

# Iowa Judicial Branch

## eFile User Guide

### **About this Guide**

This guide outlines formatting and technical requirements for electronic filing in Iowa courts. This guide also contains overviews of the electronic filing system, the use of non-notarized signatures, and the requirements to protect nonpublic information in public court filings.

The information in this guide is summarized for convenience. It should not be relied upon as a source of legal authority. Any court filing may be subject to any number of court rules, statutes, or other sources of law that do not appear in this guide.

This guide is subject to periodic updates. The current version of the guide is posted on the Iowa Judicial Branch website, <http://www.iowacourts.gov/>

The rules in Chapter 16 Iowa Rules of Electronic Procedure in the [Iowa Court Rules](#) govern the electronic filing of all documents.

## Overview of Filing Electronically

The Iowa court electronic filing and service system (called eFile or EDMS) is a web-based system that is used to electronically file, serve, and track cases and documents in Iowa's district and appellate courts.

### ***Who Must File Electronically***

Electronic filing in Iowa court cases and appeals is mandatory unless otherwise required or authorized by the Iowa Rules of Electronic Procedure in Chapter 16 of the Iowa Court Rules.

All filers, including attorneys, self-represented persons, and government agencies are required to file documents electronically in court. You may register to file electronically at <https://www.iowacourts.state.ia.us/efile/>. There is no fee to register.

Exceptions from registration and electronic filing requirements are of two types:

1. Exceptions granted by the clerk of court or by court order<sup>1</sup>
  - One-time exceptions for good cause, such as a power outage at the filer's office or home.
  - One-time exceptions for self-represented defendants who need to make an initial filing in person.
  - Exceptions for the duration of a case for good cause, such as when a filer cannot use a computer or does not have regular access to the Internet at home through a device capable of displaying documents. This inability to file in or follow his case could put a filer at a disadvantage in court. Only the chief judge of the judicial district or the chief judge's designee can grant an exception for the duration of a case.
2. Exceptions by rule
  - Self-represented criminal defendants, confined persons, and self-represented parents in a juvenile proceeding are exempted from filing electronically.<sup>2</sup>
  - Exceptions for extended system unavailability.<sup>3</sup>

A person who is excused from registration and electronic filing requirements is called an "exempt filer."

### ***Documents that Cannot Be Filed Electronically***

Some types of documents cannot be filed electronically:

- Items as specified in Rule 16.313, including the administrative record in cases where the court is asked to rule on that record, transcripts of proceedings that are not available electronically, and any other item not capable of being filed in electronic format, such as large maps or blueprints.
- Any documents filed in waiver of parental notification proceedings, which must be filed on paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.302(2)(b).

<sup>2</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.302(3).

<sup>3</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.309(4)

**Paying Filing Fees**

You may pay filing fees for electronically filed documents:

- by credit or debit card in the eFile system at the time of filing, or
- in person within five (5) business days of the filing at the clerk of court office at the courthouse where the case was filed.

**Serving Documents Electronically**

The eFile system is also used to serve documents. Usually, the system serves the documents upon all case parties who are registered filers and have filed an entry of appearance or filed an answer, filed a notice of case association, or filed an appearance as a court-approved intervenor.

There are some exceptions to this rule:<sup>4</sup>

- An original notice or any other document that confers jurisdiction on the person against whom the action is brought cannot be served electronically.<sup>5</sup>
- Requests for discovery, responses to discovery requests, and notices of deposition are not filed and, therefore, are not served electronically. They should be served by mail, fax, or email.<sup>6</sup>
- Documents or exhibits that are proposed for restricted access or that are filed under an order restricting access are not served electronically. The filer is responsible for service.

Parties are required to file with the court a *notice of the service* of a request for discovery, a response to discovery, or a notice of deposition on another party.

**Serving Documents to Exempt Filers**

Electronic service may not be used to serve documents upon nonregistered filers, which must be served in paper according to requirements of the Iowa Code or Iowa Court Rules<sup>7</sup>.

**Example**

A case has three parties. One party is represented by an attorney, and the other two are self-represented. One of the self-represented parties has registered for electronic filing, but the other self-represented party has received an exemption from the electronic registration requirement.

The attorney and the registered self-represented party must use the eFile system to be served and to serve documents upon each other but must serve a paper copy on the exempt party.

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<sup>4</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.315(1)(f) and 16.405(3).

<sup>5</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.314(3).

<sup>7</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.315(2).

