

Civil Just-us for Us

A Practical Handbook for Pro Se Civil Rights Litigants

Build the record. Protect the facts. Make the court confront the evidence.

RONALD L. HESTER

First Edition

Copyright and Reader Notice

Copyright © 2026 Ronald L. Hester. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form without written permission from the copyright holder, except for brief quotations used in reviews or as otherwise permitted by law.

Important legal disclaimer

This book provides general legal information and practical organization tools. It is not legal advice, does not create an attorney-client relationship, and is not a substitute for advice from a licensed attorney who knows the facts, jurisdiction, deadlines, and current law governing a particular case. Court rules, statutes, local practices, filing systems, and controlling precedent change. Every reader must verify current federal rules, local rules, standing orders, scheduling orders, and appellate law before acting.

Examples and templates are educational starting points. They are not promises of success and should never be copied without adapting them to the evidence and law of the reader's case. If a deadline may be approaching, seek qualified legal help immediately.

Privacy note. Use initials or fictional names when practicing with the worksheets. Do not publish medical records, home addresses, dates of birth, Social Security numbers, names of minors, or sealed information.

Contents

Part	What you will learn
Introduction	Why procedure and proof decide civil-rights cases
1	What Section 1983 Does and Does Not Do
2	Turn an Experience into Legal Claims
3	Deadlines Parties Capacity and Remedies
4	Build the Evidence System Before You File
5	Draft a Complaint That Can Survive
6	Answer Motions Without Losing the Thread
7	Use Discovery to Test the Official Story
8	Depositions Admissions and Impeachment
9	Summary Judgment Is an Evidence Audit
10	Qualified Immunity and Disputed Facts
11	Damages Settlement Trial and Appeal
12	The Pro Se Operating System
Appendix A	The First Seventy Two Hours
Appendix B	Chronology and Evidence Matrix
Appendix C	Discovery and Motion Starters
Appendix D	Official Resources and Authorities

Introduction

Why procedure and proof decide civil rights cases

A person can be right about what happened and still lose in court. That is one of the hardest truths for a pro se litigant to accept. Federal court does not decide a case from outrage alone. It asks narrower questions: What legal right was violated? Who personally caused the violation? What evidence is admissible? Was the filing timely? Did the litigant follow the rules for presenting facts?

That gap between lived truth and courtroom proof is where many cases collapse. Civil Just-us for Us is designed to help close it. The purpose is not to turn a reader into a lawyer. It is to teach a disciplined way to preserve facts, separate events, identify legal elements, request evidence, test changing explanations, and present a record a judge can use.

The title is intentional. “Just-us” names the frustration people feel when the institutions promising justice seem to speak a language ordinary people were never taught. The answer is not to imitate legal jargon. The answer is to become exact: exact about time, exact about actors, exact about what each person knew, and exact about what the record proves.

The central method. Separate the events. Identify the decision-maker. Freeze the timeline. Match each fact to a legal element. Cite the record every time.

How to use this handbook

Read Chapters 1 through 5 before filing if possible. If a case is already active, begin with the chapter matching the current stage, then build the chronology and evidence matrix in Appendix B. Keep the court’s scheduling order beside this book. A general guide never overrides a judge’s order.

- Mark every deadline on two calendars and create reminders at 30, 14, 7, and 2 days.
- Maintain one master chronology and one exhibit index throughout the case.
- Keep original files untouched. Work from copies and record how each copy was obtained.
- Write for a skeptical reader who knows none of the background.
- Ask what the opposing side must prove, not only what you want to say.

Chapter 1

What Section 1983 Does and Does Not Do

42 U.S.C. § 1983 creates a civil cause of action against a person who, acting under color of state law, causes the deprivation of a right secured by the Constitution or federal law. Section 1983 is a vehicle; it is not itself the source of most rights. A complaint therefore must identify both the vehicle and the underlying right, such as the Fourth Amendment right against an unreasonable seizure.

The basic structure

Question	What the plaintiff must connect
Who acted?	A person or entity legally subject to suit.
Under what authority?	Action under color of state law.
What right?	A specific federal constitutional or statutory right.
What conduct?	An act, decision, failure, or policy tied to that right.
What causation?	A factual link between the defendant and the injury.
What remedy?	Damages, declaratory relief, or proper prospective relief.

