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Practice Material

Civil

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CIVIL

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Chapter 1

Preliminary Matters¹

[§1.01] Introduction to These Materials

The purpose of the *Practice Material: Civil* is to introduce you to the law of civil procedure in British Columbia. These materials provide a roughly chronological overview of the process. The first chapters cover meeting the client, determining the procedural options and gathering evidence. The next chapters address chambers, dispute resolution and abbreviated trial processes, before discussing a full trial, costs and interest. The final chapter on collections deals with collecting debts either before or after judgment. Different aspects of some matters might appear in more than one chapter. For example, aspects of default judgment are addressed under Chapter 5 (“Disposition of the Action Before Trial”) and also in Chapter 9 on collections; aspects of fast track litigation are addressed in Chapter 2 on Supreme Court procedure and also in Chapter 8 on costs.

The Small Claims Rules, B.C. Reg. 261/93 govern practice in Small Claims Court (a branch of the Provincial Court). Small Claims Court and procedures in that court are outlined briefly in this chapter. Lawyers who will be appearing in Small Claims Court need to consult the Small Claims Rules and guides that are specific to procedures in that court.

At the end of this chapter, you will find some general resources for civil practice. The *Practice Material: Civil* deals primarily with practice in the BC Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court Civil Rules, B.C. Reg. 168/2009 (the “SCCR”) govern practice in the BC Supreme Court, including the procedure for starting a civil claim. Although they take the form of regulations, the SCCR have the force of statute and can alter substantive rights (*Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia*, 2013 SCC 42 at para. 50). In these *Civil* chapters, we will refer to the rules under the SCCR using the abbreviation “SCCR” (for example, Rule 1-1 under the SCCR is “SCCR 1-1”).

The SCCR came into force in July 2010, replacing the Rules of Court, B.C. Reg. 22/90 (the “former Rules”) and introducing significant changes to practice. Some

¹ **Michael J. Kleisinger** kindly revised this chapter in November 2024. It was previously revised by Ellen S. Hong (2018, 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2023); Mark W. Mounteer (2016, 2012, and 2011); Adrienne G. Atherton (2004–2008); C. Michelle Tribe-Soiseth (2003); F. Matthew Kirchner (2002); Margaret M. MacKinnon and David R. MacKenzie (2001); Leonard M. Cohen (1996); and Mark M. Skorah, KC (1995).

current SCCR provisions are comparable to the former Rules, but lawyers must be cautious when relying on case law decided under the former Rules.

Counsel should become familiar with the court’s current Administrative Notices and Practice Directions, which set out expectations for practice and procedure in court. These are available on the court websites.

[§1.02] Effective Advocacy

Advocacy starts long before the courtroom, and very few cases ever go to trial. The successful advocate understands what the client wants to achieve and wins a favourable result for the client, often by way of settlement, which is generally quicker, less stressful and less expensive than a trial.

The keys to effective advocacy are *preparation* and *organization*. Preparation is necessary at all stages of an action, beginning with the initial client interview. Without properly gathering the facts, counsel will not be effective at the bargaining table or in examining witnesses. Organization accompanies preparation. If a legal practice is organized logically—using checklists, reminders, and document management systems—it is easier to prepare for hearings.

Advocacy is important in drafting pleadings, in chambers, in negotiating and in conducting a trial. While these materials do not address subtleties of advocacy, you will find helpful resources listed at the end of this chapter.

[§1.03] Meeting the Client

1. Purpose

A plaintiff’s lawyer will first meet their client when the client seeks advice about their claim. Defence counsel often do not meet their clients until much later—usually shortly after their client learns about the lawsuit.

The first meeting is often by telephone or virtual meeting. You should perform a conflict check as early as possible, before the potential client discloses any confidential information. See the *Practice Material: Professionalism: Practice Management* for further reading.

Once you have checked for conflicts, you should have the prospective client prepare and send you the following in advance of the first meeting:

- a detailed, chronological outline of the facts;
- all relevant documents; and
- a list of people involved, with contact details.

The purposes of the first meeting are essentially the same for both plaintiff's counsel and defence counsel. You want to do the following:

- (a) obtain all facts, whether favourable or unfavourable, relative to the claim;
- (b) obtain specific facts to draft the pleadings;
- (c) provide the client with initial advice as to the merits of the claim or defence;
- (d) obtain sources for further investigation, including all relevant documents; and
- (e) obtain information for the purposes of settlement.

Sometimes it may take more than one meeting to accomplish these goals.

