

GUIDE ON COURT REPORTING

USER GUIDE

ON COURT REPORTING

Introduction

Court journalists, especially those who are newly attached to the courts, would often have to first attain a good basic understanding of the courts and its processes, before they are able to get started on reporting news relating to the courts.

This publication has been prepared with this objective in mind - to equip court journalists with pertinent information about the Courts, such as the types of hearings, how to conduct an inspection of court documents and, most importantly, key pointers on certain terms used which all reporters should be aware of. This information would come in useful when reporting on court judgments and the various announcements made by the Courts.

This publication is intended for general guidance only and is not to be regarded as legal or other professional advice, nor should it be relied upon for that purpose. If in doubt, including whether your reporting would breach any laws, please seek legal advice from your in-house counsel or other local counsel.

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Structure of the Courts



The Singapore Judiciary comprises the Supreme Court, the Family Justice Courts and the State Courts.

Structure of the Courts

SUPREME COURT SINGAPORE

- Court of Appeal
- High Court
 - Appellate Division of the High Court
 - General Division of the High Court
 - Singapore International Commercial Court

FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS SINGAPORE

- Family Division of the High Court
- Family Courts
- Youth Courts

STATE COURTS SINGAPORE

- District Courts
- Magistrates' Courts
- Coroners' Courts
- Small Claims Tribunals
- Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals
- Employment Claims Tribunals
- Protection from Harassment Court

Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court



- The Court of Appeal hears all criminal appeals against decisions made by the General Division of the High Court (“General Division”) in the exercise of its original criminal jurisdiction, prescribed categories of civil appeals against decisions made by the General Division and appeals that are to be made to the Court of Appeal under written law. The prescribed categories of civil appeals are set out in the Sixth Schedule to the Supreme Court of Judicature Act.
- The **High Court** comprises the General Division and the Appellate Division of the High Court (“Appellate Division”).
 - The General Division exercises original and appellate jurisdiction in civil and criminal cases. The General Division also exercises revisionary jurisdiction over the State Courts in criminal cases. It hears cases in the first instance as well as cases on appeal from the State Courts.

The types of cases heard by the General Division include the following:

- Civil cases where the value of the claim exceeds \$250,000.
- Criminal cases where offences are punishable with death or imprisonment for a term which exceeds 10 years.
- Admiralty matters.
- Company winding-up and other insolvency-related proceedings.
- Bankruptcy proceedings.
- Applications for the admission of advocates and solicitors.

Appeals arising from a decision of the General Division in civil matters will be allocated between the Appellate Division and the Court of Appeal in accordance with the statutory framework set out in the Supreme Court of Judicature Act. In cases where leave is required to appeal against a decision of the General Division, the leave application will be heard by the relevant appellate court, whose decision on the application for leave to appeal will be final.

- The **Appellate Division** hears all civil appeals against decisions made by the General Division that are not allocated to the Court of Appeal under the Sixth Schedule to the Supreme Court of Judicature Act. The Appellate Division also hears any civil appeal or other process that any written law provides is to lie to the Appellate Division. It has no criminal jurisdiction.
- The **Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC)** is a division of the General Division. The SICC has the jurisdiction to hear and try:
 - Actions which are international and commercial in nature, in accordance with section 18D(1) of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act.
 - Proceedings relating to international commercial arbitration, in accordance with section 18D(2) of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act.
 - These include cases commenced in the SICC as well as cases transferred from the General Division to the SICC.

Jurisdiction of the Family Justice Courts



- The **Family Justice Courts (FJC)** are established pursuant to the Family Justice Act, which was passed by Parliament on 4 August 2014. FJC came into operation on 1 October 2014. The “Family Justice Courts” is the collective name for a body of Courts which comprise the Family Division of the High Court, the Family Courts and the Youth Courts.
- The **Family Division of the High Court** hears at first instance cases involving important questions of law or test cases or if it appears to the High Court or Family Court, as the case may be, that a case should be tried in the High Court for any other sufficient reason.

The current position is that the High Court exercises original jurisdiction and hears amongst other cases, ancillary matters in family proceedings involving assets of \$5 million or more.

The Family Division of the High Court also hears probate matters where the value of the deceased's estate is more than \$5 million or if the case involves resealing of a foreign grant.

Lastly, the Family Division of the High Court hears appeals against the decisions of the Family Courts and the Youth Courts.

- The **Family Courts** hear all family related cases which include:

Divorce and ancillary matters

- Divorce.
- Division of matrimonial assets.
- Maintenance of a spouse, ex-spouse or child in divorce proceedings.
- Custody, care and control and access of children.

