



Tips for Self-Represented Litigants: Zoom Hearings and Basic Court Processes and Procedures

Here are some quick tips for people who are representing themselves in Zoom hearing, including an explanation of basic processes and procedures used in court.

1. Information and Items Needed for the Zoom Hearing

• **Internet Access**

- You need to have reliable, stable access to the internet to participate in the hearing.
- If you do not have access to the internet, you may be required to participate in the hearing by phone. It is not ideal, because you, the judge and the other party cannot see each other, making it harder to know what is going on during the hearing.
- There may be free internet options on a limited basis. Look at the Texas Law Help [website](#), which is run by the Texas Legal Services Center, a statewide nonprofit legal aid organization, for information on what free options may be available.

• **A Phone, Cell Phone, Tablet, Laptop or Desktop Computer**

- As soon as you schedule your hearing or get notice of a hearing, make sure that you have access to a cell phone (i.e. iPhone, Android, Windows Phone, etc.), tablet, or a working computer **with access to the internet and, if possible, a video camera.**
- If you do not have access to a cell phone or other device with access to the internet, you can also use a regular phone (landline phone) to call into the hearing. As previously mentioned, it is not ideal, because you, the judge and the other party cannot see each other, making it harder to know what is going on during the hearing
- If you only have access to a cell phone with a limited number of minutes, it is unlikely that you will be able to participate in the hearing. Depending on the case, hearings can last several hours. Call the Court Coordinator/Administrator's Office, tell them the situation, and ask them what to do. Court Coordinator/Administrator's Office is the office that usually schedules hearings and keeps track of the Court's calendar.
- If you do not have access to a reliable phone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer, call the court coordinator. Tell them that you do not have access to these items and ask them what to do. The court must provide another way for you to participate in the hearing or reset the hearing for an in-person hearing when the courts reopen.

• **Email Address and Phone Number**

- Give your current email address and phone number to the Court Coordinator/Administrator's Office. This office usually schedules hearings and keeps track of the Court's calendar.
- If you do not have an email address, you can get one for free, using sites like Google, Yahoo, Apple iCloud, etc.
- It is extremely important that you check this email address daily. You can get sent information about your case at any time and you may need to take action quickly, so it is

a good idea to check it regularly. If you don't check your email, you may not find out that a hearing on your case has been set and miss the hearing date. If you miss a hearing, you could lose your case.

- **Download the “Zoom Cloud Meetings App” or visit <https://zoom.us.join>**
 - You do not need to set up an account to use the app.
 - Before the hearing date, the Court Coordinator should send a link to join the Zoom Meeting. You will click on that link to attend the hearing. If you haven't been given information on how to join the hearing or sent a link, contact the court at least a day before the hearing and ask for this information. If you do not have this information, you will not be able to participate in the hearing and the judge may take action without you sharing your side of the story.

- **Evidence and Documents**
 - If you have evidence to show the judge, contact the court coordinator, preferably several days before the hearing, to learn how they want you to submit documents or other evidence. Make sure to ask if there is a deadline for submitting your evidence.
 - Some courts want you to email your documents before the hearing. You may need to scan and upload your documents to share them with the Court. Tips on how to scan and upload documents are located in the Appendix.
 - If you do not have the technology or the ability to submit the evidence in the way that the court has asked for it to be submitted, let the court coordinator know and ask what you should do.

- **Witnesses**
 - If you have witnesses that you want to testify at the hearing, contact the court coordinator several days before the hearing and ask how your witnesses can give their testimony at the hearing.

2. At Least Three Business Days Before the Hearing:

- **Contact the Court Coordinator**
 - Make sure your hearing is still set/scheduled and has not been reset to another date.
 - Ask if you must complete any particular forms before the hearing.
 - If you have not received a “Meeting ID” or link or other instructions from the Court about how to join the Zoom hearing, ask for this information.

- **Check Your Email Daily** for any updates sent from the Court.