2. Matters Covered

Some litigation lawyers find it helpful to develop a checklist of the matters to be covered. Sample checklists appear in the following resources:

- The Law Society's *Practice Checklists Manual* (available on the Law Society website);
- *British Columbia Motor Vehicle Accident Claims Practice Manual* (Vancouver: CLEBC); and
- *Bender's Forms of Discovery*.

Regardless of the type of litigation, you must discuss certain matters with your client:

- (a) Discuss the litigation process and the likely procedures in resolving the claim, unless the client is experienced with litigation.
- (b) Discuss the cost of litigation, including legal fees, disbursements and the costs the client must pay if they lose.
- (c) Discuss settlement. Ensure that the client does not have an unrealistic view of the case. While it is not always possible to assess a case at the outset, advise the client of the risks. Note the Canons of Legal Ethics in rules 2.1-3(a) and (c) of the *Code of Professional Conduct for British Columbia* (the "BC Code").
- (d) Discuss alternatives to a court action, such as mediation or arbitration. Often clients are unaware of the benefits these procedures offer.
- (e) Find out whether the client has consulted another lawyer on the same matter. If the client was dissatisfied with another lawyer, find out why. The client might have a poor case or be holding something back. You want to know

whether an action has already been commenced, if there are fees outstanding, and, in general, what is the present relationship between the client and the former lawyer.

- (f) Consider whether the matter is within your realm of competence. It is a disservice to your client as well as to yourself to take on a case that exceeds your expertise.
- (g) Identify the client and verify that identity as required by the Law Society Rules.
- (h) Confirm that the client is competent to instruct counsel. If the client is a corporation, ensure that it has duly authorized taking steps. If the client is under a disability or a minor, the client requires a litigation guardian.

3. Record

You should keep a detailed record of the first client interview. This record will help you throughout the file and protect you if your relationship with the client deteriorates.

The record may be written notes or an audio recording. If it is an audio recording, tell the client beforehand that the meeting is being recorded. In either case, send a typed copy of the record to the client for any comments, additions or deletions. You may want this record, or parts of it, to be part of the retainer letter or an appendix to it.

[§1.04] The Retainer

1. General

The *Practice Material: Professionalism: Practice Management* discusses retainers, retainer letters, and fee arrangements. Give clients a realistic picture of how litigation and negotiation work. Although you cannot estimate the exact fees involved, you might be able to approximate certain expenses, such as what it will cost to prepare a claim or defence, or to complete discovery.

Certain types of actions—for example, class actions—have additional requirements that must be included in the retainer agreement (*Class Proceedings Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 50, s. 38).

2. Obtaining Instructions

The *Practice Material: Professionalism: Ethics* discusses the need for lawyers to obtain proper instructions. Confirming these instructions is critical, particularly when the lawyer is performing limited or particular services only (as in a limited scope retainer).

3. Getting Off the Record

There may come a time when you and your client must part ways. If your client will not sign a notice of intention to act in person or to appoint another solicitor, you must obtain the court's permission to withdraw. Withdrawing as counsel becomes more difficult the closer you are to trial. SCCR 22-6 and section 3.7 in the *BC Code* deal with the procedure for and conditions surrounding withdrawal.

If you have a contingency agreement with your client that does not address withdrawal, you may be unable to withdraw. Consequently, you should always include a term entitling you to withdraw and draw your client's attention to it when initially reviewing the fee agreement.

Note that in the case where an infant or a person who is mentally incompetent makes a claim in Supreme Court, you cannot remove yourself from the record and leave that person unrepresented, as SCCR 20-2(4) requires that a litigation guardian must act by lawyer unless the litigation guardian is the Public Guardian and Trustee.

[§1.05] Limitation Periods

The limitation period is the time period that a statute specifies within which an action must be brought or a complaint filed. It is *crucial* that you determine the applicable limitation period at the outset of any claim. The client may not have retained you until near, on, or after the date on which the limitation period expires.

If there is any risk that the limitation period is about to expire or may have already expired, file a claim as soon as possible to stop the clock running. Remember that you can file a claim on one date and serve it later. You may later decide that the case is not worth pursuing.

You must be familiar with the various statutory time limits. In some cases, limitation periods might be subject to variation depending on features like the following:

- (a) the status of the plaintiff—for example, if the plaintiff is an infant, a person who is mentally incompetent, or a “worker” under the *Workers Compensation Act*;
- (b) the status of the defendant—for example, if the defendant is deceased or is a municipal corporation or other government body;
- (c) the nature of the cause of action—for example, if the injury was discovered long after the act that caused it occurred; or
- (d) conflicts of law considerations, including choice of law clauses in contracts.

