.
- j. **Young lawyers.** Current trends indicate that associates and other young lawyers have limited speaking or *stand-up* opportunities in federal court. Providing these opportunities benefits young lawyers, clients, and the profession as a whole.
On any request for oral argument, the Court weighs in favor a representation that the party will entrust argument to a young lawyer who has substantially drafted or contributed to the motion or response.
- k. **Resolution by agreement.** Immediately advise by email of resolution of a pending motion prior to the Court's ruling. The Court will then deny the motion as moot.

18. Briefing requirements

The Court requires succinct, pertinent, well-organized motion papers. Observe the following:

- a. **Separate memorandum not allowed.** Don't file a separately designated *Memorandum of Law*. Include necessary factual support, legal argument, and requested relief in the motion itself.
- b. **Style.** Use American letter-size paper, a minimum 13-point font, and a minimum of 1" margins. Double space except for lengthy quotations, headings, and footnotes.
- c. **Word limits and certificate of word count.** Limit any motion or response to 5,000 words (approximately twenty-five pages). Limit any reply to 2,000 words (approximately ten pages). Don't file a sur-reply absent alternate permission.
Provide a certificate of word count following the signature block. Reliance on word-processor register is sufficient in this regard. Word limits don't include the case caption, table of contents, table of authorities, signature block, and certificates.
The Court rarely extends word limits. Anticipate and seek resolution of any motion for extension well in advance of filing deadlines.
- d. **Footnotes.** The Court disfavors footnotes and discourages their use by setting word limits rather than page limits. Use the same font as text for any footnote believed necessary.

The Court disregards evidence or argument raised only by footnote.

- e. **Briefing requirements.** All motions or similar filings must contain:
- A short statement of the nature and stage of the proceeding;
 - A statement of the facts necessary to resolution of the motion;
 - A statement of the issues requiring resolution;
 - A short statement of and authority for the standard of review for each issue;
 - An argument devoted to relevant, persuasive legal authority;
 - A short conclusion stating the precise relief sought; and
 - Succinct headings dividing the motion into the above parts.

Submissions with an argument section more than ten pages must also contain:

- A separate cover sheet for the case caption and title of the filing;
 - A table of contents setting forth page numbers of all sections and point headings;
 - A table of authorities organizing in categories and arranging alphabetically all cited cases, statutes, rules, textbooks, and other authorities;
 - A brief introduction of the dispute;
 - A concise summary of the argument immediately prior to the argument in full; and
 - Succinct point headings dividing the argument into separate components.
- f. **Citations.** Provide pinpoint citation for all legal authority. Do the same for evidence. For instance, cite to page and line for depositions, to page and paragraph number for affidavits and pleadings, and to page and section number for contracts and similar materials. Use Bates number as the page reference where available.
- g. **Supporting evidence.** Supply affidavits, deposition testimony excerpts, and supporting documents as exhibits to any filing. Provide a cover sheet to identify and separate each exhibit. Prepare and submit a table of contents when attachments are numerous. Separately upload these exhibits together as a single attachment during filing on the CM/ECF system.
- h. **Copies of legal authority.** Supply all cases or other authority not readily available through Westlaw or Lexis-Nexis as an appendix to

any filing. Provide a cover sheet to identify and separate each authority. Prepare and submit a table of contents.

Separately upload any appendix as a single attachment during filing on the CM/ECF system.

- i. **Court copies.** Submit courtesy copies if required and as directed in Section 6.

19. Final pretrial conference and trial setting

- a. **Final pretrial conference.** The Court sets each civil case for a docket call in the Scheduling and Docket Control Order, typically on the third Monday of a month. Docket call may serve as the final pretrial conference. Prepare to address all objections to pretrial filings and to argue outstanding motions. The Court at docket call may set complex cases to a later date for the final pretrial conference.

The Court sets each criminal case for a final pretrial conference in the Scheduling and Docket Control Order, typically on a Friday morning. Prepare to address all objections to pretrial filings and to argue outstanding motions.

- b. **Trial setting.** The Court discusses civil trial settings with the parties at docket call. The Court sets the case for a date certain at the earliest time determined advisable.

The Court establishes criminal trial settings in the Scheduling and Docket Control Order, typically on a Tuesday morning.

- c. **Continuances.** The Court disfavors passing trial dates but understands exigent circumstances can arise. Establish good cause in any motion seeking continuance.