- **Prepare for Your Case**
 - Think about what you want to say to the judge and what you want the judge to do. Practice telling your side of the story and asking the judge for the results that you want. It is very important to be polite, to speak clearly, and remain calm, no matter what happens.

- Think about any questions that the other party, their attorney, or the judge might ask you and how to answer them.
- Gather any evidence you have. Put it in the order that you want to present it to the judge.
- Contact any witnesses you may have and tell them how the court wants them to participate in the hearing.
- **Consider Logistics for the Hearing**
 - *Noise and Distractions*: Try to find a quiet spot, away from children or others not participating in the hearing.
 - If you can, get help with children or other caregiving responsibilities you have so that you don't get distracted or interrupted during the hearing.
 - Think about where to put any pets that may cause a distraction.
 - On the day of the hearing, minimize noise distractions by silencing phones, email, and text notifications, and turning off fans, dishwashers, washer/dryer, or any other noise distractions.
 - *Lighting*: Make sure there is good lighting (bright), so you can be seen on camera. It is best to sit where the light is in front of your face or over your head, not behind you. For example, avoid sitting in front of a window, which can cause a shadow over your face.
 - *Background*: Choose a spot with a nice and uncluttered background, such as a solid color or blank wall.
 - Avoid windows, plants, lamps, or other objects directly behind your head.
 - Avoid bathrooms and areas that are messy or not clean.
 - We do not recommend using a virtual background, which can make your hands and ears disappear if you move. If you choose to use a virtual background, pick something professional and not busy.
 - *Camera Placement*: If possible, place the camera on your device at eye level. If using a laptop, you may want to place it on a stack of books. Know where the camera on your device is located and look directly at it when speaking. Avoid looking down at the camera - you don't want the camera pointing up your nose.
 - *Screen Brightness*: Know how to dim your computer screen. Computer screens can wash out your face or cause reflections in eyeglasses.
 - *Timer*: The judge may only give you a certain amount of time to speak. Make sure you have a watch, clock or phone so you can keep track of your allotted time.

3. The Day of the Hearing:

- Dress like you are in front of the judge even though you may not be in a courtroom. It's best to dress professionally and conservatively – as if you were going to a job interview or to church – so no shorts, short skirts, spaghetti straps, tank tops, “wife beaters”, etc. Cover any visible tattoos and remove piercings.
- Verify childcare or coverage for other caregiving responsibilities.
- Review the logistics listed above.
- Test for any technical problems at least 15 minutes before the hearing, test for any technical problems. If your computer/tablet/phone asks you to grant it permission to use the camera, audio, and microphone for the Zoom Hearing, allow it to do so.

4. At the Time of Your Hearing:

- **Reminders:**
 - Turn off any other devices that may make a lot of noise or cause a distraction.
 - Ensure children, pets, or others will not be a distraction.
 - Avoid walking around, speaking to someone off camera, chewing gum or eating during the hearing. You may drink water or ask the judge for a break, if you need to use the restroom.
 - Grant permission to use the camera, audio, and microphone if you have not done this already.
 - Look directly at the camera when talking. Try to mute microphone when you are not speaking.
- Click on the Zoom link sent by the Court or enter the link into your device.
- The judge will be the first person to talk and may also go over what is going to happen during the hearing. The proper way to address the Judge is, “Your Honor” or Judge [Judge’s Last Name]. During this introductory phase of the hearing, it is important to let the judge know if you:
 - Are having any technical difficulties or that you may have technical difficulties;
 - Cannot or were not able to submit evidence in the way the court asked you to submit it;
 - Do not have childcare or coverage for other caregiver responsibilities;
 - Need to have the hearing reset (also called a request for continuance). Be prepared to state why you need the hearing reset.
 - Need any ADA accommodations;
 - Need or a witness needs an interpreter. If so, what language(s) are needed; and
 - Have any witnesses who will be testifying and ask how the judge wants the witnesses to participate.
- If you are the person who scheduled the hearing, you may be asked to speak first.
- Speak directly to the Judge only when asked or called-upon. Do not speak to the other party in the case unless the Judge gives you permission. This applies to the other side as well.
- Most courts use a court reporter, so it is very important that you do not talk at the same time as the judge or the opposing side. You may be asked to speak louder, slower, or be asked to wait until other side has spoken. This applies to both sides of the case.