Maintenance and family protection

- Applications for maintenance of a spouse or child.
- Enforcement of an existing maintenance order for a spouse, ex-spouse or child.
- Enforcement of nafkah iddah (maintenance of wife) or mutaah (consolatory gifts) under a Syariah Court Order.
- Enforcement of an order for the maintenance of a parent; and/or
- Applications for personal protection orders and domestic exclusion orders under the Women's Charter (Cap. 353).
- Applications for orders to protect vulnerable adults under the Vulnerable Adults Act 2018.
- Applications to vary, suspend or revoke a maintenance order except for those made by the Supreme Court, the Syariah Court or the Maintenance of Parents Tribunal.

Adoption, Guardianship and International Child Abduction in relation to children

- Applications for adoption orders under the Adoption of Children Act (Cap. 4).
- Applications in relation to guardianship of an infant under the Guardianship of Infants Act (Cap. 122).
- Applications in relation to a child who has been wrongfully removed to or retained in Singapore under the International Child Abduction Act 2010.

Mental Capacity and Probate and Administration

- Applications for the appointment of a deputy and other orders under the Mental Capacity Act (Cap. 177A).
- Applications for the grant of probate or letters of administration.
- Protection for vulnerable adults.

- The **Youth Courts** hear the following cases under the Children and Young Persons Act:

- Family Guidance cases.
- Care and Protection cases.
- Criminal cases.

Jurisdiction of the State Courts



- The **District Courts** hear:
 - Civil cases where the value of the claim is between \$60,000 and \$250,000, or up to \$500,000 for road traffic accident claims or claims for personal injuries arising out of industrial accidents.
 - Criminal cases where the maximum imprisonment term does not exceed 10 years or which are punishable with a fine only.
- The **Magistrates' Courts** hear:
 - Civil cases involving claims not exceeding \$60,000.
 - Criminal cases where the maximum imprisonment term does not exceed 5 years or which are punishable with a fine only.
- The **Coroners' Courts** inquire into:
 - The cause of and circumstances connected with a person's death. Such inquiries are held when there is reason to suspect that a person has died suddenly or unnaturally, by violence, or when the cause of death is unknown, and in situations where the law requires an inquiry.
- The **Small Claims Tribunals** hear:
 - Claims not exceeding \$20,000 or up to \$30,000, if both parties consent in writing, for disputes arising from a contract for the sale of goods, provision of services, an unfair practice relating to a hire-of purchase agreement, a tort in respect of damage caused to property, certain statutory claims, or a contract relating to a lease of residential premises not exceeding 2 years.
- The **Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals** deal with:
 - Claims not exceeding \$20,000 for disputes between neighbours concerning the tort of interference with enjoyment or use of place of residence.
- The **Employment Claims Tribunals** hear:
 - Salary-related claims and wrongful dismissal claims not exceeding \$20,000 or \$30,000 for tripartite-mediated disputes.
- The **Protection from Harassment Court** hears:
 - Matters arising out of harassment, stalking and related anti-social behaviour, as well as false statements of fact.

Life Cycle of Civil Proceedings in the Supreme Court and State Courts



Stage 1: Commencement of an action by Writ of Summons

Stage 2: Pre-trial

- Pre-trial conferences
- Interlocutory applications
- Summons for Directions
- Case Management Conferences
- Court dispute resolution process for selected cases in the State Courts

Stage 3: Trial

Stage 4: Post-trial

- Cost orders
- Assessment of damages (if necessary)
- Taking of accounts (if necessary)
- Taxation of bills of costs and review (if necessary)

Stage 5: Appeal (where applicable)

Stage 6: Enforcement of judgment (where applicable)

Stage 1: Commencement of an action by Originating Summons

Stage 2: Pre-hearing

- Defendant files affidavit, if applicable
- Pre-trial conferences for certain matters in the General Division of the High Court