Personal involvement matters

Do not treat “the police,” “the city,” or “the department” as a single actor. List each critical event and identify who ordered it, who performed it, who observed it, who could stop it, and what each person knew at that moment. Titles alone do not establish liability. A supervisor is not automatically liable because an employee acted unlawfully.

Municipal liability is a separate claim

Under *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, a municipality is not liable under § 1983 merely because it employed the individual defendant. The plaintiff generally must connect the violation to an official policy, a widespread custom, a final policymaker’s decision, or a legally sufficient failure to train or supervise. “The city employed the officer” is not enough.

Common limits

- States and many state agencies have Eleventh Amendment immunity from damages suits in federal court.

- Judges and prosecutors may have absolute immunity for particular functions, even when the conduct is alleged to be wrong.
- A federal official ordinarily is not sued under § 1983 merely because the conduct involved federal authority.
- Some claims that would necessarily undermine an existing conviction may be restricted by Heck v. Humphrey unless the conviction has been invalidated.

Drafting rule. Name the right, the act, the actor, the time, the knowledge, the injury, and the requested remedy. If one is missing, investigate before adding conclusions.

Chapter 2

Turn an Experience into Legal Claims

A real-world encounter may contain several separate Fourth Amendment events. A stop, release, renewed detention, arrest, vehicle search, station-house search, and later evidence discovery should not be blended into one paragraph. Each event may require a different justification and may involve different actors and information.

Use the event separation test

1. Identify the precise moment government authority restrained, searched, entered, seized, ordered, or used force.
2. Identify when that event began and ended.
3. List every fact known to the decision-maker before the event began.
4. Exclude facts discovered afterward when evaluating the earlier decision.
5. State the legal justification the defense claims and the evidence supporting or contradicting it.
6. Record the injury produced by that event, separate from later events.

This method prevents retroactive justification. Evidence discovered after a search may affect damages, causation, or another doctrine, but it does not automatically become information known before the search was authorized.

Build an element chart

Claim	Elements to research	Proof to locate
False arrest or seizure	Intentional confinement or seizure without adequate legal justification; precise elements vary.	Body camera, dispatch, arrest report, timestamps, witness accounts.
Unreasonable search	Search attributable to defendant and unreasonable under the governing context.	Authorization, scope, location, manner, policy, contemporaneous reason.
Excessive force	Objective reasonableness under the facts confronting the officer.	Video, injuries, medical records, warnings, resistance evidence.
Failure to intervene	Opportunity and ability to prevent another officer's constitutional violation under circuit law.	Positions, duration, audio, testimony, command structure.
Municipal liability	Policy, custom, policymaker decision, or qualifying failure	Policies, training, discipline, similar incidents,

	tied causally to the violation.	policymaker records.
--	---------------------------------	----------------------

Facts are not adjectives

“The officer lied” is a conclusion. A stronger presentation identifies the two incompatible statements, when each was made, the speaker’s access to the facts, and the exhibit proving the conflict. “The search was humiliating” describes impact but not unreasonableness. Add the place, exposure, number and gender of observers, physical contact, duration, security need, available alternatives, and governing policy.

Precision beats volume. One clean contradiction tied to a material issue is often stronger than twenty pages of accusations.

Chapter 3

Deadlines Parties Capacity and Remedies

Start with the clock

Section 1983 does not contain its own general limitations period. Federal courts generally borrow the forum state's personal-injury limitations period, while federal law governs when the federal claim accrues. Special doctrines may delay, toll, or alter the analysis. The deadline can differ by claim, defendant, and requested relief.

New York note. Claims brought in New York commonly use New York's three-year personal-injury limitations period for § 1983 claims, but accrual and tolling must be researched for the specific claim. State-law notices of claim and shorter deadlines may apply to separate state-law causes of action.

Create a limitations memo before filing. For every claim, record the event date, possible accrual date, limitations source, tolling questions, and last safe filing date. Do not rely on the longest possible date. Use the earliest reasonable deadline until counsel or controlling law confirms otherwise.