APPENDIX

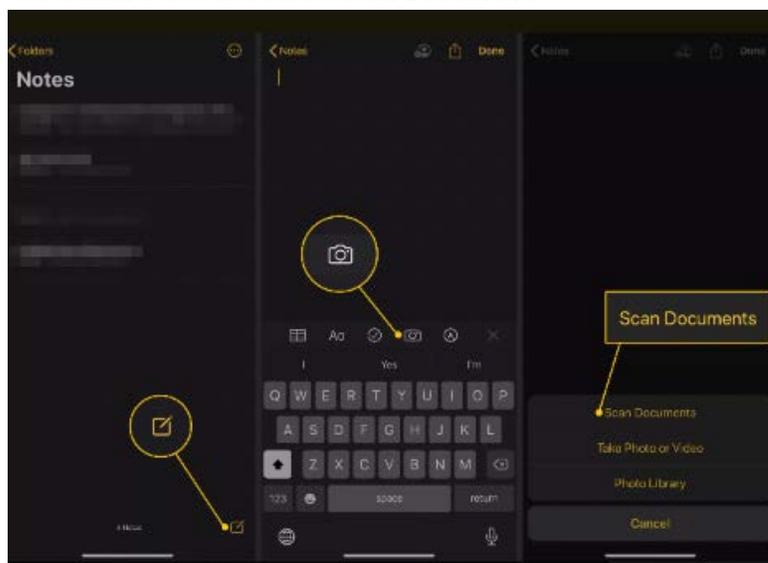
Tips on How to Scan and Upload Documents

1. General Information

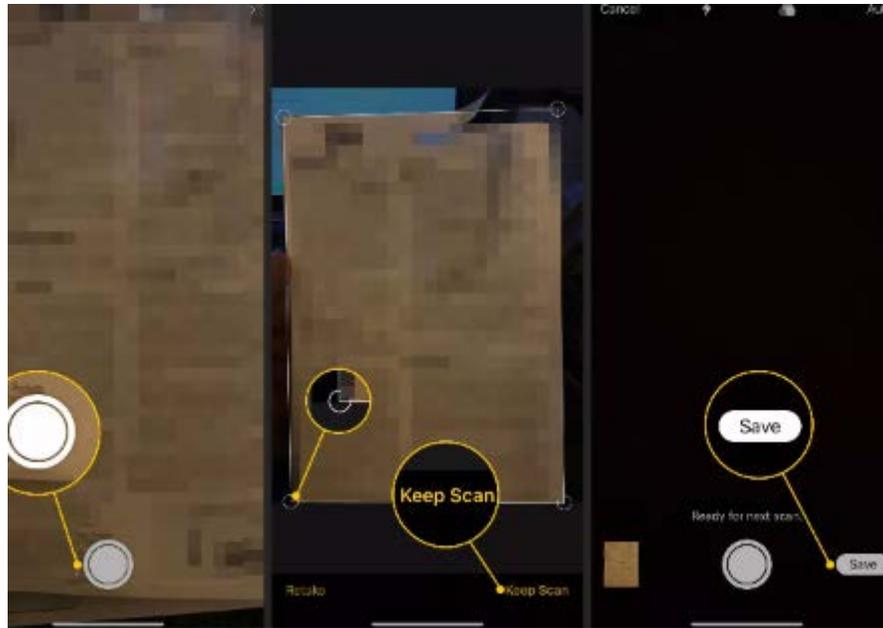
- You will need a working camera and an app that scans documents (most scanner apps are available for free in the App Store or Google Play).
- Try to place each document on a flat surface with a plain, dark background when scanning.
- Take a picture of the document with the camera, or allow the app to automatically detect and scan each page.
- Try to stand over document to capture the entire page.
- Watch your lighting: you may need to turn off the camera flash, especially if the document is shiny or has a reflective surface.
- The app will likely ask you to name the scanned document. Short names are better than long ones. You may also want to include a date. So, your title may look like: Date_Your Name_Short Title. For example: 20-04-15_Jane Doe_Original Petition.
- The app may ask if you want to save the scan. If it does, it's a good idea to save the scanned document to your device before you send a copy to the Court. Apps like Dropbox, Box, OneDrive, etc. offer free cloud based storage options.

