

A blurred photograph of a courtroom interior. In the center background, a judge's bench is visible, flanked by the United States flag on the left and a blue state flag on the right. Above the bench is a large circular seal, likely the Department of Justice seal. The room features dark wood paneling and arched doorways on either side. The foreground shows rows of empty wooden desks and blue chairs, suggesting a gallery or a waiting area. The overall lighting is warm and the image has a soft, out-of-focus quality.

DOJ Etiquette Workshop



Framing the Room

Thank you for being here. Whether you are newer to the courtroom or have been in it for some time, this workshop is about refining how we operate inside that space.

Today is not about memorizing rules. It is about understanding the standard that is expected of you the moment you step into court, and how your behavior directly affects not only your case, but the entire proceeding.

A courtroom is one of the few places in the city where structure truly matters. It is not casual, it is not reactive, and it is not driven by who speaks the loudest or the fastest. It is driven by control, clarity, and professionalism.

And the truth is, most cases are not won or lost on a single dramatic moment. They are shaped by consistency. By how prepared you are. By how you respond under pressure. By how clearly you present your position.

That is what etiquette really is. It is not surface level politeness. It is professional discipline.



Courtroom Appearance and Professional Dress

Before we ever speak, before we ever argue, before we ever object, there is something the Court sees immediately, and that is how you present yourself.

Court is a professional environment, and your appearance should reflect that.

As an attorney, your goal is not to stand out, it is to be taken seriously. That means clean, professional, and intentional attire. Suits, structured outfits, neutral tones, and well-kept appearance all contribute to how you are perceived.

If you look unprepared, overly casual, or distracted in your appearance, it sends a message before you ever open your mouth. And that message can work against you.

Now this extends beyond you. It includes your client.

Part of your responsibility as an attorney is to prepare your client not just legally, but behaviorally and visually. You should be advising them to dress appropriately for court.

That means:

- Clean clothing
- No distracting or inappropriate outfits
- Nothing that draws unnecessary attention

Your client does not need to look like an attorney, but they should look like someone who respects the setting they are in.

Because just like you, the Court is forming an impression of them immediately.

And whether we like it or not, presentation affects perception.



Understanding the Courtroom Layout and Positioning

When you look at a courtroom, everything has a place.

At the front, elevated, is the Judge's bench. That elevation is intentional. It represents authority and control over the proceeding.

In front of the bench, you will typically see a central podium or speaking area. This is where attorneys often stand when addressing the Court.

To either side, you have counsel tables. One side for the State, one side for the Defense. That is where you remain when you are not actively addressing the Court.

There may also be a witness stand positioned to one side, where witnesses testify when called.

And behind that, seating for observers.

Now here is where etiquette comes in.

- You do not wander the courtroom freely.
- You do not approach the bench without permission.
- You do not move toward a witness without direction or purpose.

If you need to approach, you ask.

“Your Honor, may I approach?”

That simple step maintains structure.

When addressing the Court, you should be clearly positioned, either standing at your table or at the designated speaking area, depending on how your courtroom operates.

Do not speak casually from wherever you happen to be. Position matters. It shows intention and respect for the process.

The courtroom is designed for order. Your movement within it should reflect that.



Judge's bench

Central podium or
speaking area

Witness stand

Prosecutor table

Counsel table

seating for
observers

seating for
observers



Physical Conduct and Awareness in the Courtroom

Now let's take that a step further.

Courtroom etiquette is not just verbal, it is physical.

- How you stand
- Where you look
- How you react
- How you move

All of that communicates something.

Avoid pacing. Avoid dramatic gestures. Avoid turning your back on the Court while speaking. Avoid stepping into spaces that are not yours without permission.

When someone else is speaking, your job is to listen, not react. That means no visible frustration, no exaggerated expressions, no side commentary.

Even small things like leaning too casually, slouching, or appearing disengaged can send the wrong message.

You want your presence to feel controlled and intentional.

Because again, even when you are not speaking, you are being observed.



Professional Presence and Preparation

Something people often underestimate, and that is presence.

Before you ever speak, the Court is already forming an impression of you.

If you enter late, if you appear unprepared, if you are searching for your own evidence in real time, if you are distracted or unfocused, it immediately affects how seriously your arguments are taken.

Preparation is not just about knowing your case. It is about being ready to move through it without hesitation.

You should know:

- What you are asking the Court for
- What evidence you are relying on
- What your key points are
- What weaknesses exist in your case

Because if you do not understand your own case clearly, the Court cannot either.

And when you are prepared, it shows without you needing to say anything. You move with purpose. You speak with direction. You do not stall or fill space.

That kind of presence builds trust before you ever argue a single point.



Structure, Timing, and Control

Now, let's talk about control.

One of the biggest misunderstandings about court is thinking that participation means constant involvement. It does not.