Stage 3: Hearing

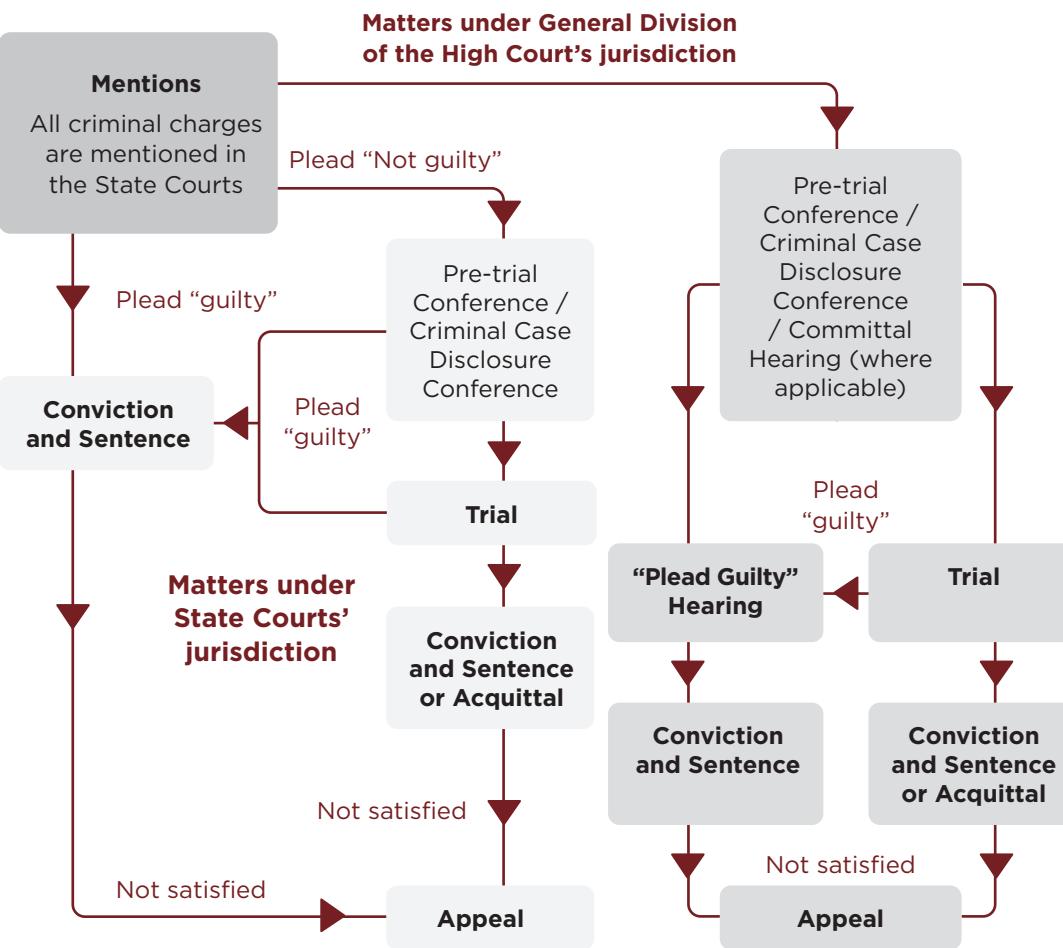
Stage 4: Post-hearing

- Cost orders
- Taxation of bills of costs and review (if necessary)

Stage 5: Appeal (where applicable)

Stage 6: Enforcement of judgment (where applicable)

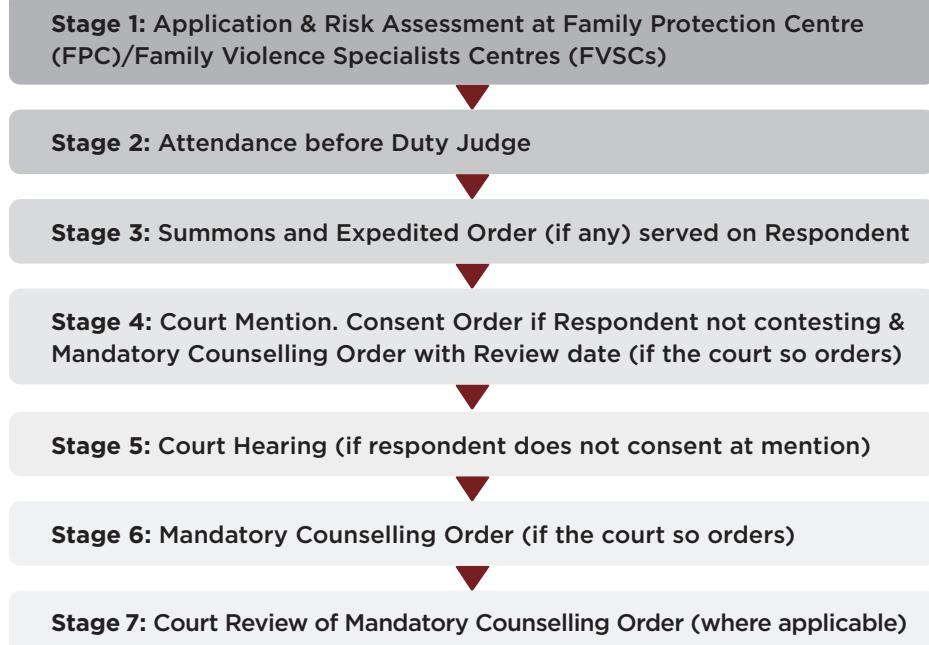
Life Cycle of Criminal Proceedings in the Supreme Court and State Courts