2. Mobile Device or Tablet

- **iPhone (iOS11 or later):**
 1. Open the “Notes” App and tap the icon to create a new note.
 2. Tap the **Camera** icon and select **Scan Document**.

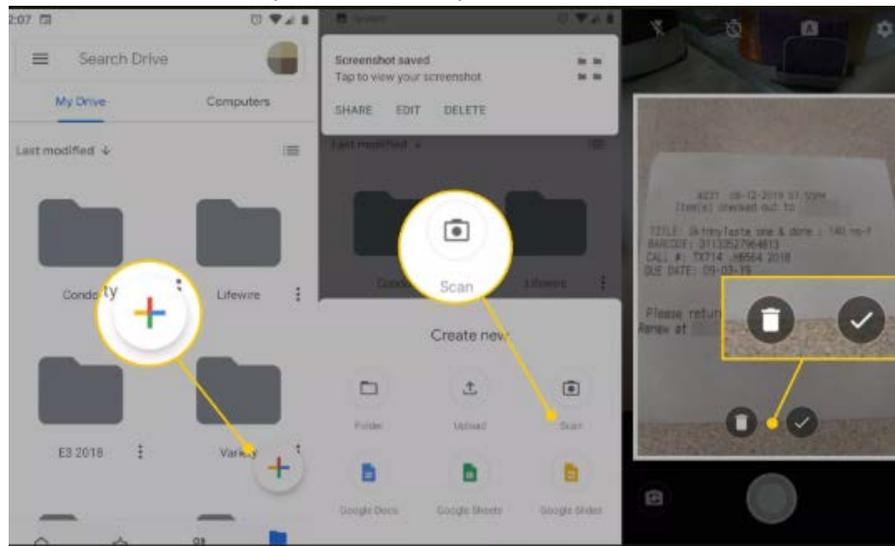


3. Hold the phone camera over your document. The Notes app can automatically focus and scan the image. You can also tap the shutter button to scan the image yourself.
4. After you scan the page, drag the sides or “handles” to crop the image. Tap **Keep Scan** to continue.
5. Repeat the tips above until you finish scanning each page of your document or evidence. Tap **Save** when you are finished.

