

## **Checklist: Reading legal documents**

You can print this checklist as it may help you when you are reading your legal document.

Tick on each box as you go.

### **Reading legal documents**

#### **Who is it from?**

- A letter or court document would be sent to or served on (given to) you. Knowing who it is from is the first step in understanding what it is saying.

#### **Is it in reply to anything?**

- A letter might refer to a previous letter from you. If this is the case, you would know that it is in response to something you said.
- A court document that is served on you might be in response to a court document that you served. For example, it might be a Defence to a Statement of Claim. In that case, you will need to look at the original document you served to understand what the document you have received is saying.

#### **Headings and reference numbers**

- Check for any headings, to help you understand what the document is about.
- Headings may refer to the names of the parties to the case or to court case numbers and reference numbers.

#### **What does the document mean?**

- The type of document can tell you what it means.
- A Statement of Claim means a court case has been started against you.
- A letter of demand means that someone thinks you owe them money.

A Subpoena means you have to go to court, or provide the court with documents.

An Act of Parliament explains what the law is.

**What are the issues?**

- Make a dot point list of all the issues the document raises.
- Does it mention any relevant law, and if so, what law?
- Does it mention past incidents, and if so, what are they?

**Do you need to do anything?**

- A letter might ask for a response.
- A court document might need you to serve another court document or evidence by a particular time.
- A court document might explain when and where you have to attend court.
- A fine will require a payment, or an election to go to court, by a particular date.

**Are there any time limits?**

- A letter might give you a certain time to respond by, or to pay an amount of money demanded.
- There might be a time limit for responding to a court document. For example, a Defence must be filed within 28 days of being served with a Statement of Claim.

**Do you agree with part or all of the document?**

- Do you agree with what the document is saying?
- Separate the points you agree with from the points you disagree with.

**Legal words, phrases and Latin**

Legal documents often contain words and phrases that are not easily understood by non-lawyers.

Legal documents may also contain Latin phrases that can be confusing. For a list of commonly used legal words, phrases and Latin words, see [Reading legal documents](#).



### **Use a dictionary**

If you don't understand any words or phrases, use a dictionary.

There are legal dictionaries available for common legal words, including Latin.

You can access dictionaries and legal dictionaries in your local library. Go to the LIAC website for more information.