Unless you are certain of the limitation period, always review the appropriate statute. A great starting place is the Lawyers Indemnity Fund publication “Beat the Clock: Timely Lessons from 1600 Lawyers.” A quick reference list of the most common limitations and deadlines appears in the *Practice Material: Professionalism: Ethics*, as an appendix. This chart is also available on the Law Society website (www.lawsociety.bc.ca).

In most cases, the applicable limitation period will be found in the *Limitation Act*, S.B.C. 2012, c. 13. The current *Limitation Act* came into force June 1, 2013, and represented a significant change in the limitations regime in BC. If the claim may have originated before June 2013, consider whether the former act applies.

You must be familiar with the current *Limitation Act* and its basic provisions. Under the *Limitation Act*, a single two-year basic limitation period applies to most civil claims (e.g. negligence, breach of contract or breach of fiduciary duty). Exceptions are civil claims that enforce a monetary judgment, actions that have limitation periods set by other statutes, and claims specifically exempted under the *Limitation Act* (e.g. some claims by debtors, claims for arrears of child or spousal support and claims of sexual assault, among others).

You must also be aware of the rules about when a claim is “discovered” for the purposes of starting the clock on the limitation period. The general discovery rule in s. 8 of the *Limitation Act* is that a claim is “discovered” by a person on the first day on which the person knew or reasonably ought to have known all of the following:

- (a) that injury, loss or damage had occurred;
- (b) that the injury, loss or damage was caused by or contributed to by an act or omission;
- (c) that the act or omission was that of the person against whom the claim is or may be made; and
- (d) that, having regard to the nature of the injury, loss or damage, a court proceeding would be an appropriate means to seek to remedy the injury, loss or damage.

When a person is said to have “discovered” a claim might be affected by special discovery rules under the *Limitation Act* (ss. 12–20). These special rules may postpone the start of the limitation period until the person entitled to make a claim becomes aware of the loss. For example, special discovery rules apply when the claim is for fraud or recovery of trust property. Also, a child does not “discover” a claim until they reach the age of majority (in BC, 19 years), so the limitation period for when that child could bring a claim does not start to run until they reach the age of 19. Similarly, a person under a disability does not “discover” a claim while they remain under a disability, subject to other provisions of the act whereby a potential defendant

could force a child or a person under a disability to proceed with their claim.

Section 21 of the *Limitation Act* imposes a 15-year ultimate limitation period within which a claim must be brought. The 15-year limitation period begins to run not when the claim is *discovered*, but when the act or omission that caused an injury, loss or damage *took place*. Section 21(2) specifies when an act or omission is considered to have taken place for certain claims.

Section 24 sets out circumstances in which a limitation period for a claim will be extended because a person acknowledges liability for the claim.

If the limitation period appears to have expired when the client consults you, determine if there are facts that suggest the running of time was postponed. In any event, you should file the claim promptly, whether to meet a limitation date or to lay the foundation for a postponement argument.

Postponement is subject to the ultimate limitation period of 15 years. The ultimate limitation period also applies to actions against municipalities and governments (*Armstrong v. West Vancouver (District)*, 2003 BCCA 73).

Be especially alert to the limitation periods that apply to local governments or municipal corporations. This is a complex area (see Johnson, *Annotated British Columbia Local Government Act and Community Charter* (Canada Law Book, loose-leaf)). **Remember that in addition to the limitation periods, special notice requirements apply to claims against governments** (see §1.06). You must consider the *Limitation Act* and the *Local Government Act*, R.S.B.C. 2015, c. 1 (note that the City of Vancouver is governed by the *Vancouver Charter*, S.B.C. 1953, c. 55, not the *Local Government Act*). Under s. 735 of the *Local Government Act* and s. 249(1) of the *Vancouver Charter*, a **six-month limitation period** applies to claims against a municipality for actions taken by the municipality that are beyond the powers (*ultra vires*) of the municipality.

Some statutes authorize municipalities to take actions that could affect a person's rights. Expropriation is an example. The municipality is only authorized to act in accordance with the statute, but the municipality could become liable for this same action if the municipality carried out the action in an unlawful way outside its statutory authority. For example, the six-month limitation period will apply to an unlawful expropriation or an unlawful demolition, but common law claims against a municipality, such as damages arising from a negligent building inspection (for an inherent construction defect) or failure to warn, are subject to the longer limitation period under the *Limitation Act*.

