

Dunn & Baker

4.10(a) APPEARING AS A WITNESS IN A CRIMINAL COURT

Outline of a Criminal Hearing

- 1) The Prosecution is entitled to make an opening speech before calling their evidence.
- 2) Witnesses are called commencing with the Complainant.

After the Complainant has given evidence, then witnesses of fact will be called, and lastly expert witnesses.

- 3) The Advocate for the Defendant has the right to cross-examine the witness. These questions may be pertinent to the matter in issue, or be calculated to attack the witness's claim to credibility. If there is more than one Defendant, the First Defendant will cross-examine the Prosecution witnesses before the Second Defendant's Advocate.
- 4) The Prosecution has the right to re-examine the witness on any matters raised in cross-examination.
- 5) Witnesses of fact are those who are called to Court to give evidence as to what they have seen or heard. Expert witnesses are called to Court to give an expert interpretation of those facts.
- 6) When the Prosecution have called all their evidence, the Defence can make a submission of "no case to answer" if there is no evidence to sustain the Prosecution case.
- 7) If no submission is made, or the submission is unsuccessful, the Defence will then call their evidence – starting with the Defendant, then witnesses of fact, and ending with expert witnesses.
- 8) The Defendant and the Defence witnesses are cross-examined by the Prosecution in turn. If there is more than one Defendant, the Second Defendant's advocate will cross-examine before the Prosecution.
- 9) The Defence Advocate makes a closing speech addresses the Judge / Magistrates on law and fact.
- 10) The Prosecution does not make a closing speech in the Magistrates' Court, but is entitled to address the court on any questions of law.

4.10 Witness

However in the Crown Court, the Prosecutor makes the first closing speech, namely a brief summary of the evidence and an explanation of the burden and standard of proof.

- 11) In Crown Court the Judge then sums up for the jury, explaining the functions of the jury, summarizing the evidence and explaining the nature of the charge and the burden and standard of proof. After the jury bailiff has taken the jury oath, the jury retires to consider its verdict.

In the Magistrates' Court, normally the Magistrates retire to consider their verdict.

- 12) If the Defendant is convicted, the court will proceed to sentence, either immediately, or after the Court has adjourned for pre-sentence reports to be prepared, which normally takes three weeks.

Appeals

If you have given evidence in a trial at the Magistrates' Court and then are called to give evidence in the Crown Court, you must expect to be questioned on any inconsistencies in your evidence on the second occasion.

Although there is no official Court record of the evidence given in the Magistrates' Court, it is likely that the legal clerk to one of the parties will have taken a note, and you should ask to see whether there is a transcript of the original evidence available, before you go to Court.

Presence in Court

- 1) Witnesses of fact must wait outside Court until called to give evidence. This is so they are not tempted to change their evidence of what they saw or heard, in the light of anyone else's evidence that they hear.
- 2) Expert witnesses are normally permitted to remain in Court until they give evidence, specifically so that they can adjust their opinions, in case they hear facts which cause them to revise their expert views.
- 3) After giving, evidence witnesses can ask the Judge directly to be released and should do so, if they do not wish to remain in Court until the end of the case.
- 4) Whilst you are giving oral evidence, you must not discuss your case with anyone else. This means that if the court takes a break part of the way through your case, you must not be seen to talk to anyone except your own

4.10 Witness

advocate. This guards against any accusation that you have told other witnesses what to say, or that other witnesses have told you what to say.

Oath/Affirmation

You may swear on your relevant holy book.

Any person who objects to being sworn is permitted to make a solemn affirmation instead of taking an oath. All you have to do is say to the Court "may I affirm please?".

Correct mode of address to the Court

- 1) High Court – My Lord/My Lady
- 2) Crown Court – Your Honour
- 3) Magistrates' Court – Sir/Madam
- 4) Coroner's Court – Sir/Madam
- 5) All Tribunals – Sir/Madam

Burden of proof

The basic principle is that the party who brings the case must prove the case.

- a) In civil cases, the standard of proof is satisfied on the balance of probabilities (a 51% likelihood of being correct).
- b) In Criminal Cases, the standard required of the prosecution is beyond all reasonable doubt (a 99% degree of certainty of being right).

The best evidence rule

This rule states: -

- 1) The best evidence is that given by the person who observed what happened, who is present in Court to describe it, and is available to be cross-examined about it.
- 2) The best evidence of a document, is production of the original.

It is only in the unavoidable absence of the best or primary evidence, that the Court will instead accept secondary evidence.

4.10 Witness

Unless you are permitted to do so by the Court, you should give evidence only of what you saw and heard, and not report anybody else's evidence.