<sup>6</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.401(1).

Any filings from the exempt self-represented party will be served electronically when the clerk scans and docketed those into the case.

If there were other exempt parties in the case, all parties, including the first exempt party must serve the other exempt parties in paper or non-electronically.

### ***Receiving Documents Served Electronically***

Registering to file electronically constitutes a request for and consent to the electronic service of court-generated documents and documents other parties file on your cases.

When a document is served electronically, a notice of electronic filing or presentation is posted into your eFile account, along with a link to the document.

Electronic notice is only provided to registered filers who are case parties, meaning they have initiated the case, filed an answer or appearance, or filed a notice of case association.<sup>8</sup>

Electronic notice will continue to be provided to you until you have filed a withdrawal from the case and, if applicable, obtained an order allowing withdrawal.

### ***Questions about Filing a Document***

If you have a question specific to the document or about filing options on the website, please contact the clerk of court office in the county where you are filing.

Clerks of court and Technical Help Desk staff cannot provide legal advice.

### ***If You have Technical Difficulties***

If technical problems with the website prevent you from filing or serving a document electronically, use the soonest available electronic or nonelectronic means to file it. In such case, you may file a motion asking the court to order that the document be deemed filed or served on the date you attempted to file it. You have the burden of showing that there was a technical error. If appropriate, the court may adjust the time to respond to the document.<sup>9</sup>

If you encounter technical difficulties, contact the Technical Help Desk at 1-800-831-1396 or via email at [support@iowacourts.gov](mailto:support@iowacourts.gov). Support is available 7AM-5PM, Monday-Friday, excluding State holidays and furloughs.

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<sup>8</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.201(23).

<sup>9</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.309(2).

## Your Responsibilities when Filing Electronically

### ***Signing up for Service***

Registration is required before you can use the eFile system. To register, you must have and maintain a current email account. Attorneys must have an AT Personal Identifying Number (AT PIN) assigned to them when they passed the Iowa bar, or a PHV PIN assigned after they were admitted to the case.

### ***Maintaining Your Registration Information and Email Address***

You are responsible for updating your registration information promptly when any changes occur to your email address, mailing address, or telephone number. You must also notify the clerk of court in the county where your case is filed if your contact information changes.

You must maintain a working email address. You are responsible for ensuring that the eFile system has the correct email address, that it functions properly, and that it has not exceeded its size limitation.

Regardless of these precautions, the Judicial Branch cannot guarantee that you will receive the notifications it sends to you through email. Consequently, email notifications do not constitute service of any document, and are considered a courtesy. Service is considered complete when the notice is electronically posted to your eFile account.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Monitoring Your eFile Account***

When a document is filed, a notice of electronic filing or presentation will be posted to your eFile account. You must monitor your eFile account regularly and ensure that notices sent to the account are opened in a timely manner.<sup>11</sup> Notifications are not permanent. They are kept for 90 days, but the court sets the time limit and can change it.

A courtesy email message will be sent to you whenever something is received, filed, or returned on your case. The email is a courtesy only and does not constitute service of any document.

### ***Using an Individual Username and Password***

The eFile system requires all filers to select a username and password. You must have your own username and password and may not allow any other person to use your username and password. (If you are an attorney or a filing agent, you may permit use by an authorized staff person). Regardless of whether authorization is given, you are responsible for anything downloaded or filed with your username and password. If your password is compromised, you must immediately notify the Technical Help Desk.

The court can impose sanctions on filers for improper use of electronic filing.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.201(11).

<sup>11</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.304(1)(g)(2).

<sup>12</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.304(2)(d).

### ***Ceasing Electronic Participation***

If you are a registered filer and can no longer participate electronically in a case or cases, you must do two things:

1. Request an exception from registration and electronic filing from the chief judge of each judicial district where a case is pending.<sup>13</sup>
2. After you have received an exception in every active case, you must withdraw from the eFile system.

If your request to withdraw from electronic filing is approved, your login and password will be canceled, and your name will be deleted from applicable electronic service lists.

*Withdrawal from the eFile system alone does not mean you are withdrawn from a case or excused from electronic filing – you need court approval for an exception from electronic filing.*

## Forms

The Iowa Supreme Court provides certain forms that can be used when filing. Forms are available online at <https://www.iowacourts.gov/for-the-public/court-forms/> and in the appropriate chapter of the [Iowa Court Rules](#). Not all court forms are available electronically. Review the [Representing Yourself](#) page to determine if there is a specific set of forms for your case.

