California Small Claims Filing Checklist (2026)

From the demand letter to collecting the judgment

Work through these steps in order. CCP means the California Code of Civil Procedure. Full guide: clearlegaltips.com/california-small-claims-court/

1. CHECK THE LIMITS (CCP 116.220, 116.221, 116.231)

[ ] I am suing as an individual (limit $12,500) or as a business, corporation, LLC or partnership (limit $6,250).

Amount I am claiming ($): _____

[ ] If my claim is over $2,500, I have not filed more than two claims over $2,500 in California this calendar year.

[ ] If my claim is over the limit, I understand I can waive the excess, and the waiver takes effect at judgment (116.220(d)).

2. ASK FOR PAYMENT IN WRITING (CCP 116.320)

Date I sent my written demand: _____

How I sent it, and my proof: _____

3. PICK THE COURT

Defendant's legal/trade name: _____

Defendant's address: _____

County I am filing in: _____

[ ] The county is where the defendant lives or does business, or another allowed place.

4. FORMS AND FILING FEE (CCP 116.230)

[ ] Form SC-100, Plaintiff's Claim and ORDER to Go to Small Claims Court, completed.

[ ] Form SC-100A added if I need room for more plaintiffs or defendants.

[ ] Asked the clerk or small claims advisor whether my court has local forms.

[ ] Made one copy for me and one for each defendant (the original plus at least 2 copies).

Fee change: Assembly Bill 2781 (Chapter 98, Statutes of 2026) moves the line between the $50 and $75 fees to $6,250, starting January 1, 2027. The $50 fee then covers claims over $1,500 up to $6,250, and the $75 fee covers claims over $6,250. File before then and the table below applies.

Amount claimed	Filing fee
$1,500 or less	$30
$1,500.01 to $5,000	$50
Over $5,000	$75
More than 12 other small claims in the past 12 months	$100

Fee paid ($) or waiver (yes/no): _____

5. HEARING DATE (CCP 116.330)

Hearing date on my SC-100: _____

Service deadline: _____

15 days before the hearing, or 20 days if the defendant is in a different county.

Proof of service due: _____

6. SERVE THE DEFENDANT

[ ] I am not serving the papers myself. My server is 18 or older and not part of the case.

Server's name: _____

Date, time and place served: _____

[ ] If no one was home, my server used substituted service: left the papers with an adult at the defendant's home or work and mailed a copy to the same address.

[ ] Form SC-104, Proof of Service, signed by the server and filed at least 5 days before the hearing.

7. GET READY FOR THE HEARING

[ ] Evidence in date order: the original for me, a copy each for the judge and the other side.

[ ] Asked for a subpoena only if a witness or document would not come on its own.

[ ] Requested an interpreter on Form INT-300, if needed, as early as possible.

[ ] Wrote a one-sentence opening: who owes me, how much, and why.

8. AFTER THE HEARING

Notice of Entry (SC-130) date: _____

30-day date: _____

Earliest day to collect, and the defendant's deadline to appeal (CCP 116.750).

[ ] The defendant sent me Form SC-133, Judgment Debtor's Statement of Assets, within 30 days (CCP 116.830). If not, I asked for a debtor's exam.

[ ] To collect from wages or a bank account, I got a Writ of Execution from the court. The sheriff or another levying officer does the levy.

[ ] To put a lien on real estate, I got an Abstract of Judgment from the court clerk.

[ ] When I am paid in full, I file an Acknowledgment of Satisfaction of Judgment (form SC-290).

[ ] I noted the date my judgment expires (10 years) in case I need to renew it.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

Checked in November 2026 against CCP sections 116.220, 116.221, 116.230, 116.231, 116.320, 116.330, 116.750 and 116.830, Assembly Bill 2781 and the California Courts Self-Help Guide. General information, not legal advice. Local courts may have their own forms and rules: ask your court clerk or small claims advisor, and consult a licensed California attorney for advice on your situation. Guide: clearlegaltips.com/california-small-claims-court/