Name the correct defendant

- Confirm the person's legal name and role through reports, payroll records, rosters, body-camera metadata, or discovery.
- Research whether a department can be sued as a separate entity under local law.
- Specify individual capacity when seeking personal damages from an official, consistent with controlling pleading rules.
- Distinguish damages claims from official-capacity claims and prospective injunctive relief.
- Use John or Jane Doe placeholders only when allowed and pursue identification promptly.

Service is not clerical trivia

Filing a complaint and serving it are different acts. Rule 4 governs summonses, service methods, waivers, deadlines, and proof of service. A plaintiff proceeding in forma pauperis may receive service assistance, but still must provide enough identifying information and monitor the docket. Always read the court's service order.

Choose remedies that fit the injury

Compensatory damages require proof of actual injury and causation. Nominal damages may be available when a right was violated without provable compensatory loss. Punitive damages against an individual require the governing heightened standard and are not generally available against a municipality under § 1983. Prospective relief requires a live basis for forward-looking relief, not only a past injury.

Chapter 4

Build the Evidence System Before You File

Memory fades, digital systems overwrite files, and official narratives harden. Preservation is therefore the first litigation skill. The goal is to make later verification possible without altering the original material.

The four-folder system

Folder	Contents	Rule
01 Originals	Untouched downloads, videos, photographs, letters, exports.	Never edit, rename destructively, or annotate originals.
02 Working Copies	Clips, enlarged images, transcripts, annotations.	Every derivative points back to its source.
03 Court Filed	File-stamped pleadings, orders, exhibits, receipts.	Use the docket number and filing date in filenames.
04 Research	Cases, statutes, rules, policies, notes.	Record court, year, citation, and date checked.

Create a defensible chronology

Use one row per event. Include the exact time if available, the source of that time, people present, action, words spoken, disputed point, and exhibit. Do not silently “correct” conflicting clocks. Record that camera time and dispatch time differ, then calculate or explain the offset if the evidence permits.

Send preservation requests early

A preservation request should identify the incident, date range, people, locations, systems, categories of information, and foreseeable litigation. Request preservation of native files, metadata, audit logs, revisions, retention schedules, messages, dispatch, body-worn camera, vehicle video, booking-area video, photographs, property records, policies, training, authorization forms, and complaint or discipline records when relevant and legally obtainable.

A preservation letter is not automatically a discovery request, subpoena, or court order. It creates notice and identifies material that should not be destroyed. Formal discovery still must comply with the Rules and the scheduling order.

Authenticate as you collect

- Record who created or supplied the item and when you received it.
- Keep the email, envelope, portal receipt, or production cover letter.
- Preserve native files and metadata when possible.

- For screenshots, preserve the full page, URL, date, and surrounding context.
- For public records, preserve the request and the agency's response.

Evidence rule. If you cannot explain where an exhibit came from, how it stayed unchanged, and why it proves the proposition, it is not ready for a motion or trial.

Chapter 5

Draft a Complaint That Can Survive

A complaint is not the place to present every exhibit or every argument. Its job is to give fair notice of plausible claims, identify defendants, establish jurisdiction and venue, state facts showing entitlement to relief, and request appropriate remedies. Rule 8 calls for a short and plain statement, but “short” does not mean vague.

A durable complaint structure

7. Caption and parties.
8. Jurisdiction and venue.
9. Numbered factual allegations in chronological order.
10. Separate counts identifying the right and defendants involved.
11. Injuries and causation.
12. Requested relief and jury demand, if appropriate.

Use one or two facts per numbered paragraph. Define each defendant once, then use a consistent surname or label. Avoid “Defendants” when only one person acted. Separate what you personally observed from information learned later.

Plead conduct not labels

Weak	Stronger
Defendants violated my rights.	Officer A ordered the second detention at 8:42 p.m., after the occupants had been told they could leave.
They conspired against me.	Officer B called Officer C, described the evidence, and both agreed to list a reason absent from the contemporaneous report.
The city failed to train.	The complaint identifies the training subject, the alleged deficiency, the policymaker notice, and the causal link to the event.

Attach selectively

An exhibit attached to a complaint may become part of the pleading for Rule 12 purposes. Do not attach a document without reading every page and considering whether it contradicts the pleading or creates unnecessary disputes. A complaint can identify evidence without attaching the entire case file.