Be aware that by commencing an action, the plaintiff may revive a defendant's cause of action that had been time-barred. For example, if the plaintiff brings a claim

on time, and the defendant has a claim related to that claim, then the court may allow that party to bring a proceeding against the plaintiff by counterclaim, even if the limitation period for it has passed (*Limitation Act*, s. 22(1)(a)).

Under ss. 150(2) and (5) of the *Wills, Estates and Succession Act*, S.B.C. 2009, c. 13, an action may be commenced by or against the estate of a deceased within the time limit for the action, as if the deceased were living.

Each province has its own statute setting out limitation periods. If your client has a claim in another jurisdiction, you should immediately determine the applicable limitation period under the appropriate law. You may also need to obtain advice from legal counsel licensed to practice in that jurisdiction.

The Lawyers Indemnity Fund regularly receives claims relating to missed limitation periods. Remember that you must report as soon as you realize the error. See the *Practice Material: Professionalism: Ethics*.

For matters within federal jurisdiction, see the *Federal Limitations Manual*, loose-leaf, 2nd ed. (Markham: LexisNexis, 2006) and Graeme Mew, *The Law of Limitations*, 3rd ed. (Markham: LexisNexis, 2016).

For limitation periods related to collections, see §9.04.

[§1.06] Notice/Conditions Precedent

The requirements for giving notice or filing proof of loss are as important as the limitation period. If you propose to sue a government body, you *must* check the appropriate statute to see if notice is required and how (and to whom) you must give notice. If you are suing a municipal corporation, the notice requirements apply *regardless of the cause of action and the limitation period that applies*.

Under s. 736 of the *Local Government Act*, notice of a claim against a municipality must be served on the municipality **within two months from the date on which the damage was sustained**. The notice must be in writing and must describe the time, place and manner in which the damage was sustained.

Pursuant to s. 736 of the *Local Government Act*, failing to give proper notice is not fatal if there is a reasonable excuse **and** there is no prejudice to the municipality. Courts have often ruled that ignorance of a notice period is not a reasonable excuse: see e.g. *Ordog v. Mission District* (1980), 31 B.C.L.R. 371 (S.C.). However, in *Teller v. Sunshine Coast (Regional District of)* (1990), 43 B.C.L.R. (2d) 376 (C.A.), the Court of Appeal said that while ignorance of the law alone may not be a reasonable excuse, it may be considered as one factor.

If you are suing or defending a person based on a breach of contract, check the contract for any conditions about

dispute resolution or conditions precedent to commencing an action.

When you are suing on behalf of a strata corporation, a resolution passed by a 3/4 vote at an annual or a special general meeting must authorize the action prior to commencement of the litigation. An exception exists for an action that is brought under the *Small Claims Act* against an owner or another person to collect money owing to the strata corporation, including money owing as a fine, if the strata corporation has passed a bylaw dispensing with the need for authorization, and the terms and conditions of that bylaw are met (see ss. 171 and 172 of the *Strata Property Act*, S.B.C. 1998, c. 43). Actions brought on behalf of a strata corporation are purely statutory, representative actions that give the plaintiffs the capacity to sue or the right to action, which they would not otherwise have. Under s. 173.1 of the *Strata Property Act*, failure to obtain the proper authorization does not affect the validity of an action and cannot be used as a defence in an action commenced by a strata corporation.

If the claim arises under an insurance policy, s. 23 of the *Insurance Act*, R.S.B.C. 2012, c. 1 sets out the applicable limitation period.

[§1.07] Investigating the Facts

The trial lawyer is responsible for finding and presenting the facts of the case. Investigating the facts can be one of the great joys of practice.

Your investigation starts with the client. The client will provide documents. Follow up on those, ensuring that you have all relevant documents, including general documents that may touch upon issues in the litigation, such as policy manuals or protocols. If your client is a company or government organization, make sure you understand all departments that may have been involved or have relevant documents. Your own client *must* produce a list of all documents that are or have been in the party's possession or control and that could, if available, be used by any party of record at trial to prove or disprove a material fact, whether they are helpful or harmful to the client's case (SCCR 7-1(1)). Moreover, it is counsel's obligation to ensure that this is done.

