

CALIFORNIA TRAFFIC COURT FAQ

Courtesy of the California Courts Self-Help Center
www.courtinfo.ca.gov

How do I figure out what to do with my ticket?

Read your "Notice to Appear." You'll find:

- * The name of the court that will decide your case;
- * The deadline to pay the ticket or go to court; and
- * What you must do to respond to the ticket.

However, if you were under age 18 when you got the ticket, this information could be sent to you later by the court.

Who do I call if I want to talk to somebody?

For a "Notice to Appear" ticket, call the court listed on the ticket or look for the Traffic Department in the Government Pages of your phone book. Or get their phone number from the court's Web site.

Must I go to court?

If you got a ticket for an infraction (like running a stop sign), you can probably do everything you need to do by mail. You must go to court for a misdemeanor.

How do I ask for a trial?

If you think you're not guilty, ask for a trial.

You can go to the courthouse on the date shown on your ticket and ask for a trial.

For most infractions you can send a letter to your court asking for a court trial or a trial by mail (also called a "trial by written declaration"). You'll have to pay the bail even if you want to have a trial. Send your letter by certified or registered mail, at least 5 days before the "appearance date" on your ticket.

Will I get my bail back if I'm found "not guilty"?

Yes. If you have a trial and you're found "not guilty," the court will return the bail to the person that paid it.

Do I need a lawyer?

You can go to traffic court without a lawyer.

If you want a lawyer for a traffic infraction (like speeding or running a red light), you can hire one. But the court won't give you one.

For a misdemeanor like driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, it's a good idea to have a lawyer. If you can't afford one, the court will give you one.

Does my DMV record change when I get a ticket?

After you pay your fine, points may show up on your DMV record unless you can go to traffic school. If the court lets you go to traffic school and you turn in your proof of completion of traffic school to the court before the deadline, the points should not show up on your record.

If you get points on your record, your insurance company may ask you to pay more for insurance because of this, or they may cancel your policy and tell you to find insurance elsewhere. Points can stay on your record for 3 to 7 years.

Can I go to traffic school?

The court can tell you what you need to do to be able to go to traffic school. If this is your first ticket and the court lets you go to traffic school, you should not get any points on your record.

In addition to the court fees, the traffic school will also charge you for the class. It will take a whole day to complete. Some courts let you go to traffic school on the Web.

What if I got a ticket for a car registration or driver's license violation?

One way is to go to the local DMV office This is an external link. Click this icon for our external linking policy.. Ask a clerk at the DMV to help you.

After you correct the problem, the DMV will sign the "Certificate of Correction" part of your ticket.

You must take or mail the signed ticket with proof of correction to the court along with your dismissal fee. Do this before the deadline on your ticket.

The court will then dismiss your case and it won't go on your record.

What if I don't go to court or pay for my ticket?

When you sign your ticket, you promise to go to court or pay the fine.

If you don't go to court or pay your fine, your driver's license can be suspended. And you may not be able to renew your car's registration.

The judge can also charge you with "contempt of court" or "failure to pay a fine." If that happens, the court can charge you with a misdemeanor and issue a warrant for your arrest or add an additional fee (called a "civil assessment") of up to \$300.