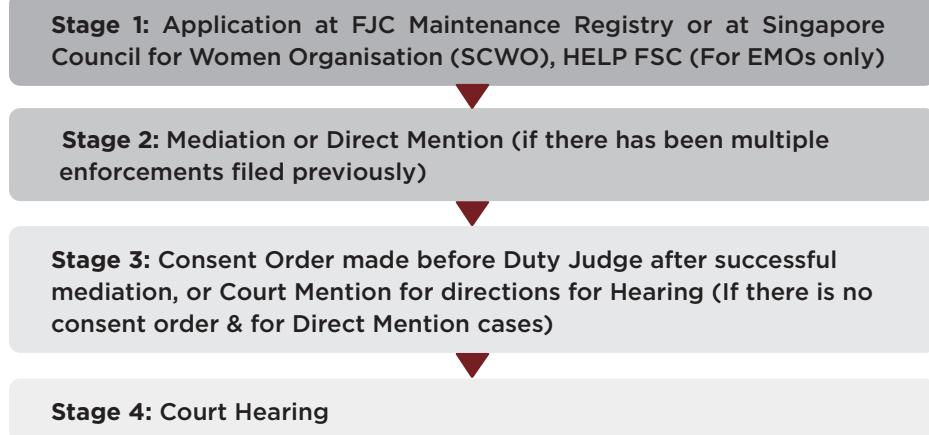
Life Cycle of Proceedings in the Family Justice Courts



Personal Protection Order Case

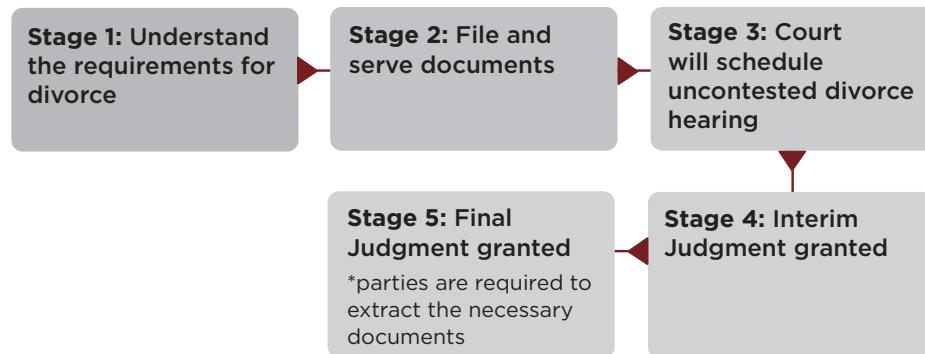


Maintenance Case



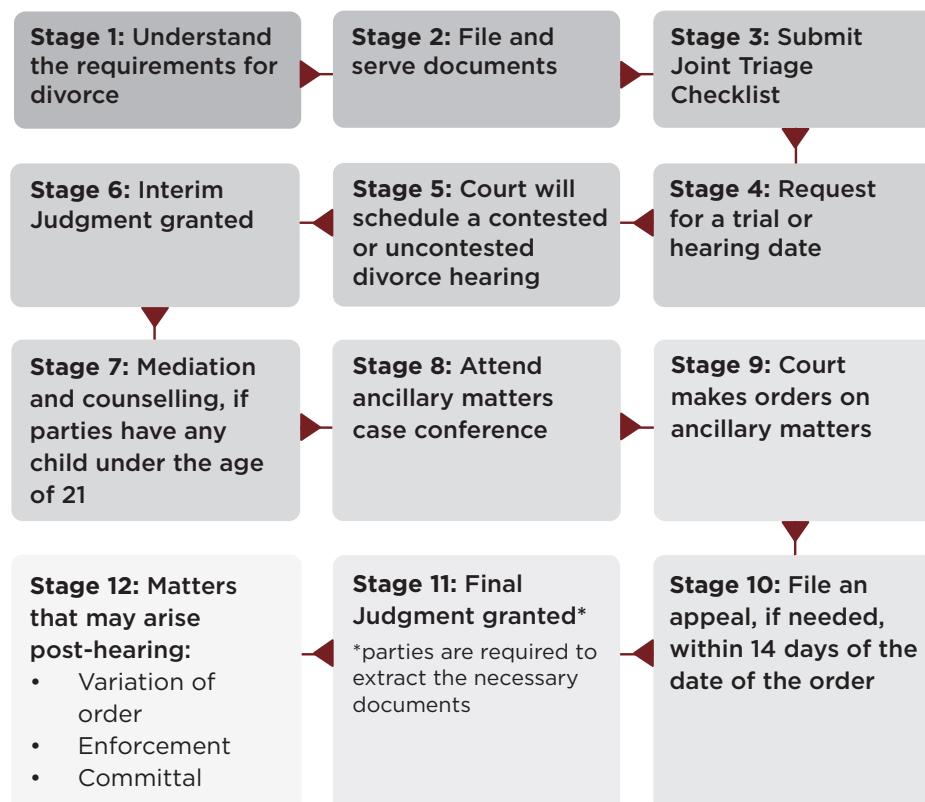
Matrimonial Application for Divorce (Simplified Track)