Amendment requires control

If amendment is permitted, create a change chart showing every added defendant, claim, factual allegation, and requested remedy. File a complete amended pleading when required; do not assume the court will combine scattered papers. Rule 15, the scheduling order, and local rules may impose different standards depending on timing.

Chapter 6

Answer Motions Without Losing the Thread

A motion to dismiss tests the pleading

A Rule 12(b)(6) motion generally challenges whether the complaint states a legally sufficient claim. The court ordinarily assumes well-pleaded factual allegations are true for this purpose but does not have to accept legal conclusions. Your opposition should map pleaded facts to each challenged element and address immunity, limitations, capacity, and remedy arguments directly.

Use an argument response grid

Defense argument	Rule or element	Your pleaded facts	Authority	Requested result
No personal involvement	Causation and defendant-specific conduct	Paragraphs ____ to ____	Controlling circuit law	Deny dismissal or allow amendment
Qualified immunity	Violation and clearly established law	Facts known before the act	Factually similar precedent	Deny at pleading stage
Untimely	Accrual limitations tolling	Dates and triggering event	Federal accrual plus state period	Reject or permit factual development

Do not convert opposition into a new complaint

Facts first raised only in a brief may not cure a deficient complaint. If missing facts are necessary and amendment is available, request leave properly and attach or propose the amended pleading if local rules require it. Explain why amendment is not futile and why the omission should be excused.

Read the motion backward

- Start with the exact relief requested.
- List every claim and defendant the movant seeks to dismiss.
- Extract each legal element the defense says is missing.
- Locate the complaint paragraph answering that point.
- If no paragraph answers it, decide whether the response is legal, factual, or requires amendment.

Chapter 7

Use Discovery to Test the Official Story

Discovery is not a demand for everything. It is a controlled process for obtaining relevant, proportional information needed to prove claims or defenses. The best requests start with the element chart and target identifiable sources.

Write requests by proposition

Before drafting, write the proposition you need to prove: “The supervisor authorized the search before receiving the witness statement.” Then list possible sources: authorization form, phone logs, hallway video, body-camera audio, dispatch, text messages, reports, audit history, and testimony. Draft one request per source or narrow category.

Core tools

Tool	Best use	Common mistake
Interrogatories	Names, roles, contentions, information locations.	Multi-part questions that exceed limits or invite vague narratives.
Requests for production	Documents, ESI, recordings, policies, metadata.	Saying “all documents” without time, custodian, system, or subject limits.
Requests for admission	Narrow uncontested facts and authentication.	Using them as argumentative interrogatories.
Subpoenas	Relevant information from nonparties.	Ignoring notice, geographic, burden, service, and fee requirements.
Depositions	Lock testimony, test perception, expose sequence and knowledge.	Asking long speeches instead of short questions.

Meet and confer with a record

When a response is incomplete, identify the request number, quote the disputed language, explain the deficiency, propose a practical cure, and set a reasonable response date consistent with the scheduling order. Keep the tone professional. Courts care whether the parties genuinely tried to narrow the dispute before seeking intervention.

Production review

- Compare the production to the response and privilege log.
- Check for missing date ranges, custodians, camera IDs, attachments, and native metadata.

- Track duplicates by hash or filename but do not delete unique versions.
- Record Bates ranges and the request each item answers.
- Update the chronology and evidence matrix immediately.

Discovery discipline. A request is useful only if you can explain what element it targets and what you will do with the response.

Chapter 8

Depositions Admissions and Impeachment

A deposition is a fact-development tool, not a closing argument. Your objective is to learn the witness's sources, lock down the sequence, identify decision points, and preserve testimony that can be compared with documents and later statements.

Build modules not a script

- Role, training, assignment, and chain of command.
- Timeline and location at each material minute.
- Information received: who said what, by what method, and when.
- Decision: options considered, policy consulted, authorization requested.
- Action: what the witness personally did and observed.
- Documentation: when reports were written, sources used, edits made.
- Contradictions: prior testimony, reports, video, forms, and messages.