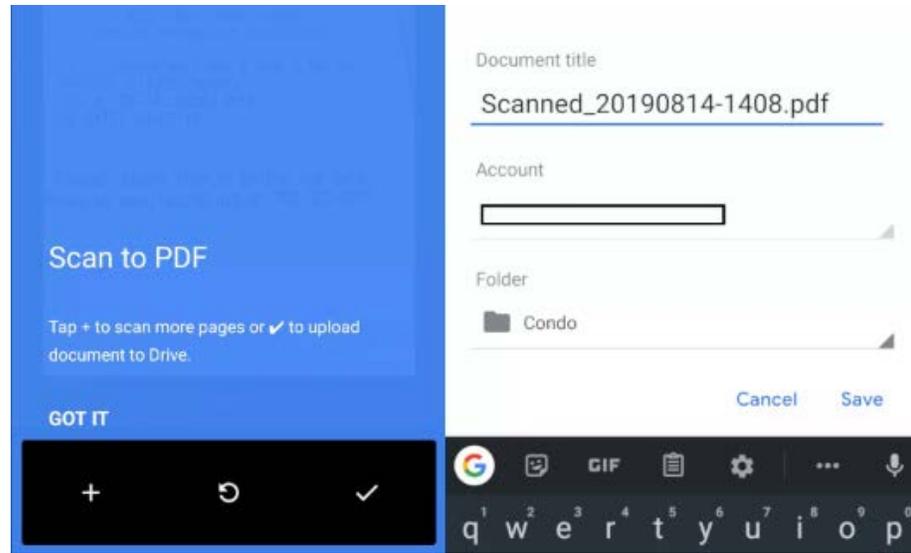


- **Android:**

1. Open the **Google Drive** app and tap the + symbol.
2. Select **Scan** under the **Create New** tab.
3. Hold the phone camera over the document and tap the **Shutter** button when you are ready to scan the image.
4. Tap the **Checkmark** to keep the scan or tap the **Trash** icon to delete it.

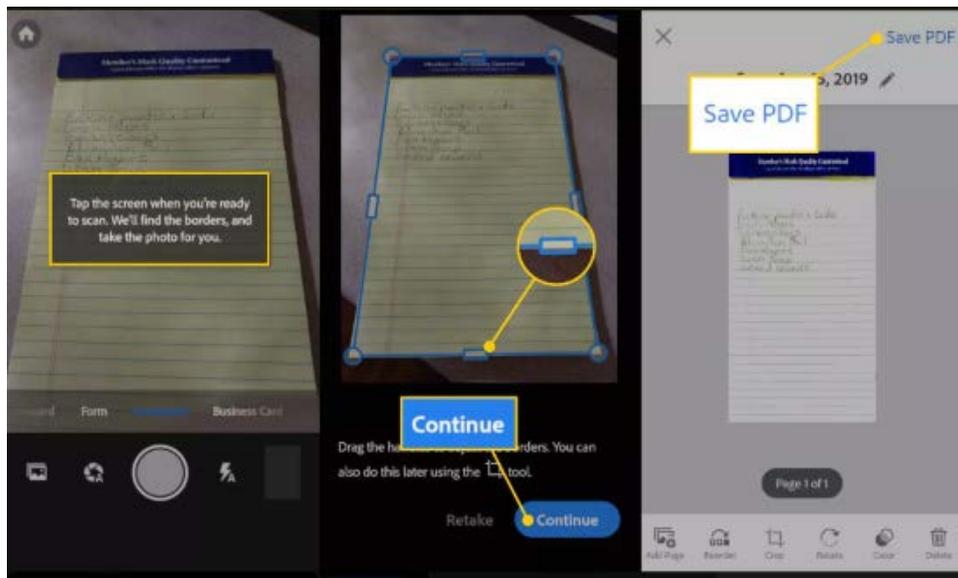


5. Tap the + symbol to scan more documents. When finished, tap the **Checkmark**. The document(s) will upload to Google Drive.
6. Name your new scanned document and choose which folder to save it in.



- **Third Party App** (Adobe Scan Used as Example)

1. Open the app. If required, log in or create a new log in.
2. Tap the screen when you are ready to scan your document. Most apps do this automatically.
3. Drag the handles or “handles” to crop the image, if needed. Press **Continue**.
4. Tap the picture to open the editing and saving options. Tap **Save PDF** when finished and ready to save.



- If the Court gave you an email address to send your documents/evidence to:
 1. Open the scanned document.
 2. Find the **Share** option (may vary depending on the app you are using)
 3. Select the **Email** option.

4. Select the email app you prefer.
5. Type in the email address provided by the Court.
6. Tap **Send**.
7. Open the email app you just used and check your **Sent** folder to make sure the email was sent. If you see the email in your Sent folder, it should have been sent. If you don't see it there, repeat the steps above.

- **Computer or Laptop**

1. Make sure that the scanner is connected to your computer.
2. Place the document on the scanner.
 - a. Most printer-scanners require you to place the document face-down on the glass plate. Stand-alone scanners may differ.
3. Select the scan option on the scanner or from your computer.
4. Repeat the steps above until you have scanned all of your documents.
5. Save the scan to your computer.
6. Email the scanned documents to the court coordinator's email address (if you were asked to send the documents by email).