A trial setting in another court isn't good cause unless lead or other primary counsel has commenced trial.

The Court is unlikely to continue a trial setting due to witness unavailability in civil cases. Anticipate testimony by stipulation or by oral or written deposition under Rules 27, 30, and 31.

20. Joint pretrial orders in civil cases

- a. **Form.** Use Form 12 to prepare a Joint Pretrial Order.

Adapt it within reason to accommodate the nature and complexity of the case.

- b. **Same-day filings.** When filing the Joint Pretrial Order on the CM/ECF system, attach the pretrial filings set out in Section 21.

- c. **Responsibility.** All lead counsel must sign the Joint Pretrial Order. Primary responsibility rests with plaintiff's counsel to ensure timely filing as established by rule unless otherwise set by Court order. On

any failure by plaintiff's counsel, defendant's counsel must timely file the defendant's portions.

21. Required pretrial filings

- a. **Required filings.** Unless otherwise set by Court order, on the date established by rule each party must file:
- An exhibit list as per Section 22;
 - A witness list as per Section 23;
 - Designation of deposition excerpts as per Section 24;
 - Motions in limine as per Section 25;
 - Proposed topics and questions for examination of prospective jurors as per Section 26;
 - In jury trials, a proposed jury charge as per Section 27;
 - In bench trials, proposed findings of fact and conclusions of law as per Section 28; and
 - A trial memorandum of law identifying and addressing the legal propositions that are necessary to the disposition and relief sought in the case, with indication of those which aren't in dispute.

- b. **Court copies.** Confer and prepare a joint trial notebook to provide the Court. Include each party's materials paired together in the order listed above. In civil cases, include the Joint Pretrial Order as the first item.

Counsel to plaintiff or prosecution must deliver three copies at least four business days prior to the first day of trial in the manner directed in Section 6.

22. Trial exhibit lists

- a. **Form.** Use Form 13 to prepare a trial exhibit list. Also refer to Section 14.

Each offering party must mark its own exhibits with the party's name, case number, and exhibit number. List only those exhibits intended in good faith for use before the jury during trial.

- b. **Exchange.** Seek agreement on the form of exchange. Absent agreement, exchange well-organized USB drives or provide for similar download.

In civil cases, exchange all exhibits at the time of filing the Joint Pretrial Order unless agreed between the parties in writing to a different time. In criminal cases, the Court sets the schedule for disclosure of exhibits.

- c. **Court copies.** Follow Section 21 regarding submission of all exhibit lists.

In addition to the lists, each party must simultaneously submit all exhibits on a well-organized USB drive together with three copies in the manner directed in Section 6.

- d. **Objections.** Confer in good faith to identify and resolve objections. The Court supersedes time limits set in LR44.1, LR46, and CrLR55.2.B and requires filing of any objections with authority within seven days of listing and exchange. File any response within seven days. Reply is optional within four days.

This includes identification in writing to the offering party of exhibits requiring authentication. The Court typically allows telephonic depositions on an expedited basis to authenticate exhibits and may shift costs in this regard.

- e. **Disposition.** The Court presumptively admits into evidence all exhibits listed without objection. But such exhibits are not considered admitted until referenced before the jury.

The Court typically rules on objections when the parties offer exhibits in evidence during trial. The parties may request resolution of certain objections at the final pretrial conference.

The Court rarely admits exhibits not disclosed as required.

- f. **Publication to jury.** Exhibits listed without objection don't require further permission for publication to the jury. Don't show exhibits with unresolved objections to the jury. Don't pass exhibits to the jury absent alternate permission.

- g. **Deliberations.** The Court sends all admitted exhibits to the jury during deliberations. The burden is on the parties to assemble and ensure that the Case Manager has all the admitted exhibits—and only the admitted exhibits—for delivery to the jury. The parties must jointly prepare and provide written certification of completeness.

- h. **Demonstrative exhibits.** Don't list demonstrative exhibits unless intended for admission.

Disclose demonstrative exhibits to all other parties by 10:00 p.m. of the evening prior to intended use. The Court resolves objections as a first order of business the following morning before seating the jury.

- i. **Sensitive exhibits.** Identify at the final pretrial conference any concerns about sensitive, dangerous, or bulky exhibits.

A government agent must retain custody throughout trial of exhibits such as weapons, drugs, money, and the like. Replace with photographs where appropriate for jury deliberation.