(Where all divorce and ancillary matters have been agreed on between parties)

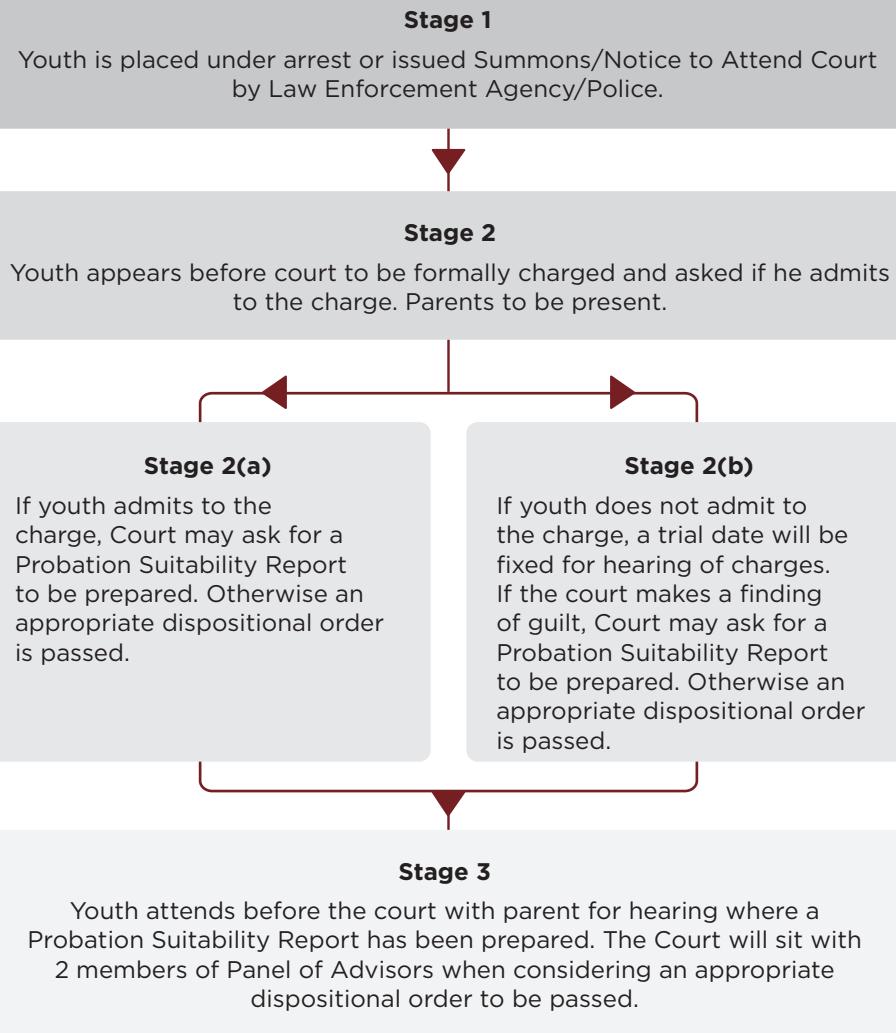


Matrimonial Application for Divorce (Normal Track)

(Where parties do not agree to a divorce)



Youth Offender Case



Types of Hearings



Hearings in Chambers in the Supreme Court and State Courts

The general rule is that hearings in chambers are private in nature, and that members of the public are not entitled to attend such hearings.