If you have referred to a document in your evidence, you should bring the original document to Court with you.

Evidence about what you heard someone else say, is known as "hearsay". Hearsay is only generally admitted into evidence in Proceedings if the Court has given leave or under certain limited circumstances.

Examination in chief

If you are giving evidence as a witness of fact for a Defendant, at Crown Court, the Defence barrister should not discuss your evidence with you. This avoids any suggestion of a Defence witness being "coached".

If you are giving evidence as an expert witness, before you go into Court, ensure that you draw the Solicitor or Barrister's attention to any weak points in your evidence.

If you have the chance to discuss this in advance, this will give the Defendant's Solicitor or Barrister the opportunity in full in examination in chief to deal with it, hopefully to the satisfaction of the Judge. If instead you gamble on the Prosecution not spotting the weakness and it comes to light, in cross-examination the damage will be greater and you risk being thought either fool or a rogue.

- 1) Counsel/Solicitor should ask you short questions which enable you to give a full explanation.
- 2) You will be asked to establish your name and address and confirm basic initial details before you give your evidence. At this stage, instead of constantly repeating the answer "yes" to every question, you can keep yourself alert and keep the interest of the Judge by varying the response, for example "that is correct" or "this is so".
- 3) Do not repeat the same point.
- 4) Breathe and think before you answer.

Cross-examination

After you have given your evidence, you will be made available to the Prosecution Solicitor/Barrister to answer questions challenging your evidence. He or she may suggest that you are either mistaken or lying.

It is his/her job professionally to disbelieve you, and you should not take it personally.

4.10 Witness

- 1) Speak clearly and slowly.
- 2) Listen carefully to the questions and allow yourself time to think. If you do not fully understand the question, ask for it to be repeated.
- 3) Answer only what is asked.
- 4) Be brief – try and answer in sentences of 10 words or less.
- 5) Use simple words.
- 6) Do not evade questions – if you do not know, say so clearly.
- 7) Answer calmly, no matter how impertinently you may be addressed.
- 8) If you do not agree, disagree firmly but politely.
- 9) If make a mistake, say so as soon as you realise it, apologise, and correct that mistake.
- 10) Never answer a question “yes” or “no”, if you feel the question requires more than that.
- 11) Do not guess or speculate – if you do not know an answer, never be afraid to say “I don’t know”.
- 12) Do not forget that although the questions will be directed at you by a Solicitor/Barrister, you are to turn and face the Judge when you deliver your answer.
- 13) Never argue with the opposing counsel / solicitor
- 14) Never talk when the Judge / Magistrate is talking

Re-examination

In re-examination, your Barrister/Solicitor can only deal with issues that have arisen in cross-examination, and ask you questions by way of clarification or correction.

Consequences of giving evidence

Witnesses enjoy an absolute immunity from any civil action brought against them in respect of anything they say or do in Court during the course of a trial. You cannot be sued for giving “negligent answers”!

The one exception to that is perjury. If a person is lawfully sworn as a witness in judicial proceedings, then makes a statement knowing it to be false or not

4.10 Witness

believing it to be true, he or she may be prosecuted for perjury if that untrue statement was material to the judicial proceedings.

Checklist for a witness

- 1) Bring a pen, spare pen and note paper in the event you wish to jot down notes of evidence.
- 2) Ensure you check in advance the location of the Court so it can be easily found.
- 3) Determine in advance the nearest available car park or carefully check the public transport arrangements.
- 4) Plan to arrive at least 30 minutes earlier than the time of the hearing.
- 5) Bring cash including small change for parking and telephone calls.
- 6) On arrival, (after you have found the toilets) enlist the help of the Court Usher to find out which Court you are in and to assist you meet up with the Solicitor/ Barrister. If you arrive sufficiently early, you can ask the Court Usher whether you can be shown around the inside of the Court before the day's proceedings start, so that the Usher can show you where you will have to stand, where you can sit afterwards and where everybody will be sitting during the trial. You may feel less nervous in advance if you know this.
- 7) Take something to read with you – you may have to wait some considerable time.
- 8) Bring a diary with you, which shows on what dates in future you are available. Hearings seldom run to time, and the Judge may unexpectedly ask if the Parties are free to come back to Court on the next day, or the next week, or even the next month.
- 9) If it is a lengthy hearing, feel free to ask in advance whether or not you need to attend throughout, or whether arrangements can be made for you to attend only after a certain time, or even in response to a telephone call.
- 10) If you have incurred any travel expenses attending Court, please provide details of these to the Counsel/Solicitor on the day of hearing, supported if possible by documentary proof, so these may be reclaimed in due course.

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