The funnel technique

13. Begin broad: "Describe everything you knew before authorizing the search."

14. Identify each source: "Who told you that?"

15. Fix the time and medium: "Was that before or after the call at 8:42?"

16. Exclude additions: "Anything else?"

17. Confirm completeness: "So those were all facts you relied upon at that time?"

Impeachment without drama

First obtain the present answer. Then establish the prior statement's date, setting, authorship, and adoption. Show the exact passage. Ask whether it was accurate when made. Finally, place the two statements side by side. The contradiction should become visible from the record; the examiner does not need to announce that the witness lied.

Admissions need context

A useful admission is clear, personal, and material. "I do not remember" may matter if the witness previously offered a detailed version. "That is what the report says" is not necessarily adoption. Follow up until the record distinguishes personal memory, routine practice, reconstruction from documents, and information supplied by others.

Chapter 9

Summary Judgment Is an Evidence Audit

Summary judgment asks whether there is a genuine dispute of material fact and whether the movant is entitled to judgment as a matter of law. It is not enough to point generally to the complaint or say the jury should decide. The response must cite evidence in the record in the manner required by Rule 56 and local rules.

The three-document architecture

Document	Function	Frequent failure
Memorandum of law	Explains the governing law and why it applies.	Arguing facts without record citations.
Statement response	Admits or disputes each asserted fact with a focused citation.	Disputing everything or adding speeches instead of evidence.
Declarations and exhibits	Supplies admissible proof and foundation.	Unlabeled, unauthenticated, incomplete, or uncited exhibits.

Material is not the same as important

A fact is material if it could affect the outcome under governing law. A dispute is genuine if a reasonable factfinder could decide the issue for the nonmovant based on the evidence. Build the motion around elements, not around every disagreement in the story.

Respond paragraph by paragraph

18. State “Admitted” when the cited evidence fairly establishes the proposition and it is not material to contest.
19. State “Disputed” or “Disputed in part” and identify the precise clause disputed.
20. Cite the exact exhibit, page, paragraph, timestamp, or deposition line.
21. Briefly explain what the citation proves.
22. Do not rely on argument, speculation, or an unsworn assertion as evidence.

Video does not interpret itself

Provide the timestamp, identify who or what appears, explain any clock offset, and avoid claiming audio says more than can be heard. If the video is incomplete or ambiguous, say so. Under *Scott v. Harris*, a court need not accept a version blatantly contradicted by reliable video, but *Tolan v. Cotton* warns courts not to weigh disputed evidence or draw improper inferences against the nonmovant.

Rule 56 declaration practice

A declaration should state facts based on personal knowledge, show competence to testify, identify attached exhibits, and use the required penalty-of-perjury language under 28 U.S.C. § 1746 when unsworn. Do not fill it with legal conclusions. If essential facts cannot yet be presented because discovery is incomplete, research Rule 56(d) immediately and explain specifically what evidence is needed, why it matters, what efforts were made, and why it is unavailable.

The record-citation test. A judge should be able to move from your sentence to the exact proof in under thirty seconds.

Chapter 10

Qualified Immunity and Disputed Facts

Qualified immunity can shield an individual official from damages unless the plaintiff shows a violation of a federal right and that the right was clearly established in the relevant, fact-specific sense. Courts may address those questions in either order. The doctrine is distinct from whether a constitutional violation occurred.

Separate law from historical fact

Question of law	Historical fact that may be disputed
What rule did clearly established precedent provide?	What did the officer know before acting?
Would the conduct be lawful under plaintiff's supported version?	Who gave the order and when?
Is precedent sufficiently particularized?	Was the person released before being detained again?
Could a reasonable official make the asserted mistake?	What warning, resistance, statement, or gesture actually occurred?

When the defense assumes a disputed fact, identify the assumption, cite contrary evidence, and explain why the fact matters under the governing rule. Do not stop at “facts are disputed.” Show the competing versions and the evidence supporting each.

Find useful precedent

- Start with Supreme Court and controlling circuit decisions.
- Match the right at the correct level of specificity.
- Identify cases existing before the challenged conduct.
- Compare the setting, justification, information known, degree of intrusion, and urgency.
- Use out-of-circuit authority carefully and explain its relevance under local doctrine.

Policy can matter without deciding the Constitution

A policy violation does not automatically establish a constitutional violation, and policy compliance does not automatically defeat one. Policy may still be evidence of training, expected procedure, feasibility, notice, or the reasonableness of a claimed belief. Explain the evidentiary purpose rather than treating policy as the Constitution itself.

