



**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 Supreme Court, 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 Supreme Court.

The information captured in this publication pertains only to the Supreme Court. Court procedures and processes may be different in the Family Justice Courts and the State Courts due to the nature of cases that come before each court.

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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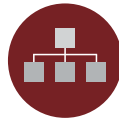
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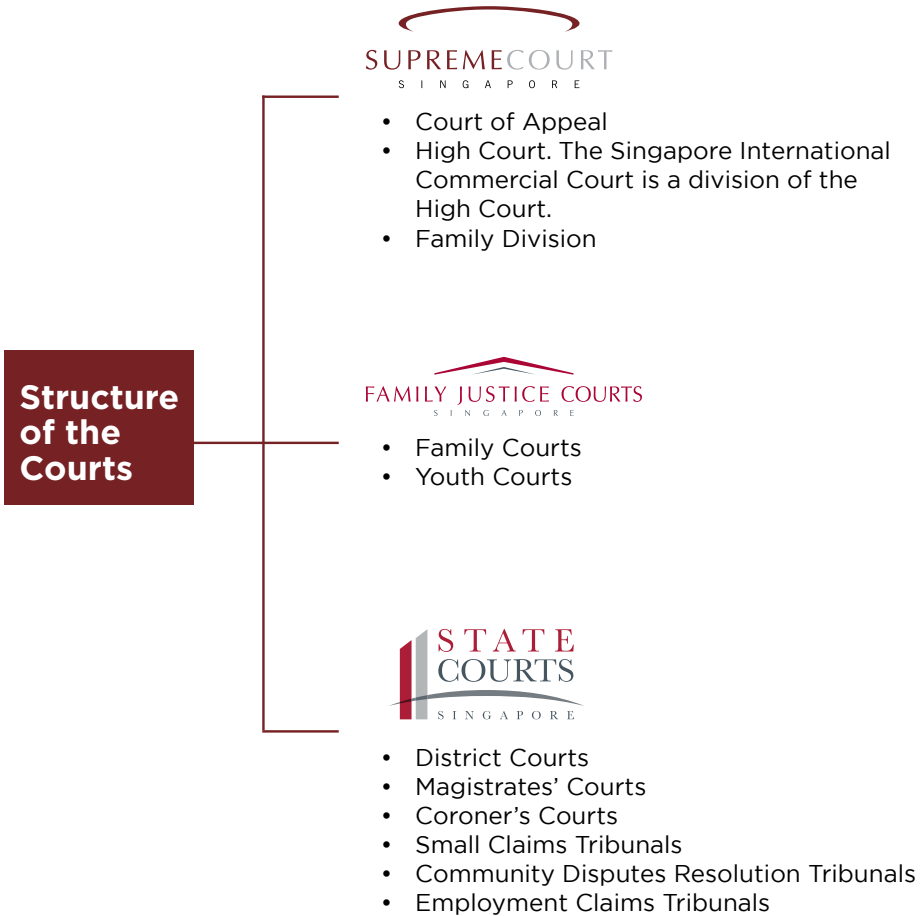
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# Structure of the Courts



The Singapore Judiciary comprises the Supreme Court and the State Courts (previously named Subordinate Courts).



*Note: This publication covers only information about the Supreme Court*

# Jurisdiction of the Supreme Court



- The **Court of Appeal** hears both criminal and civil appeals from the High Court.
- The **High Court** hears cases which fall within the following categories:
  - o Civil cases where the value of the claim exceeds \$250,000
  - o Criminal cases where offences are punishable with death or imprisonment for a term which exceeds 10 years
  - o Civil and criminal appeals from State Courts
  - o Admiralty matters
  - o Company winding-up and other insolvency-related proceedings
  - o Bankruptcy proceedings
  - o Applications for the admission of advocates and solicitors
  - o Judicial review and public law related cases
  - o Tribunal appeals

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- The **Family Division** exercises original jurisdiction and hears appeals against the decisions of the Family Courts and the Youth Courts in family proceedings.
  - o Hears ancillary matters in family proceedings involving assets of \$5 million or more.
  - o Hears probate matters where the value of the deceased's estate is more than \$5 million or if the case involves the resealing of a foreign grant.