- j. **Control of exhibits after trial.** Refer to LR79.2 and CrLR55.2.C.

23. Witness lists

- a. **Form.** Use Form 14 to prepare a witness list.

Each party must file a list of witnesses it intends in good faith to call in its case-in-chief. State for each witness:

- Full name, address, and identifying information;
- A concise summary of the expected testimonial topics;
- Whether the witness will testify live or by deposition; and
- Whether testimony is fact, expert, or record custodian.

- b. **Court copies.** Follow Section 21 regarding submission of witness lists. Also furnish a copy to the court reporter before trial.

- c. **Objections.** Confer in good faith to identify and resolve objections. File any objections with authority within seven days of listing. File any response within seven days. Reply is optional within four days.

- d. **Disposition.** The Court endeavors to resolve objections to witnesses at the final pretrial conference.

- e. **Order of witnesses.** In civil cases, by 8:00 p.m. two days in advance of the first day of trial, plaintiff must notify all other parties as to the order of witnesses expected during the first two days of trial. Once trial commences, the parties must update one another at the end of each trial day on the order of witnesses expected during the next two trial days.

In criminal cases, prepare to discuss at the final pretrial conference whether the required notification above is appropriate or requires modification.

24. Deposition designations in civil cases

- a. **Form.** Use Form 15 to prepare deposition designations.

The Court presumptively limits designations to twenty-five minutes and counter-designations to fifteen minutes absent agreement or alternate permission. Don't designate irrelevant or repetitive testimony, objections, or colloquy at depositions.

For bench trials, also offer the entire deposition marked as an exhibit.

- b. **Unavailability required.** Jurors generally disfavor deposition designations. Follow Rule 32 to establish unavailability and use designations. The Court typically refuses even agreed requests as to party witnesses when the witness is available.

- c. **Court copies.** Follow Section 21 regarding submission of all deposition designations.

During trial, seek to dedesignate unnecessary or cumulative testimony. Provide revised designations to opposing counsel three days in advance of intended use.

- d. **Objections and counter-designations.** Confer in good faith to identify and resolve objections. The objector must provide any objections with authority to the designator two days in advance of intended use. Also include counter-designations by page and line. The designator must then provide any counter-objections or reply to the objector one day in advance of intended use.
- e. **Disposition.** As to each intended deposition designation, the designator must make a joint filing comprehending the parties' exchanges twenty-four hours in advance of intended use. The Court endeavors to resolve objections after the conclusion of the trial day of the day prior to the intended use of the designated testimony.

The designator must prepare and have ready at the Court's request each designated deposition. Include a cover sheet with concise summary of topics for each witness, the first deposition page, and at least two pages prior to and after any designation. Highlight in contrasting colors to indicate all designated testimony, counter-designations, and objections. Use a condensed transcript (four pages to one) when available.

- f. **Presentation to jury.** After the Court rules on objections, review and agree on the accuracy of any final synthesis or videotape edit well prior to reading or playing.

Counterdesignations for optional completeness come in with the subject designation. All others follow the original designations.

25. Motions *in limine*

- a. **Form.** Review Form 16 to see the form order for standard topics *in limine* in jury trials.

Confer in good faith to complete and jointly file any requested modifications. Also confer in good faith regarding additional topics. Note all joint or unopposed requests.

Don't bring motions *in limine* in bench trials. Don't raise or reurge topics resolved under *Daubert* or summary judgment practice. Keep in mind that *limine* practice typically concerns only topics so unfairly prejudicial that the Court can't cure resulting prejudice by instruction.

- b. **Court copies.** Follow Section 21 regarding submission of all motions *in limine*.
- c. **Objections.** File any response with authority within seven days of motion. Reply is optional within four days.

- d. **Disposition.** The Court enters the standard order as modified during the final pretrial conference. The Court enters a separate order prior to jury selection as to other topics granted.

26. Jury selection

- a. **Number of jurors.** The Court seats twelve jurors in both civil and criminal cases. The Court seats one alternate in criminal trials and may seat additional alternates in lengthy trials.
- b. **Juror questionnaire.** Review Form 17 to see the form questionnaire required of prospective jurors for service.
- c. **The Court provides completed questionnaires to the parties prior to jury selection.** Don't make copies. Return all questionnaires on conclusion of jury selection.