Key discipline. Evaluate authorization using the information available before authorization. Later-discovered evidence cannot silently rewrite the earlier knowledge state.

Chapter 11

Damages Settlement Trial and Appeal

Prove injury with the same care as liability

Create a damages file from the beginning. Keep medical and counseling records, invoices, medication costs, wage proof, job records, property loss, travel expenses, photographs, symptom notes, and witness information. Separate physical, emotional, economic, and dignitary harms. Avoid exaggeration; consistency is credibility.

Settlement is a risk decision

Evaluate settlement by comparing the proposed outcome to realistic litigation paths, not to the largest verdict found online. Consider liability uncertainty, immunity, causation, collectability, fees and costs, liens, taxes, confidentiality, release language, non-disparagement, future claims, payment timing, and the value of finality. A settlement can require dismissal of claims broader than the money suggests.

Trial preparation begins before discovery ends

- Create an element-by-element proof chart.
- List every exhibit and its authentication path.
- Identify each witness's personal knowledge and expected testimony.
- Anticipate hearsay and other evidentiary objections.
- Prepare proposed jury instructions from controlling pattern instructions and law.
- Build a short theory of the case that every witness and exhibit advances.

Preserve issues for appeal

An appeal usually reviews the existing record; it is not a new trial. Make timely objections, comply with offers-of-proof rules, and ensure key materials are filed or otherwise part of the record. A notice of appeal deadline can be jurisdictional and is often short. Read Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 4 and any applicable order immediately after judgment.

Chapter 12

The Pro Se Operating System

The strongest pro se litigant is not the person who writes the angriest brief. It is the person who can retrieve the right document, explain the issue in one sentence, cite the governing rule, and show the exact evidence without wasting the court's time.

Weekly case review

- Docket: What was filed or ordered this week?
- Deadlines: What is due in the next 30, 14, and 7 days?
- Evidence: What new item arrived and where does it fit?
- Gaps: Which element still lacks admissible proof?
- Discovery: Which response is overdue or incomplete?
- Strategy: What single action most reduces risk this week?

The one-page case dashboard

Field	Current answer
Case and judge	_____
Current stage	_____
Next three deadlines	_____
Claims still alive	_____
Defendants still in case	_____
Strongest evidence	_____
Largest proof gap	_____
Pending discovery dispute	_____
Next action	_____

Professional tone is strategy

Attack the inconsistency, not the person. Ask the court for specific relief. Quote accurately. Correct mistakes promptly. Follow page limits and formatting rules. A calm filing makes a disputed record easier to trust.

Know when to seek help

Seek counsel or limited-scope assistance when possible, especially for imminent limitations deadlines, complex immunity questions, expert evidence, sealed or privileged material, sanctions disputes, settlement releases, trial, and appeal. Legal clinics, bar referral services,

court pro se offices, and law-school clinics may offer guidance even when they cannot enter the case.

Final principle. Your job is not to prove that every official act was wrong. Your job is to identify the legally material act, preserve the best evidence, and present it in the form the court can decide.

Appendix A

The First Seventy Two Hours

Use this checklist after a serious encounter with government officials when it is safe and lawful to do so.

- Write a private, chronological account while memory is fresh. Separate what you saw, heard, inferred, and learned later.
- Record exact locations, approximate times, names, badge numbers, vehicle numbers, agencies, witnesses, and camera locations.
- Photograph injuries and property damage over several days with date information preserved.
- Obtain appropriate medical care and accurately report symptoms and cause.
- Back up original photographs, audio, video, and messages in two secure places.
- Ask witnesses to write their own independent accounts; do not script or coordinate them.
- Identify likely video systems and retention windows.
- Prepare focused preservation requests to agencies and relevant private businesses.
- Save receipts, missed-work records, travel costs, and replacement costs.
- Do not post detailed allegations or evidence on social media while litigation is foreseeable.
- Research the earliest possible filing or notice deadline and calendar it.
- Consult a qualified civil-rights attorney or legal clinic as soon as possible.