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- The **Singapore International Commercial Court (“SICC”)**
  - o The SICC is a division of the Singapore High Court and part of the Supreme Court of Singapore designed to deal with transnational commercial disputes.
  - o Generally, 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 High Court to the SICC

# Types of Court Proceedings

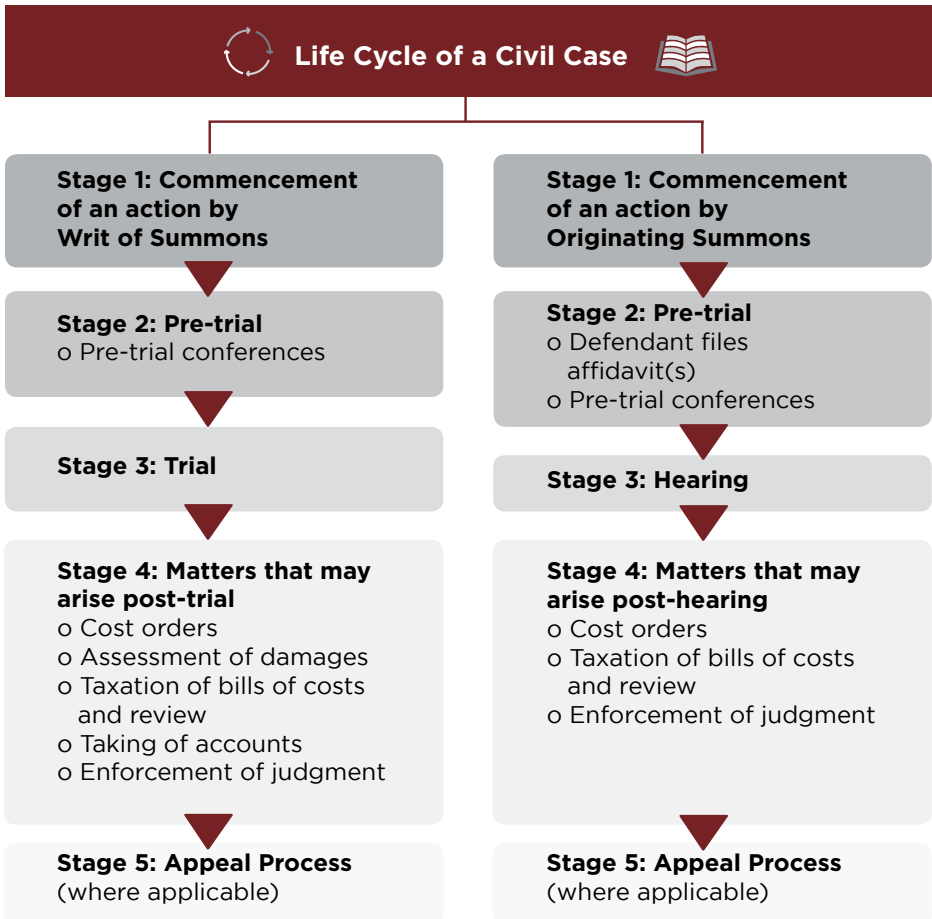


## Civil Proceedings

In general, the High Court deals with matters where the value of the subject matter of the claim exceeds S\$250,000.00.

There are, however, some processes not bound by monetary limits that are exclusively dealt with in the High Court. These include:

- Admiralty Proceedings;
- Bankruptcy Proceedings;
- Companies Winding-Up Proceedings; and
- Applications for Admissions of Advocate and Solicitors.



## **Criminal Proceedings**

The **High Court** deals with the following types of criminal matters:

- trial of criminal offences in its original jurisdiction;
- appeals from decisions of a District Court or Magistrate's Court;
- revision in respect of criminal proceedings and matters dealt with by the State Courts; and
- points of law reserved by special cases submitted by a District Court or Magistrate's Court.

The **Court of Appeal** hears:

- appeals against decisions made by the High Court in the exercise of its original criminal jurisdiction;
  - questions of law arising out of a case stated by a trial court;
  - criminal references, from criminal matters heard by the High Court in the exercise of its appellate or revisionary jurisdiction.
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### **Types of Criminal Proceedings include:**

- Criminal Trials
- Matters concerning bail
- Criminal Revisions
- Criminal Appeals
- Criminal References
- Criminal Motions







## Life Cycle of a Criminal Case



1



### Stage 1: Pre-trial

- o Pre-trial conferences
- o Committal hearings

2



### Stage 2: Trial

3



### Stage 3: Judgment and Verdict

4



### Stage 4: Appeal Process

(where applicable)

# Types of Hearings



## Chamber Hearings

The general rule is that hearings in chambers in civil proceedings 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:**

Chamber hearings 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 chamber hearings can be made available to the public, 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 chamber hearings should not prejudice the administration of justice.

## Open Court Hearings

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. 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 on the courtroom door bearing the words “Hearing in Camera”.

# 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.

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## 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

# Media inspection procedure at the Supreme Court of Singapore

For electronic case files

**1**

Download and complete the appropriate parts of the request form found [here](#) on the Supreme Court website.

**2**

Submit your hardcopy form together with your Ministry of Communications and Information (“MCI”) press accreditation card at the Records Counter located at Level 2 of the Supreme Court building.

- Please remember to indicate the reason for inspection

**3**

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 LawNet Service Bureau, located at Level 1 within the Supreme Court building.
- If the request is rejected, no payment will be required.