## Signing Forms

### ***Types of Signatures***

Most documents requiring a signature may be signed in one of three ways:

- A nonelectronic signature is handwritten on a paper form which is then scanned to become an electronic document.
- A digitized or facsimile signature is an electronically stored handwritten signature or signature made with a signature pad that creates an accurate image of the person's signature.
- An electronic signature is typed in the format: /s/ Pat L. Smith.

Some documents require a nonelectronic or digitized signature, such as notarized documents or documents signed under oath, affirmation, acknowledgement, or verification.

All types of signatures must be accompanied by a signature block containing your typed name, address, telephone number, email address, and if applicable, law firm or (for filing agents) name of entity on behalf of which the filing agent is signing.<sup>14</sup> Crime victims and protected persons may omit mailing addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses from their signature block when necessary for their protection.

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<sup>13</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.204(1)(h).

<sup>14</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.305(4).

## Safeguarding Personal Information

In most instances, personal information in case filings is not automatically kept confidential. It only becomes confidential once it is excluded. Information that should always be excluded is called “Protected Information”.

You are responsible for ensuring that confidential or private information does not appear in public court documents, whether you prepared the document or not.<sup>15</sup> When this type of information is required by law to be included or is material to the case, you must safeguard it in the document by redacting it.

The only time you can include protected information in your documents without redacting it is when you are filing a confidential document or filing on a confidential case. To help you determine that, consult the list of Restricted Documents and Case Types on the Judicial Branch website. You may also apply to the court to restrict access to a document or a type of information in your documents that you consider too sensitive to make public<sup>16</sup>.

Filers who incorrectly file documents containing protected information may be required to pay damages and reasonable expenses, cost and attorney fees associated with the filing of that information. They also waive their rights to have their personal information protected and they may be found in contempt of court and charged as such.

Determining how to properly deal with protected information and other personal information can be difficult; unrepresented filers should consider contacting an attorney for assistance.

For more information, see [Representing Yourself-Protect Personal Information](#).

### ***Information That Must Be Protected***

- Social security numbers
- Financial account numbers
- Dates of birth
- Names of minor children
- Individual taxpayer identification numbers
- Personal identification numbers
- Other unique identifying numbers
- Confidential information as defined in rule 16.201

You *do not* need to safeguard information in [documents and case types that are automatically held confidential](#).

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<sup>15</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.602.

<sup>16</sup> Iowa R. Elec. P. 16.405.

### ***How Protected Information Can Be Safeguarded***

If protected information is material to the proceedings or required by law, and must be included in the documents being filed, then you must redact it. Follow the [Redaction Instructions](#) or refer to Rules 16.605 and 16.606.

If you purposely fail to properly redact protected information, you may be sanctioned by the court. Sanctions may include requiring you to pay damages and reasonable expenses, costs, and attorney fees associated with the filing of that information. You also waive your rights to have your own personal information protected and may be found to be in contempt of court and charged as such.

## Formatting and Technical Requirements

All electronically filed documents *must* comply with applicable rules governing paper documents in the Iowa Rules of Civil Procedure and Iowa Rules of Appellate Procedure.

Follow these guidelines when preparing documents for electronic filing.

**Document Type:** All documents must be submitted as PDF (.pdf) files except for proposed orders. PDFs must be searchable whenever possible.

**Proposed orders:** Proposed orders must be filed in a Microsoft Word editable format.

**Document Format:** 8.5 x 11-inch page. Orientation: Portrait except for some attachments. The top margin must be at least one inch and be free of all written matter.

**Submission Size:** The size limit for District Court filings is 20 MB per single submission. The size limit for Appellate Court filings is 150 MB per single submission. Any number of individual documents may be included in a submission, as long as they do not exceed the size limit.

**Color:** Documents should be scanned in black and white. Color scans should only be used when it is essential to the case. Color increases the file size.

**Resolution:** The scanner resolution should be set to 200 dpi. Higher resolution increases the file size. Documents scanned at resolutions higher than 300 DPI may be rejected for filing.

**Viewability:** Text must be legible, and images must be viewable. Documents must not be scanned upside down. When necessary, attachments may be scanned sideways, though pleadings should not be.

**Protected Information:** When confidential information is required by law to be included or is material to the case, you must safeguard the protected information by redacting it.