Confer in good faith and jointly or separately propose topics and questions for examination of the panel that are specific to the case.

- d. **Time of selection.** The Court seeks to commence jury selection as early in the day as possible.

Be prepared for opening statements to follow immediately after seating of the jury. Testimony will also commence if time permits.

Examination. The Court provides background information to the panel and conducts a preliminary examination.

In civil cases, the Court typically allows each side up to thirty minutes to examine prospective jurors on matters specific to the case. In criminal cases, the Court typically conducts the entire examination but may upon request permit counsel to briefly examine prospective jurors on matters specific to the case.

The Court may conduct brief further examination.

- e. **Peremptory challenges.** Refer to 28 U.S.C. § 1870 for civil cases. Refer to Rule 24 of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure for criminal cases.

27. Jury instructions

- a. **Joint or unified proposed jury charge, civil cases.** Confer in good faith on the necessary charge to the jury. Seek agreement and reasonable compromise in accord with the law.

File a joint proposed charge when possible. File a unified proposed charge even when not agreed in full. Observe the following:

- Separately number all necessary instructions and questions;
- Address at a minimum the *prima facie* elements of each cause of action and defense, legal definitions necessary to the jury, components of damages, and methods of calculation of

damages;

- Present each instruction, definition, and question with supporting legal authority;
- Use the Fifth Circuit Pattern Jury Instructions whenever possible;
- Identify with legal support any deviations from the pattern instructions;
- Identify by bold or italicized font any disputed language and which party requests each competing version; and
- Don't use footnotes to argue or explain disagreements.

- b. Jury charge, criminal cases.** At the time ordered by the Court, the prosecution must file a proposed jury charge based solely on the Fifth Circuit Pattern Jury Instructions and supported modifications. At least three days prior to the final pretrial conference, the defense must file objections or its own supported modifications.

Each side must provide supporting legal authority for all requested instructions, definitions, and questions. If either side believes the case requires an instruction not included within the Fifth Circuit Pattern Jury Instructions, confer in good faith to propose agreed wording. Prior to the final pretrial conference, file an agreed instruction or competing versions of the requested instruction that identify agreed aspects.

- c. Court copies.** Follow Section 21 regarding submission of the charge. In civil cases, counsel for plaintiff must also jointly submit a Word version by email or USB drive. In criminal cases, counsel for prosecution and defense must each also submit a Word version by email or USB drive.
- d. Charge conference.** The Court conducts a preliminary charge conference during the final pretrial conference to establish a proposed jury charge. The Court typically provides the proposed jury charge to all parties prior to jury selection.

The Court will modify the proposed jury charge in light of the evidence during trial and further consideration of applicable law. The Court establishes a final jury charge at a final charge conference after the close of all evidence and prior to closing arguments.

- e. Young lawyers.** On request of all parties and time permitting during the final pretrial conference, the Court allows young lawyers who have researched and participated in drafting the proposed jury charge to argue the law in a nonexclusive manner at the preliminary charge conference. The Court allows more experienced lawyers to finalize

the argument and further preserve the record if desired.

This procedure doesn't apply to the final charge conference.

28. Bench trials

- a. **Required filings.** Each party must file proposed findings of fact, proposed conclusions of law, and a supporting memorandum of law at the time directed by the Court.
- b. **Proposed findings of fact.** Each party must specify all proposed findings it anticipates establishing at trial. To the extent possible in advance of trial, cite deposition testimony, expected witness testimony, exhibits, or other evidence to support each proposed finding. Specify stipulated or agreed facts.
- c. **Proposed conclusions of law.** Each party must cite legal authority to support all proposed conclusions of law it seeks at trial. Specify agreed propositions of law.
- d. **Memorandum of law.** Each party must set forth all legal propositions that are necessary to the disposition and relief sought in the case. At a minimum, address the *prima facie* elements of each cause of action and defense, the relation of necessary evidence to those elements, legal definitions necessary to the Court, components of damages, and methods of calculation of damages.
- e. **Supplementation.** Following trial and at the time directed by the Court, each party must file supplemental proposed findings of fact and proposed conclusions of law. Provide citations to specific testimony and evidence from trial.
- f. **Court copies.** Follow Section 21 regarding submission of these materials.

In civil cases, counsel for plaintiff must also jointly submit a Word version by email or USB drive. In criminal cases, counsel for prosecution and defense must each also submit a Word version by email or USB drive.

