

How to Address a Judge

In person: In an interview, social event, or in court, address a judge as “Your Honor” or “Judge [last name].” If you are more familiar with the judge, you may call her just “Judge.” In any context, avoid “Sir” or “Ma’am.”

In writing: There is a basic formula for addressing correspondence to a judge:

The Honorable First M. Last
Court Name¹
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Judge Last:

As with any rule, there are, of course, exceptions:

- **Judge vs. Justice.** Write “Dear Judge” to a jurist on the Superior Court, Federal District Court, and Federal Court of Appeals. Write “Dear Justice” to a jurist on the California Court of Appeal and the U.S. and California Supreme Courts. Check the websites of other states’ courts for variations
- **Special Titles.** If you are writing to a Chief Judge or Presiding Justice (i.e., head honcho), add that denomination in the address block before the court name. Other designations, like Senior Judge or Associate Justice, need not be listed.
- **Special Judges.**

Bankruptcy Judges do not need any special designation, as long as you specify that they work at the Bankruptcy Court rather than the District Court:

The Honorable First M. Last
United States Bankruptcy Court, Central District of California

Magistrate Judges should have this title after their name (“The Honorable First M. Last, Magistrate Judge”). It will still be “Dear Judge Last” after that.

Commissioners should also have this title after their name (“The Honorable First M. Last, Commissioner”). It will then be “Dear Commissioner Last.”

- **Chambers vs. Departments.** In a cover letter to a *Superior Court* judge, do not say that you would like to work in her “chambers”; a Superior Court judge has a “department” or “courtroom.”

¹ Make sure you get the court name and address exactly right (check court websites). For example, the California Court of Appeal does not have an “s” on the end, while the federal Court of Appeals does.