However, subject to any written law, the Court may, in its discretion, permit interested parties, such as instructing solicitors, foreign legal counsel and parties to the matter, to attend hearings in chambers.

Note to media:

Hearings in chambers are not confidential and should not be referred to as 'closed door hearings'. They should instead be referred to as 'hearings in chambers'. The information pertaining to the proceedings in hearings in chambers can be made available, upon approval by the Registrar, save where there are exceptional circumstances. Statements made in chambers which had been expressly stated to be confidential or is impliedly confidential may not be published.

Care should be taken to ensure that news reports on hearings in chambers should not prejudice the administration of justice.

Hearings in Open Court in the Supreme Court and State Courts

These hearings are conducted in public, and are hence open to all members of the public to attend.

Proceedings which are heard *in camera** are however closed to the public, including the media. The court can hear proceedings *in camera* if the court is satisfied that it is expedient in the interests of justice, public safety, public security or propriety, or for other sufficient reason to do so. An example of this would be where the case involves a vulnerable witness. On such occasions, there will be a sign bearing the words "Hearing in Camera".

*Latin for "in private"

Hearings in the Family Justice Courts

All FJC matters and proceedings are heard *in camera* whether in the Judge's chamber or in a Courtroom. This means that only the parties, their lawyers, and any witness when giving evidence, are allowed to be present during the proceedings which are closed to all members of the public, including the media. However, the court has the power to direct any matter or part of it to be heard in open court which the public may attend if it is satisfied that it is expedient in the interests of justice, or for other sufficient reason, to do so, in accordance with section 10(2) of the Family Justice Act.

Access to Case Records



Principles of open justice

In *Tan Chi Min v The Royal Bank of Scotland PLC* [2013] SGHC 154, the court stated that the principle of open justice requires that decisions be amenable to scrutiny by members of the public through the inspection of documents filed in court that were considered in the decision-making process. This serves to promote public confidence in the administration of justice.

However, not all court documents are open to inspection the moment they are filed in court, as the principle of open justice is engaged only when a court has made a decision involving a consideration of those documents.

Documents which may be inspected

- Documents relating to civil cases
 - Originating processes and pleadings.
 - Interlocutory summonses.
 - Interlocutory affidavits – access generally granted only when the underlying interlocutory application has been fully heard and determined.
 - Affidavits of evidence-in-chief – access generally granted only when they have been admitted as evidence in a trial.

Documents which may not be available for inspection

- Documents relating to criminal and family cases.
- Documents that had been sealed by an order of court.
- Certified transcripts of Judges' or Registrars' notes.

Access to Case Records - Supreme Court



Media accredited with Ministry of Digital Development and Information

For electronic case files

1

Complete and submit the appropriate online request form together with a copy of your Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI) accreditation card:

- [Requestors who have a Singpass account](#)
- [Requestors who do not have a Singpass account](#)

2

You will be informed whether your request is approved.

- If the request is approved, you can proceed to e-file your request and make payment at the CrimsonLogic Service Bureau, located at Level 1 within the Supreme Court building.
- If the request is rejected, no payment will be required.

3

Upon successful e-filing, if you have indicated that you wish to conduct the inspection online and have provided your mobile number and email address at the time of filing, you will receive an authentication token (via SMS) and a hyperlink (via email) after your approved request has been processed. You can then access the documents online without having to attend physically at the CrimsonLogic Service Bureau to inspect the documents.

- If you do not wish to inspect the documents online, you can attend physically at the CrimsonLogic Service Bureau to inspect the documents.

For non-electronic case files*

1

Complete and submit the appropriate online request form together with a copy of your Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI) press accreditation card:

- [Requestors who have a Singpass account](#)
- [Requestors who do not have a Singpass account](#)

2

Upon processing and approval of the Request, the requestor will be able to view the case file and court documents at the Supreme Court Service Hub.

*Non-electronic case files include the following:

- *Bankruptcy Petitions (pre-2002)*
- *Companies Winding Up Petitions (pre-2002)*
- *Divorce Petitions (pre-1996)*
- *Originating Motions (pre-2002)*
- *Originating Petitions (pre-2002)*
- *Originating Summons (pre-2001)*
- *Powers of Attorney (pre-2002)*
- *Suits (pre-2001)*

Media not accredited with Ministry of Digital Development and Information

Journalists who are not accredited with Ministry of Digital Development and Information (MDDI) may proceed to CrimsonLogic Service Bureau to file a request to inspect court documents.