29. Juror comprehension initiative

- a. **Jury trial innovations.** The Court endeavors to implement one or more of the following practices where appropriate to assist juror comprehension:
 - Trial time limits;
 - Preliminary substantive jury instructions;
 - Notetaking by jurors;
 - Trial binders for jurors to include glossary of terms, cast of characters, chronology, and key exhibits;

- Questions by jurors during trial; and
- Interim statements or argument to jury by counsel.

Refer to the Court's website for additional information.

- b. **Selection.** Confer in good faith and prepare to discuss suitability of these practices at the final pretrial conference.

30. Courtroom procedures and conduct

- a. **Decorum.** The guidelines for courteous and orderly behavior set forth in the Local Rules are Attachment 3. Counsel must ensure all participants always observe these conventions.

For emphasis, the Court doesn't tolerate personal invective directed at any person. Address one another, all witnesses, the jury, and the Court with courtesy and respect.

- b. **Hours.** Hours during trial vary depending upon the type of case and the needs of the parties, counsel, witnesses, jurors, and the Court.

The Court typically convenes the jury at 9:00 a.m. and typically adjourns shortly after 5:00 p.m. Expect to arrive earlier and stay later than the jury for trial conferences. Court recesses one hour for lunch and twenty minutes each morning and afternoon.

The Court typically doesn't conduct trial on Fridays due to conferences, sentencings, and other regularly scheduled matters.

- c. **Courtroom access.** Arrange in advance by email with the Case Manager for any necessary access before or after normal hours.

Enter and leave the courtroom only by the front, public doors. Don't use the Court's other doors absent alternate permission.

- d. **Seating.** The Court designates the table closest to the jury for the plaintiff or prosecution.

The Case Manager will note the original seating position of all counsel on a chart for the Court's reference. Remain as situated throughout trial or hearing. Seek permission before making any change.

- e. **New documents offered.** File all original documents as soon as practicable. Handing documents to the Court or Case Manager doesn't constitute filing.

Have ready for the Court two copies of documents filed during or within seven days prior to trial or hearing.

- f. **Witnesses.** Counsel must instruct witnesses in advance on courtroom decorum and duties under *the Rule* when invoked.

The parties are responsible to summon their respective witnesses

when called. The Court won't recess to permit counsel to call a missing witness unless a witness fails to appear on subpoena.

Arrange in advance for any necessary interpreter. The Court won't recess to permit counsel to obtain an interpreter unless a scheduled interpreter fails to appear.

When questioning witnesses:

- Stand at the lectern or seek alternate permission in appropriate circumstances to remain seated;
- Look at and address the witness, not the jurors;
- Seek leave of Court to approach the witness; and
- Make every effort to avoid cumulative testimony and to elicit from witnesses only information relevant to the issues in the case.

- g. Food and beverages.** Counsel and staff may have water available at counsel table or at the lectern. Witnesses may have water available on the stand.

The Court permits no other food or beverage in the courtroom generally. Counsel must ensure that all spectators refrain from eating or drinking. Seek alternate permission if necessary.

- h. Jury deliberations.** Counsel must remain immediately available within the courthouse during deliberations. Seek alternate permission if necessary.
- i. Juror contact after trial.** Observe LR47 and CrLR24.1 or seek alternate permission.

31. Courtroom technology and support

- a. Electronic devices.** Everyone must turn off all cellular telephones, pagers, or similar devices while in the courtroom. The Court rarely grants any exception.

Counsel and staff may have their laptops or similar computers before the bar and available solely for litigation purposes. The Court allows no computers or other extraneous reading material elsewhere in the courtroom.

Counsel must make certain that their clients, witnesses, and spectators comply.

- b. Audio, visual, and display equipment.** The Court makes available upon advance request easels with writing pads, projection, document camera, sound, and video equipment.

Parties may provide their own equipment upon advance arrangement with the Case Manager and courthouse security.

- c. **Equipment use and testing.** Consult with the Case Manager on technology needs or special arrangements well in advance of trial or hearing.

Arrange access to the courtroom to set up and test equipment. The Court won't recess to resolve technical difficulties arising from lack of preparation or testing.

- d. **Court reporting.** Make prior arrangement with the Court Reporter for daily or real-time transcription if desired.
- e. **Telephones.** The Court's staff won't take telephone messages absent unusual circumstances.