**4**

**Upon successful e-filing**, if you have indicated that you wish to conduct the inspection online and had 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 LawNet Service Bureau to inspect the documents.

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

# Media inspection procedure at the Supreme Court of Singapore

For non-electronic case files\*

**1**

Download and complete the appropriate parts of the request form found [here](#) on the Supreme Court website.

**2**

Submit your hardcopy form together with your Ministry of Communications and Information (“MCI”) press accreditation card at the Records Counter located at Level 2 of the Supreme Court building.

- Please remember to indicate the reason for inspection

**3**

Upon processing and approval of the Request, the requestor will be able to view the case file and court documents at the Legal Registry.

\*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 Summonses (pre-2001)
- Powers of Attorney (pre-2002)
- Suits (pre-2001)

## Important Information:

### Records Counter

Legal Registry at Level 2,  
Supreme Court Building

### Operating hours:

9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. from Mondays  
to Thursdays

9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Fridays  
Public holidays excluded

**Contact number: 6332 4252**

### Lawnet Service Bureau

Level 1  
Supreme Court Building

### Operating hours:

8.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and  
2 p.m. to 5 p.m. from Mondays  
to Fridays

**Contact number: 6337 9164**

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

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

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## Reporting on the decision of the Judge

At the end of a trial, the Judge may deliver his 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.

## **Gag order**

Pursuant to s 8(3) of the Supreme Court of Judicature 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.

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## **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 trivialize 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 rules may be asked to leave the courtroom
  - **For media: Please show your MCI press accreditation card, in order to gain entry into the media gallery**
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## Dress code

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

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## Media contact

Media relations and queries are managed by the Office of Public Affairs. Please feel free to send your request or queries (which are related to the Supreme Court or the Family Justice Courts) to the following email address: [Supcourt\\_media@supcourt.gov.sg](mailto:Supcourt_media@supcourt.gov.sg)

# Useful Resources for the Media



S/N	NAME	SOURCE
1	<b>Supreme Court Website – Media Resources</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media releases</li> <li>• Speeches</li> <li>• Case summaries</li> <li>• Announcements</li> <li>• Hearing List</li> <li>• Judgments</li> <li>• Annual Reports</li> <li>• Media Contacts in Supreme Court</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/news/media-resources">https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/news/media-resources</a>
2	<b>Supreme Court Website – Glossary of Terms</b>	<a href="https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/services/self-help-services/glossary-of-terms">https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/services/self-help-services/glossary-of-terms</a>
3	<b>Supreme Court Website – Subscription Feature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Judgments</li> <li>• Case summaries</li> <li>• Media releases</li> <li>• Registrar Circulars</li> <li>• Speeches</li> <li>• Practice Directions</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/subscribe">https://www.supremecourt.gov.sg/subscribe</a>
4	<b>Supreme Court Twitter page</b>	<a href="https://twitter.com/SupremeCourtSG">https://twitter.com/SupremeCourtSG</a>
5	<b>Supreme Court YouTube page</b>	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEGKudOFzfXKOAQ3dutDgpg/featured">https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEGKudOFzfXKOAQ3dutDgpg/featured</a>
6	<b>State Courts Website</b>	<a href="https://www.statecourts.gov.sg/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.statecourts.gov.sg/Pages/default.aspx</a>

S/N	NAME	SOURCE
7	<b>Family Justice Courts Website</b>	<a href="https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg/Pages/default.aspx">https://www.familyjusticecourts.gov.sg/Pages/default.aspx</a>
8	<b>Attorney-General's Chambers Website - Overview of Legal Processes</b>	<a href="https://www.agc.gov.sg/legal-processes/legal-process">https://www.agc.gov.sg/legal-processes/legal-process</a>
9	<b>Singapore Statutes Online</b>	<a href="https://sso.agc.gov.sg">https://sso.agc.gov.sg</a>
10	<b>Ministry of Law Website - Amendments to the Administration of Justice (Protection) Act</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of conduct that amount to contempt of court</li> <li>• Defences to contempt of court</li> </ul>	<a href="https://www.minlaw.gov.sg/content/minlaw/en/news/press-releases/new-bill-on-protection-of-the-administration-of-justice.html">https://www.minlaw.gov.sg/content/minlaw/en/news/press-releases/new-bill-on-protection-of-the-administration-of-justice.html</a>  <a href="https://www.minlaw.gov.sg/content/minlaw/en/news/parliamentary-speeches-and-responses/second-reading-speech-by-minister-for-law-mr-k-shanmugam--on-th1.html">https://www.minlaw.gov.sg/content/minlaw/en/news/parliamentary-speeches-and-responses/second-reading-speech-by-minister-for-law-mr-k-shanmugam--on-th1.html</a>

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