Court is structured. That structure exists so that one person speaks at a time, issues are addressed clearly, and the Judge can manage the flow of information.

You are not in control of the room. The Judge is.

Your responsibility is to operate within that structure.

That means understanding timing.

- You do not interrupt because something feels wrong.
- You do not jump in because you think you have the answer.
- You do not react because something frustrates you.

You wait. And when it is appropriate, you ask to be heard.

“Your Honor, may I respond?”

“Your Honor, may I clarify?”

Those moments of restraint are what separate a controlled attorney from a reactive one.

Because once multiple people start speaking at once, the courtroom loses clarity. And once clarity is lost, the effectiveness of the proceeding drops.

Control is not silence. Control is knowing when to speak.



Communication and Precision in Court

When you do speak, your words need to carry weight.

Court is not the place for long-winded explanations that circle the same point. It is not the place for emotional reactions disguised as arguments.

Everything you say should move your position forward.

A good habit is to structure your statements in three parts:

- What you are asking for
- Why you are asking for it
- What supports that request

For example:

“Your Honor, the Defense requests dismissal of this charge due to insufficient probable cause. The report identifies the suspect by clothing alone and does not establish a connection to the alleged offense.”

That is clear. It gives the Court direction immediately.

Compare that to someone who starts speaking without structure, builds slowly, repeats themselves, and only reaches their point halfway through. That kind of communication weakens even a strong argument.

Precision shows confidence. Rambling shows uncertainty.

And the Court responds differently to each.



Advising Your Client on Courtroom Conduct

Now let's talk about something that separates prepared attorneys from unprepared ones, and that is how well they prepare their client.

You should never walk into court without first explaining to your client how they are expected to behave.

Your client should know:

- They do not speak unless addressed
- They do not interrupt proceedings
- They do not react emotionally out loud
- They do not argue with anyone in the courtroom

And most importantly, they should understand that *you speak for them* unless the Court directs otherwise.

You should also guide them on how to address the Court if they are spoken to.

They should respond with:

- > “Yes, Your Honor”
- > “No, Your Honor”

Not casual language. Not attitude. Not defensiveness.

Because the moment a client begins reacting emotionally, speaking out of turn, or challenging the Court directly, it puts you in a position where you are no longer just managing the case, you are managing damage.

A well-prepared client strengthens your case.

An unprepared client can weaken it quickly.



Handling Disagreement and Maintaining Professional Tone

Court is built on disagreement. That is expected.

But how you handle that disagreement defines your professionalism.

You are not there to argue *with* opposing counsel. You are there to argue *through* the Court.

That distinction matters.

If opposing counsel says something incorrect, you do not turn to them and engage directly. You redirect it to the Judge.

“Your Honor, the Defense disputes that statement.”

“Your Honor, that is not supported by the evidence presented.”

This keeps the Court in control of the exchange.

Tone matters just as much as structure.

You can be firm without being disrespectful. You can challenge an argument without attacking the person making it.

The moment your tone becomes sarcastic, dismissive, or emotional, your argument starts to lose strength, even if the point itself is valid.

Professionalism is not about being passive. It is about being controlled.



Objections as a Professional Tool

Now let's move into objections, because this is where many attorneys either strengthen or weaken their presence quickly.

An objection is not a reaction. It is a decision.

Before you object, you should be asking yourself:

Is this actually improper, or is it just harmful to my case

If it is only harmful, you address it later in argument.

If it is improper, you object clearly and briefly.

“Objection, Your Honor. Relevance.”

“Objection, Your Honor. Speculation.”

Then you stop.

The mistake many people make is turning objections into arguments. That is not their purpose.

An objection is simply a signal to the Court that something needs to be reviewed.

If the Judge wants more explanation, they will ask for it.

Overusing objections, or using them emotionally, makes you look reactive. Using them selectively and correctly makes you look disciplined.

And discipline builds credibility.



Witness Handling and Testimony Control

Now let's talk about witnesses.

Testimony is where your case either becomes clear or falls apart.

On direct examination, your role is to guide the witness. That means asking clear, simple questions that allow them to explain what they know.

If your questions are confusing, the testimony will be confusing.

On cross-examination, your role shifts. You are no longer guiding, you are narrowing.

Short, controlled questions are your strongest tool.

Instead of asking broad, open-ended questions, you focus on specific points that limit the witness to clear answers.

But even then, you maintain professionalism.

Badgering a witness, interrupting aggressively, or trying to overpower them does not strengthen your position. It often has the opposite effect.

Control comes from structure, not pressure.

And for witnesses themselves, the expectation is just as important.

Answer what is asked. Do not add extra. Do not guess. Do not try to fill silence.

Clarity in testimony helps the Court. Confusion harms everyone.



Evidence and Courtroom Organization

Now let's move into evidence.

Evidence should never feel disorganized or unclear when presented.