Telephones in chambers aren't available absent alternate permission in emergencies.

- f. **Copying service.** The Court's staff won't make copies absent unusual circumstances. The sixth-floor law library has a copying machine available at nominal charge. Arrange to pay the library staff at time of usage.
- g. **Trial supplies.** Parties may leave their exhibits, boxes, and other materials in the courtroom during any recess and overnight. Restore all supplies to good order at the end of each day.
- h. **Attorney conference rooms.** Attorney conference rooms are available during trial or hearing. Make advance request to the Case Manager for a key. Restore the room to good order and return the key at the conclusion of trial or hearing.

32. Mediation and settlements in civil cases

- a. **Periodic updates.** The Court encourages good faith settlement discussions between parties at appropriate intervals. The Court will request periodic reports as determined advisable.

- b. **Alternative dispute resolution.** The Court requires mediation or settlement conference before the Magistrate Judge within forty-five days of the filing of a summary judgment motion under Rule 56. The Court may require further attempt before trial.

The Court appoints a mediator when the parties can't select one by agreement. The parties may make joint request to determine whether the Magistrate Judge is available to serve as mediator at no cost.

- c. **Notice of settlement discussions.** Notify the Court by letter or email whenever serious settlement discussions are underway. The Court will postpone consideration of pending motions until advised of success or impasse.

- d. **Notice of settlement and conditional orders of dismissal.** Immediately notify the Court by email of settlement. The Court will enter an order of dismissal. The dismissal will be without prejudice to move within a reasonable time for reinstatement if approval of documentation or condition precedent fails.
- e. **Settlements involving minors.** Counsel must jointly move for a hearing to appoint a guardian *ad litem* and to approve settlement of any suit involving a minor when a potential conflict of interest exists between the parent(s) and the minor.

Seek agreement on a guardian *ad litem* to recommend. Absent agreement, individually submit the names of qualified attorneys for consideration. The Court will appoint one suggested or of its own choosing.

33. Revisions to procedures and forms

- a. **Revisions.** The Court adheres to these procedures and forms to answer common questions that arise during litigation, to reduce confusion as to the Court's preferences, and to guide the proper and efficient resolution of the parties' disputes. The Court revises these materials as experience dictates and provides updated versions on its website.
- b. **Suggestions welcome.** The Court appreciates suggestions for modifications. Raise any suggestions at hearings in open court or submit them by letter to the Case Manager with copy to other counsel.

Attachment 1

Directory for information about the Southern District of Texas

**OFFICE OF THE CLERK
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXAS
HOUSTON DIVISION**

For inquiries and information, the main number for the Office of the Clerk is (713) 250-5500.

For additional information and resources, visit the website of the Southern District of Texas at www.txs.uscourts.gov.

For information related to the following, contact:

Admission of Attorneys	(713) 250-5500
Appeals	(713) 250-5500
Bail Bonds, Disbursement	(713) 250-5546
Bill of Costs	(713) 250-5500
Civil Case Information	(713) 250-5500
Copy Service	(713) 250-5500
Court Reporters	(713) 250-2120
Case Managers to U.S. District Judges	
Judge Nancy Atlas	(713) 250-5407
Judge Alfred H. Bennett	(713) 250-5850
Judge Keith Ellison	(713) 250-5181
Judge Charles Eskridge	(713) 250-5257
Judge Vanessa Gilmore	(713) 250-5512
Judge Andrew S. Hanen	(713) 250-5518
Judge David Hittner	(713) 250-5511
Judge Kenneth M. Hoyt	(713) 250-5515
Judge Lynn N. Hughes	(713) 250-5516
Judge Sim Lake	(713) 250-5514
Judge Gray Miller	(713) 250-5129
Judge Lee H. Rosenthal	(713) 250-5517
Judge Hilda G. Tagle	(956) 548-2628
Judge Ewing Werlein	(713) 250-5533
Case Managers to U.S. Magistrate Judges	
Magistrate Judge Peter Bray	(713) 250-5148
Magistrate Judge Christina Bryan	(713) 250-5158
Magistrate Judge Nancy Johnson	(713) 250-5703
Magistrate Judge Dena H. Palermo	(713) 250-2702
Magistrate Judge Frances Stacy	(713) 250-5565