Those who are not based in Singapore will need to authorise a local representative to file the request on your behalf. Your representative will need to produce his/her and your identification documents for verification when filing the request and pay the applicable fees.

Upon approval, your representative may go to the CrimsonLogic Service Bureau to conduct the inspection.

Important Information:

CrimsonLogic Service Bureau

Supreme Court Service Hub

Level 1

Supreme Court Building

Operating hours:

8.30a.m. to 12.30p.m. and 2.00p.m. to 5.00p.m.
from Mondays to Fridays

Contact number:

6337 9164

Filing details such as fees can be found [here](#) on the eLitigation website.

Access to Case Records - Family Justice Courts



Where the cases are heard *in camera* and are thus private and confidential, in general, a person who is not a party to the proceedings will not have access to the case records. Further, judgments pronounced or delivered in such cases are not available for public inspection in view of Rule 671(1) of the Family Justice Rules.

However, the Court may allow a non-party to apply for inspection of a judgment or to be furnished with a copy of a judgment. Rule 671(2) of the Family Justice Rules allows a judgment (after redaction of information which may lead to the disclosure of the identity of parties) to be published in law reports or professional publications. Hence, members of the public who wish to access family judgments may access the redacted versions published in the law reports or professional publications. Copies of the redacted judgments of the Family Division of the High Court are also available on the Supreme Court website.

It is important to note that information should not be published which may lead to the disclosure of the identity of parties in family cases. Section 10(4) of the Family Justice Act empowers the Court to make an order prohibiting the publication of information relating to the identification of witnesses.

Further, in relation to a child or a young person, under section 84B(1) of the Children and Young Persons Act, no information relating to any proceedings in any court is to be published if it leads to the identification of such a child or young person involved in the proceedings. A similar prohibition can be found in section 22(1) of the Vulnerable Adults Act against the disclosure of information relating to the identification of a vulnerable adult.

Note:

The prohibition under Children and Young Persons Act is also found in the section on: "Reporting of Sexual Offences and Matters Prosecuted Under the Children and Young Persons Act" on page 21.

Access to Case Records - State Courts



The media may request certain court documents that have been tendered in Court.

Criminal cases

- When an offender is charged, the details of the offences committed are set out in a charge tendered to Court by the prosecuting agency. To obtain a copy of the charge, please contact the Singapore Courts' Communications Department.
- For cases that have concluded, please apply for the documents using [Form 30](#). Do note that all applications are subject to approval.
- Reporters are strongly encouraged to be present in Court to cover the cases to take note of any orders made by the presiding Judge, especially orders relating to the reporting of cases. **Information that has been ordered by the Court as "not to be disclosed" (i.e. gag order) should not be published, even if such details are available in the charge.**

Civil cases (excluding cases at the Community Disputes Resolution/Employment Claims/Small Claims Tribunals)

- To inspect or obtain documents of civil cases dealt with by the State Courts, an application would have to be made through the CrimsonLogic Service Bureau.
- Before proceeding to the CrimsonLogic Service Bureau, please complete and submit the Request Form found [here](#) and submit it with all the necessary supporting documents to the State Courts via go.gov.sg/writetoscourts.
- The application will be subjected to the approval of the Registrar.
- You may proceed to the CrimsonLogic Service Bureau located on Level 2, State Courts Business Centre after receiving approval from the Registrar.

Important Information:

CrimsonLogic Service Bureau

Level 2

State Courts Business Centre

Operating hours:

8.30a.m. to 12.30p.m. and 2.00p.m. to 5.00p.m.
from Mondays to Fridays

8.30a.m. to 12.30p.m.
on Saturdays

Contact number:

6538 9507

Key pointers for court reporting



Getting the facts right every time

It is important to ensure that the facts of a case are stated correctly, in any reporting of an ongoing trial or a judgment delivered by a Judge. Examples of such facts include:

- Name of parties
- Name of Judge
- Type of offence or matter
- The court where the case is being heard
- The outcome of the case – such as damages one party is required to pay, or the sentencing imposed on the accused.

To help the media in understanding the judgment delivered, a case summary will now accompany the grounds of decision of some Court of Appeal and High Court cases. A case summary is a shortened and more concise version of the main key points of the grounds of decision and is not meant to be a substitute for the reasons of the Court.

Reporting on the decision of the Judge

At the end of a trial, the Judge may deliver his/her judgment in court, or decide to reserve judgment on the case.

- After delivering an oral judgment, the Judge may later decide to release more comprehensive grounds of decision.
- If a judgment is reserved at the end of the trial, the full grounds of decision will be released later.