When you introduce evidence, you are guiding the Court through it.

You identify it clearly. You explain what it is. You briefly state why it matters.

“Your Honor, the State moves to admit Exhibit A, a dashcam recording showing the initial interaction between the officer and the defendant.”

That gives the Court everything it needs to understand what is being presented.

If evidence is unclear, unlabeled, or poorly explained, it slows the proceeding and weakens your position.

Good evidence does not need to be over-explained. It should speak for itself, with you providing just enough structure to make it understandable.



Composure Under Pressure

Now, this is where etiquette is truly tested.

Everything we have discussed works well when things are going smoothly.

The real test is what happens when they are not.

When a ruling goes against you

When a witness says something unexpected

When opposing counsel pushes your position

Your response in those moments matters more than anything else.

- Do you stay composed
- Do you stay focused
- Do you stay professional

Or do you react

A composed response shows control.

If you need a moment, ask for one.

“Your Honor, may I have a brief moment to review my notes?”

That is professional.

Reacting emotionally, raising your voice, or becoming dismissive does not strengthen your position. It signals loss of control.

And once control is lost, it is difficult to regain.



Credibility and Long-Term Impact

Everything you do in court contributes to your credibility.

Not just what you argue, but how you argue it.


If you are consistent, clear, and controlled, the Court begins to trust your presentation.

If you are disorganized, reactive, or exaggerated, the Court becomes more cautious.

Credibility is built over time, but it can be damaged quickly.

And once it is damaged, even strong arguments may carry less weight.

So every appearance in court is not just about that case. It is about how you are perceived moving forward.



Guiding the Courtroom Environment Through Leadership

As an attorney, especially as you gain experience, you are not just participating in the courtroom, you are helping shape it.

Newer participants will take cues from you.

If you are structured, they will follow structure.

If you are respectful, they will mirror that.

If you are chaotic, the room will become chaotic.

So part of etiquette is leadership.

Not by controlling others directly, but by modeling the standard.

If your client starts to react, you calm them.

If things begin to get disorganized, you return to structure.

If tone starts to slip, you bring it back to professionalism.

You do not need to correct the room loudly. You guide it by how you conduct yourself.

That is what strong courtroom presence looks like.



Closing Perspective

To bring everything together, I want to leave you with this:

Court is not about who can speak the most. It is about who can speak with purpose.

It is not about who reacts the fastest. It is about who responds with control.

It is not about dominating the room. It is about respecting the structure of it.

A strong courtroom is built on discipline.

And every attorney in that room contributes to whether that standard is maintained or lowered.

Your appearance, your positioning, your tone, your discipline, your preparation, and even how you guide your client all contribute to the same outcome.

Control.

Not control over the Court, but control over your role within it.

Because the more controlled you are, the clearer your arguments become.

And the clearer your arguments become, the stronger they are received.

So when you step into court, think beyond your argument.

Think about how you carry it.

Because that is what determines how it is received.

Last Step

Complete a short quiz through
the Discord.

Use this link [here](#).

DOJ Etiquette Workshop Quiz

1. What is the primary purpose of courtroom etiquette?

- A. To make court more formal
- B. To make attorneys look professional
- C. To maintain respect, order, and clarity during proceedings
- D. To help Judges issue punishments

2. You arrive for a hearing and realize you have not organized your exhibits. What should you do?

- A. Organize them while the Judge is speaking
- B. Ask opposing counsel to help
- C. Be prepared before court begins and avoid arriving unorganized
- D. Submit them anyway and explain later

DOJ Etiquette Workshop Quiz

3. How should an attorney address the Judge during proceedings?

- A. Judge
- B. Sir or Ma'am
- C. Your Honor
- D. Counselor

4. True or False

An attorney should argue directly with opposing counsel if they disagree with a statement made in court.

DOJ Etiquette Workshop Quiz

5. Which statement is the most appropriate?

- A. "That's not true and opposing counsel knows it."
- B. "You're wrong."
- C. "Your Honor, the Defense disputes that statement."
- D. "That's ridiculous."

6. When should an attorney object?

- A. Anytime testimony hurts their case
- B. Anytime they disagree with a witness
- C. When there is a legal basis for the objection
- D. Whenever opposing counsel is speaking

DOJ Etiquette Workshop Quiz

7. After making an objection, what should you do?

- A. Continue explaining your argument
- B. Wait for the Court to respond
- C. Repeat the objection
- D. Debate opposing counsel

8. Which of the following is NOT a common objection?

- A. Relevance
- B. Speculation
- C. Foundation
- D. Disagreement

DOJ Etiquette Workshop Quiz

9. True or False

A witness should answer only the question that was asked.

10. What is one of the attorney's responsibilities before court?

- A. Coaching witness answers
- B. Preparing the client for courtroom behavior
- C. Speaking on behalf of the Judge
- D. Deciding the verdict