Criminal Cases (Open & Closed)	(713) 250–5500
Financial Section	(713) 250–5875
Interpreters	(713) 250–5667
Jury	(713) 250–5500
Local Rules	(713) 250–5500
Monition	(713) 250–5500
Naturalization	(713) 250–5500
Prisoner Related Cases	(713) 250–5402
Registry Funds	(713) 250–5875
Service of Papers	(713) 250–5500
Statistical Information	(713) 250–5500
Summons	(713) 250–5500
Transcripts	(713) 250–5499
Warrant of Seizure	(713) 250–5500
Other Agencies:	
Federal Public Defender	(713) 718–4600
U.S. Attorney	(713) 567–9000
U.S. Marshal	(713) 718–4800
U.S. Probation	(713) 250–5266

Attachment 2

Guidelines for professional conduct

Guidelines for Professional Conduct

Local Rules of the Southern District of Texas, Appendix D

- A. In fulfilling his or her primary duty to the client, a lawyer must be ever conscious of the broader duty to the judicial system that serves both attorney and client.
- B. A lawyer owes, to the judiciary, candor, diligence, and utmost respect.
- C. A lawyer owes, to opposing counsel, a duty of courtesy and cooperation, the observance of which is necessary for the efficient administration of our system of justice and the respect of the public it serves.
- D. A lawyer unquestionably owes, to the administration of justice, the fundamental duties of personal dignity and professional integrity.
- E. Lawyers should treat each other, the opposing party, the court, and members of the court staff with courtesy and civility and conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times.
- F. A client has no right to demand that counsel abuse the opposite party or indulge in offensive conduct. A lawyer shall always treat adverse witnesses and suitors with fairness and due consideration.
- G. In adversary proceedings, clients are litigants and though ill feeling may exist between clients, such ill feeling should not influence a lawyer's conduct, attitude, or demeanor towards opposing lawyers.
- H. A lawyer should not use any form of discovery, or the scheduling of discovery, as a means of harassing opposing counsel or counsel's client.
- I. Lawyers will be punctual in communications with others and in honoring scheduled appearances, and will recognize that neglect and tardiness are demeaning to the lawyer and to the judicial system.
- J. If a fellow member of the Bar makes a just request for cooperation, or seeks scheduling accommodation, a lawyer will not arbitrarily or unreasonably withhold consent.
- K. Effective advocacy does not require antagonistic or obnoxious behavior and members of the Bar will adhere to the higher standard of conduct which judges, lawyers, clients, and the public may rightfully expect.

Attachment 3

Courtroom etiquette

Courtroom Etiquette

Local Rules of the Southern District of Texas, Appendix C

People who appear in court must observe these and other conventions of courteous, orderly behavior.

- A. Be punctual.
- B. Remain in attendance until excused. All persons sitting before the bar shall remain there during each session and return after recess. Parties and counsel must remain in attendance during jury deliberations; absence waives the right to attend the return of the verdict.
- C. Dress with dignity.
- D. Address others only by their titles and surnames, including lawyers, witnesses, and court personnel.
- E. Stand when the Court speaks to you; stand when you speak to the Court. Speak only to the Court, except for questioning witnesses and, in opening and closing, addressing the jury.
- F. Avoid approaching the bench. Counsel should anticipate the necessity for rulings and discuss them when the jury is not seated. When a bench conference is unavoidable, get permission first.
- G. Hand to the clerk, not the judge or reporter, all things for examination by the judge.
- H. Stand when the judge or jury enters or leaves the courtroom.
- I. Contact with the law clerks is *ex parte* contact with the Court. Contact must be through the case manager.
- J. Assist the summoning of witnesses from outside the courtroom. Furnish the clerk and marshal with a list of witnesses showing the order they are likely to be called.
- K. Question witnesses while seated at counsel table or standing at the lectern. When it is necessary to question a witness about an exhibit, ask permission to approach the witness.
- L. Conduct no experiment or demonstration without permission.
- M. Do not participate in a trial as an attorney if you expect you may be called as a material witness.
- N. Avoid disparaging remarks and acrimony toward counsel and discourage ill will between the litigants. Counsel must abstain from unnecessary references to opposing counsel, especially peculiarities.

- O. Make no side-bar remarks.
- P. Counsel are responsible for advising their clients, witnesses, and associate counsel about proper courtroom behavior.
- Q. Request the use of easels, light boxes, and other equipment well in advance so that they may be set up while the Court is not in session