Appendix B

Chronology and Evidence Matrix

Time	Event	Actor and knowledge	Source	Dispute or significance
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Claim proof matrix

Claim and element	Fact supporting it	Record citation	Defense response	Proof gap
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Contradiction log

Issue	Statement one	Statement two	Why material	Exhibits
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Appendix C

Discovery and Motion Starters

Focused production request pattern

Produce the complete native-format [recording or document category] created, received, maintained, or modified by [identified custodians or unit] concerning [event or subject] from [start date and time] through [end date and time], including associated metadata, attachments, audit history, and any record identifying deletion, alteration, export, or retention status.

Interrogatory pattern for decision knowledge

Identify every fact known to you before you [authorized, ordered, or performed the challenged act], and for each fact identify the person or record from which you learned it, the approximate time you learned it, the method of communication, and any document or recording that reflects the communication.

Request for admission pattern

Admit that, before [specific time or act], you had not received information that [narrow factual proposition].

Declaration foundation pattern

I am over eighteen years old and competent to testify. I make this declaration from personal knowledge. On [date], at approximately [time], I personally observed [specific facts]. Attached as Exhibit [letter] is a true and correct copy of [item], which I [created, received from identified source, or recognize because]. I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on [date] at [city and state]. [Signature]

Summary judgment response pattern

Disputed in part. The cited exhibit establishes [undisputed portion], but it does not establish [disputed portion]. Instead, [Exhibit, page, paragraph, or timestamp] shows [contrary fact]. This dispute is material because [element or legal issue].

Motion quality check

- Does the first page state exactly what relief is requested?
- Does every legal rule have a current, verified citation?
- Does every factual assertion have a record citation?
- Are quotations exact and short enough to understand in context?
- Does each exhibit have a label, foundation, and readable copy?
- Does the filing comply with the judge's order, local rules, page limits, font, spacing, and service requirements?
- Did you address the opponent's strongest argument fairly?
- Did you remove accusations that are unnecessary to the requested ruling?

Appendix D

Official Resources and Selected Authorities

Verify all links, rules, and cases as of the date you use them. This edition was prepared in September 2026.

Rules and public resources

- Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, U.S. Courts: <https://www.uscourts.gov/forms-rules/current-rules-practice-procedure/federal-rules-civil-procedure>
- Federal Rules of Evidence, U.S. Courts: <https://www.uscourts.gov/forms-rules/current-rules-practice-procedure/federal-rules-evidence>
- Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure, U.S. Courts: <https://www.uscourts.gov/forms-rules/current-rules-practice-procedure/federal-rules-appellate-procedure>
- Federal court forms: <https://www.uscourts.gov/forms-rules/forms>
- Find a federal court and its local rules: <https://www.uscourts.gov/court-finder>
- 42 U.S.C. § 1983: <https://uscode.house.gov/>
- 28 U.S.C. § 1746 declarations: <https://uscode.house.gov/>

Selected foundational decisions

- *Monroe v. Pape*, 365 U.S. 167 (1961) — historical development of § 1983.
- *Monell v. Department of Social Services*, 436 U.S. 658 (1978) — municipal liability is not respondeat superior.
- *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42 (1988) — action under color of state law.
- *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989) — objective reasonableness for force claims arising from seizure.
- *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477 (1994) — limits on damages claims necessarily implying invalidity of a conviction or sentence.
- *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317 (1986) and *Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242 (1986) — summary judgment framework.
- *Scott v. Harris*, 550 U.S. 372 (2007) — record blatantly contradicted by video.
- *Pearson v. Callahan*, 555 U.S. 223 (2009) — qualified-immunity sequence.
- *Tolan v. Cotton*, 572 U.S. 650 (2014) — drawing inferences at summary judgment.

Research warning. Headnotes, summaries, AI outputs, blogs, and quotations in briefs are leads, not final authority. Read the full opinion and verify that it remains good law in your jurisdiction.

About the Author

Ronald L. Hester writes from the perspective of a pro se civil-rights litigant who learned that a case is built not only from conviction, but from disciplined chronology, preservation, procedural compliance, and record-based advocacy. His work focuses on making litigation concepts understandable to people who must navigate powerful institutions without a legal team.

Civil Just-us for Us is the first volume in a planned practical series for self-represented litigants and community advocates.