Your client will also provide the names of witnesses. Failure to interview a material witness can constitute negligence (*Fawell v. Atkins* (1981), 28 B.C.L.R. 32 (S.C.)). If a material witness fails to respond, a party may seek a court order under SCCR 7-5(1) requiring their examination under oath.

The opponent may also provide information in document disclosure and through examination for discovery. In examining all relevant documents and conducting a careful examination for discovery, you will find further avenues of investigation to pursue.

Apart from the parties themselves, consider other sources of information. For example, professionals such as lawyers, doctors, and accountants are all subject to rules of conduct and investigation by professional bodies. There might be investigations conducted under statute. For example, a fire chief often investigates fires under the *Fire Services Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 144. Public companies may have been investigated by the BC Securities Commission or by a stock exchange. Sources of information might include income tax returns, phone records or medical records. Some careful thought and a little digging should reveal these sources.

It is good practice to visit the scene of an accident or event to understand the context. Perhaps you have access to photos taken at the scene. A lawyer may notice something that the client missed, and it assists when questioning and preparing.

Take statements from all witnesses, even those who claim they have no knowledge of the events. This is preferable to being surprised at trial by a witness whose memory has changed. Also, as witnesses for the other side come to light, you should learn about them. For example, you may find that the architect retained by the other counsel to criticize the design of the stairs has designed similar stairs in the past.

In the early years of your litigation career, you should conduct an independent investigation of the facts rather than leave it to others. Once you know how to perform a proper investigation, you can delegate the task to another and will be able assess whether they did it well.

[§1.08] Jurisdiction

1. Court Jurisdiction Generally

There are two levels of provincially administered courts of first instance (or trial courts) in BC: the Supreme Court and the Provincial Court. The Civil Resolution Tribunal (see §1.10) shares jurisdiction over some strata and motor vehicle accident matters with the Supreme Court, and shares jurisdiction over some small-claims matters with the Provincial Court. There is also the federally administered Federal Court (Trial Division).

2. Supreme Court

Sections 3 and 9(1) of the *Supreme Court Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 443 set out the jurisdiction, powers and privileges of the BC Supreme Court:

3(1)The Chief Justice, Associate Chief Justice and judges have all the powers, rights, incidents, privileges and immunities of a judge of a superior court of record, and all other powers, rights, incidents, privileges and immunities that on March 29, 1870, were vested in the Chief Justice and other justices of the court.

- (2) The court may be held before the Chief Justice or before any one of the judges.

...

- 9(1) The court continues to be a court of original jurisdiction and has jurisdiction in all cases, civil and criminal, arising in British Columbia.

As a superior court, the BC Supreme Court possesses jurisdiction over all matters, unless the matter in issue has been specifically excluded from its jurisdiction. To proceed in an inferior court, it must be clear on the face of the proceedings that a matter is within the jurisdiction of that tribunal.

The jurisdiction conferred upon the BC Supreme Court by s. 9(1) of the *Supreme Court Act* is sometimes referred to as its “inherent jurisdiction.” The BC Supreme Court inherited the jurisdiction of the superior courts in England. The inherent jurisdiction of superior courts flows from the Crown.

The Supreme Court’s inherent jurisdiction can be distinguished from the jurisdiction possessed by all courts—whether superior or inferior—to regulate their own processes (*Houweling Nurseries Ltd. v. Houweling*, 2010 BCCA 315 at para. 40).

The Supreme Court has the general jurisdiction to entertain all civil actions regardless of the amount of money involved. In addition, some statutes explicitly give the Supreme Court jurisdiction in specific matters.

Some civil matters, however, cannot be brought in the Supreme Court. For example, s. 122 of the *Workers Compensation Act*, R.S.B.C. 2019, c. 1 gives certain exclusive powers to the Workers’ Compensation Board (operating as WorkSafe BC). Similarly, if claims are governed by an arbitration clause, the Supreme Court must (on application of a party) stay its jurisdiction: *Arbitration Act*, S.B.C. 2020, c. 2, s. 7.

3. Provincial Court (Civil)—Small Claims Court

Sections 2 and 3 of the *Small Claims Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 430 establish the powers and jurisdiction of the Small Claims Court.

Section 3 of the *Small Claims Act* provides:

- 3(1) The Provincial Court has jurisdiction in a claim for
- (a) debt or damages,
 - (b) recovery of personal property,
 - (c) specific performance of an agreement relating to personal property or services, or
 - (d) relief from opposing claims to personal property

if the amount claimed or the value of the personal property or services is equal to or less than an amount that is prescribed by regulation, excluding interest and costs.