The judgments and grounds of decision delivered by the Court of Appeal and High Court can be found on the Singapore Courts website [here](#). For cases heard at the State Courts, the media may contact the Communications Department to request the presiding Judge's oral/sentencing remarks.

The decisions delivered by the Supreme Court, FJC and the State Courts in the last three months can also be found on the Lawnet website [here](#).

Gag order

Pursuant to section 8(3) of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act and section 7(3) of the State Courts Act, a Court may at any time order that no person shall: publish the name, address or photograph of any witness in any matter or proceeding, or any evidence or any other thing likely to add to the identification of any such witness; or do any other act which is likely to lead to the identification of such a witness.

It is the media's obligation to find out if a gag order had been given for a particular case, and for them to ensure they are not breaching any such orders when writing their news stories

- **Reporting of Sexual Offences and Matters Prosecuted Under the Children and Young Persons Act**

The media needs to exercise consideration for victims of sexual offences by not publishing the identities of the victims, or any information that might lead to them being identified. This would include the identity of the offender if the publication of his/her identity could lead to the identification of the victim.

In addition, the media may, by operation of law, be prohibited from reporting matters prosecuted under the Children and Young Persons Act. It is an offence to report or disclose any information that may lead to the identification of any child or young person concerned in the proceedings. Any person who publishes any matter in contravention of this shall be dealt with according to the law. Members of the media should also note that the law of defamation applies to court reporting.

Reporting on affidavits / statutory declarations

Paragraph 29A(3) of the Supreme Court Practice Directions provides that any affidavit or statutory declaration which has not been adduced as evidence or referred to in any hearing in open court or in chambers should not be published, reported or commented on publicly. This also applies to any other court document which has not been served on the relevant party or parties in the court proceedings.



Court etiquette



Ground rules in a courtroom

- All mobile phones and beeping devices are to be switched to the silent mode.
- Court users are permitted to use notebooks, tablets, mobile phones and other electronic devices to carry out the following activities, provided that such use does not in any way disrupt or trivialise the proceedings.
 - Take notes of evidence and for other purposes pertaining to the proceedings in open court or chambers; or
 - Communicate with external parties in all hearings in open court
- Photography, video and audio recording are strictly prohibited.
- Silence must be observed at all times during a hearing and visitors and media are not allowed to address the court.
- No food and beverages are to be consumed.
- Any member of the audience found to be in breach of the above mentioned rules may be asked to leave the courtroom.
- **For media:** Please show your MDDI press accreditation card in order to gain entry into the media gallery for Supreme Court hearings. For State Courts hearings, there are seats assigned to MDDI-accredited media in certain courtrooms. The media will however not be allowed to the assigned seats if they do not display their press accreditation cards.
- A virtual court session is one that is conducted via video conferencing and takes place as if the parties are in Court. Refer to our [Guide to Virtual Court Sessions](#) to find out what to be mindful of if you are attending a court hearing conducted via video conferencing.

Dress code

All visitors to the Courts should be properly attired. Visitors in singlets, shorts/bermudas, slippers or other inappropriate attire may not be permitted to enter the court buildings.

Media contact



The Communications Department of the Singapore Courts' Communications and Service Excellence Division manages media relations and queries pertaining to the Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts. Please send your queries to Judiciary_Media@judiciary.gov.sg.



Useful Resources for the Media



S/N	NAME	SOURCE
1	Media releases and speeches	https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/news-and-resources/news
2	Judgments and Case Summaries	https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/judgments/judgments-case-summaries
3	Glossary of Terms	https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/news-and-resources/glossary
4	Hearing List	https://www.judiciary.gov.sg/hearing-list
5	SG Courts Facebook Page	https://www.facebook.com/SingaporeCourts
6	SG Courts X Page	https://x.com/SingaporeCourts
7	SG Courts LinkedIn Page	https://www.linkedin.com/company/sgcourts
8	SG Courts YouTube Page	https://www.youtube.com/@SingaporeCourts
9	SG Courts WhatsApp Channel	https://go.gov.sg/sgcourtswa

Useful Resources for the Media



S/N	NAME	SOURCE
10	Singapore Statutes Online	https://sso.agc.gov.sg
11	Attorney-General's Chambers Website - Overview of Legal Processes	https://www.agc.gov.sg/legal-processes/legal-process
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SG
Courts

SUPREME COURT
SINGAPORE

STATE
COURTS
SINGAPORE

FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS
SINGAPORE