**Password Protected:** Documents for filing must not be password protected.

### ***Creating PDFs***

#### **Converting Electronic Documents to PDFs**

*Whenever possible*, you should convert documents to PDF files electronically and make them searchable.

Generally, a PDF file created from an electronic document is searchable. [Instructions for preparing documents](#)



**Scanning Paper Documents to PDFs**

When it is necessary to scan printed (paper) documents for filing, you must convert the scanned image to text using OCR. If the document is in electronic format, many word processing programs will convert it directly when creating the PDF file. PDF conversion software is available without charge online.

If submitting a document (or portion of a document) in searchable PDF format is not possible, the document or portion may be scanned and submitted in non-searchable PDF format.

Handwritten documents and photographs not available in electronic form are examples of documents that may be submitted in non-searchable PDF format.

***Separate Documents as Separate PDFs***

If you want to submit multiple documents simultaneously, each document must be submitted as a separate PDF file and should not be combined with another file. Motions and proposed orders must be submitted separately: the motion as a PDF and the proposed order as a Word-editable file type.

Do not combine public and confidential documents.

***Proposed Orders***

Proposed orders must be submitted in Word-editable format and must use one of the following fonts: Arial, Times New Roman/Times, Courier New, Tahoma/Geneva, Helvetica, Calibri, or Cambria.

The proposed order must not be password-protected.

Do not combine proposed orders and motions into one document: they must be filed separately in their appropriate formats: the motion as a PDF and the proposed order as a Word-editable file type.

***Limits on Submission Size***

You are responsible for ensuring that all filings comply with the size limit.

- The size limit for District Court filings is 20 MB per single submission.
- The size limit for Appellate Court filings is 150 MB per single submission.

If a document exceeds the size limit, it can be split into smaller parts and filed in separate submissions. File the submissions one after the other, so that they can be docketed together. Clearly label the separate documents in order (“Part 1 of 3”, “Part 2 of 3”, etc.) in the Comments field when you file them. You should also alert the clerk of court that the multiple submissions are all one document.

To minimize submission size:

- Avoid scanning documents; convert them electronically if possible.
- If you must scan, avoid scanning color or greyscale (use black and white).
- Avoid including pictures (which are rarely necessary in court filings).
- Do not combine multiple documents in one pdf.

***Viewability and Legibility***

Every document filed must be readily viewable in its entirety. Corrupt or incomplete files may be rejected for filing. Before filing documents, you should verify that the files are complete and are not corrupted.

Documents shall include only legible words and viewable images. You are responsible for ensuring that the scanning process preserves legibility and viewability in scanned documents. (This requirement does not prevent the submission of a document for showing that the document is illegible.)

***Audio, Video, and Oversize Filings***

Occasionally, it will not be feasible to convert a document to an electronic format that complies with the requirements in this section. Examples include audio recordings, video recordings, and large maps or blueprints. Audio and video exhibits cannot be electronically filed but may be submitted to the court on a media storage device such as a CD, DVD, or flash drive that contains only the exhibit or exhibits and any required player application.

Audio exhibits must be submitted in .wav, .mp3, or .wma formats or else be submitted with a player application that allows the exhibit to be heard.

Video exhibits must be submitted in the following formats or else be submitted with a player application that allows the exhibit to be viewed:

- .avi
- .flv
- .mpeg
- .mp4
- .wms, or
- .mov

Large-scale exhibits, such as posters, maps, or blueprints, may be submitted nonelectronically.

***Bookmarks and Hyperlinks***

It is not possible to hyperlink between one document in an electronic court file to another document or attachments within the electronic court file.

Documents may contain these types of hyperlinks:

- **Bookmarks:** Hyperlinks to a destination within the same document that help the reader navigate a long document.
- **External hyperlink:** Link to a destination outside the document that provide convenient access to publicly available sources of law or court opinions.

Hyperlinks are not part of the court's record, and the court does not exercise any responsibility over the content or destination of any hyperlink. Hyperlinks must contain a complete text reference to the target of the link that, when copied, will take a user to the same target that would be reached by activating the link. Material reached through a hyperlink is not considered part of the official record or filing unless already part of the record in the

case. Complete citations are required to preserve the court record: hyperlinks may not be used as a substitute for standard citations.

#### Example

A party citing the Americans with Disabilities Act might wish to provide a hyperlink to the text of the Act on the United States Department of Justice website. This is permissible if a standard citation is provided. “Americans with Disabilities Act” by itself would not be sufficient; but “Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. § 12101)” would be sufficient.