

# Legal Bearings

Find your bearings in the U.S. legal system.

PRINTABLE TOOL

## Questions to Ask a Lawyer (Printable)

Use this simple checklist before you hire a lawyer. It can help you compare lawyers, ask clear questions, and feel less pressure during a stressful time.



## Bring this list to your first meeting

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Hiring a lawyer can feel hard, especially if English is not your first language or money is tight. A short list of questions can help you slow down and make a careful choice.

This page is a general education tool, not legal advice. A licensed attorney can give advice about your specific case. If you want help finding one, you can use our free [\[lawyer matching service\]](#) or learn more about [\[how to choose a lawyer\]](#).

## Questions to ask every lawyer

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- Do you handle cases like mine often? Ask for examples of the type of case, not private details about other clients.
- Who will actually work on my case? Sometimes the lawyer you meet is not the only person who will help. A paralegal, meaning a trained legal worker who is not a lawyer, may also do some tasks.
- What are my options? Ask the lawyer to explain more than one path if there is more than one.
- What are the risks? Ask what problems could happen, what deadlines matter, and what could hurt your case.
- What do you need from me? This helps you learn what documents, dates, names, or records you should gather.
- How will we communicate? Ask whether they use phone, email, text, video, or a client portal, meaning a secure online account for messages and files.
- How quickly do you usually respond? You want clear expectations about call backs and updates.
- Do you offer help in my language? If not, ask whether they can work with an interpreter, meaning a person who translates spoken words.
- Have you handled cases for immigrants or non-native-English speakers before? This may matter if language access or immigration status affects your case.
- What is your fee structure? A fee structure means how the lawyer charges. Common types include hourly, flat fee, and contingency fee.
- What other costs may I have to pay? Ask about court filing fees, translation costs, expert fees, copies, travel, and service fees.
- Can you give me a written fee agreement? A fee agreement is the contract that explains what you pay and what the lawyer will do.

- What happens if I want to stop working with you? Ask how the file is returned and whether any refund may be available.
- What should I do right now, and what should I avoid doing? This can help you avoid mistakes while you decide whether to hire them.

## How to use this printable

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- 1 Print it or save it on your phone before the meeting.
- 2 Circle the 5 to 8 questions that matter most to you.
- 3 Leave space to write the lawyer's answers.
- 4 Talk to at least two lawyers if you can. Comparing answers often helps.
- 5 After each meeting, rate how clear, respectful, and organized the lawyer seemed.
- 6 Do not sign anything until you understand the fee agreement and your next steps.

## Questions about money and fees

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Many people are afraid to ask about cost. You are allowed to ask. In fact, you should ask early. Legal fees are the money a lawyer charges for their work. Case costs are other expenses, like court fees or paying for records.

Ask whether the lawyer charges by the hour, meaning for each hour worked, or a flat fee, meaning one set price for a specific service. In some cases, a lawyer may use a contingency fee, meaning the lawyer may be paid only if money is recovered. Fee types depend on the kind of case and the rules in your state.

Ask for a written estimate of likely fees and costs. It may not be exact, but it can still help. Costs vary by state and your situation. Also ask when payment is due, whether payment plans are available, and what may happen if your case takes longer than expected.

## Watch for pressure

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Be careful if someone pushes you to sign the same day, avoids giving prices in writing, or promises a certain result. A trustworthy lawyer should explain things clearly and give you time to think.



## Signs a lawyer may be a good fit

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- They listen without rushing you.
- They explain legal words in plain language.
- They are honest about risks and do not promise results.
- They tell you who will handle your case day to day.
- They give clear answers about fees and costs in writing.
- They respect your language needs and answer questions patiently.
- They explain the next step, the timeline, and what they need from you.
- They are licensed in the state where your legal issue is being handled, if that is required for the matter.

## A simple note-taking page you can copy

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You can make a quick chart with these lines for each lawyer: name, phone, office location, language help, type of fee, estimated cost range, who works on the case, response time, and my overall feeling after the meeting.

Then add three short questions: Did I understand their plan? Did they treat me with respect? Did I feel rushed or confused? Your comfort matters. If a lawyer is skilled but does not explain things clearly, that may still be a problem for you.

If you are not sure where to start, our service can help you [get matched](/get-matched/) with a licensed attorney who participates in our network. Legal Bearings is not a law firm and does not give legal advice. The service is free for readers, and participating attorneys pay a flat fee to be included.

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**In plain English:** Bring this question list to your meeting, ask about experience, language help, and fees, and do not hire anyone until you understand the plan and the price.





This guide is general education from Legal Bearings, a free flat-fee lawyer-matching service. It is not legal advice and does not create an attorney-client relationship. For advice about your situation, talk with a licensed attorney. Get matched for free at [legalbearings.com](https://legalbearings.com).