- (2) The Provincial Court does not have jurisdiction in a claim for libel, slander or malicious prosecution.

The Small Claims Court has jurisdiction in matters involving up to \$35,000, but most claims up to \$5,000 must be dealt with by the Civil Resolution Tribunal (see §1.10).

The monetary limit on the jurisdiction of the Small Claims Court is exclusive of interest and costs (*Small Claims Act*, s. 3). “Interest” here means court-ordered interest, not contractual interest (see *Telus Services Inc. v. Hussey*, 2016 BCPC 41). Claims that exceed the monetary limit of Small Claims Court must be transferred to Supreme Court; however, a claimant may choose to abandon the excess so that Small Claims Court may hear it (Small Claims Rules 1(4) and 7.1).

The Small Claims Rules (prescribed under the *Court Rules Act*) set out the rules and forms regulating practice and procedure in Small Claims Court. The SCCR are specifically excluded from the proceedings and should not be used in Small Claims Court, except for those set out in Rule 17(18) of the Small Claims Rules.

The procedure for advancing a claim in Small Claims Court is set out in §1.09.

4. Federal Court

The Federal Court has exclusive jurisdiction over certain types of cases. In certain other cases, the Federal Court and the BC Supreme Court have concurrent jurisdiction. The jurisdiction of the Federal Court is not discussed in these materials, but see the list at the end of this chapter for resources.

5. Where to File

The territorial jurisdiction of the Small Claims Court is the entire province. However, under Small Claims Rule 1(2), the claimant must file the notice of claim at the Small Claims Registry nearest to where:

- (a) the **defendant** lives or carries on business; or
- (b) the transaction or event that resulted in the claim took place.

In the Supreme Court, it is not necessary to commence proceedings in any particular registry. Any claim that may be brought in the Supreme Court may be commenced in any Supreme Court Registry.

6. Transfer

Small Claims Rule 7.1 allows the transfer of a small claims action from Provincial Court to the Supreme Court. Section 15 of the *Supreme Court Act* authorizes a transfer from Supreme Court to Provincial Court. The transfer from Supreme Court to Provincial Court is available even when a defendant has issued a jury notice (SCCR 12-6(4)).

The Supreme Court may order that only disbursements are to be recovered in a Supreme Court action if the action properly fell within the jurisdiction of the Small Claims Court (SCCR 14-1(10)).

[§1.09] Small Claims Court Procedures

The Small Claims Rules outline the procedures in Small Claims Court. Counsel representing clients in Small Claims Court need to become familiar with these Rules. A *very simplified* overview follows. Please consult the *Small Claims Handbook* (CLEBC) for details.

Changes to the Small Claims Rules effective October 2022 resulted in alterations to some forms, so make sure that you are using the current form. Those same changes addressed the method of attendance, making it easier to attend some court proceedings by telephone or by electronic means instead of in person. Previous amendments to the Small Claims Rules provide for some pre-trial procedures in certain registries, such as Robson Square and Richmond.

The Small Claims Rules are designed to make Small Claims Court accessible and understandable to the non-lawyer litigant. In general, the Small Claims Rules encourage frank discussion early in the process at a settlement conference (Small Claims Rule 7), mediation (Small Claims Rule 7.3) or trial conference (available in some registries, see Small Claims Rule 7.5).

A claimant starts an action by completing a notice of claim (Form 1), which identifies the nature of the claim and the relief sought. The claimant files the notice of claim with the registry nearest to where the defendant lives or carries on business, or to where the event took place (Small Claims Rule 1(2)). The claimant then has 12 months to serve the claim and blank reply form (Form 2) on all the defendants (Small Claims Rule 2(7)).

Small Claims Rules 2 and 18 govern most service procedures. The Small Claims Rules permit service of a notice of claim on a defendant who is an **individual** by mailing a copy of it by registered mail to the defendant. Separate rules exist for other categories of defendant.

When the defendant receives the claim, the defendant has options as set out in Small Claims Rule 3(1):

- (a) pay the amount claimed directly to the claimant and ask the claimant to withdraw the claim;
- (b) admit all or part of the claim and propose a payment scheme;
- (c) dispute all or part of the claim by explaining why and what parts of the claim the defendant disputes; or
- (d) file a counterclaim.

The defendant can also commence an action against a third party if the defendant believes that someone other than the defendant is responsible for the claim (Small Claims Rule 5(1)).

The defendant must file a reply within 14 days after the date the defendant was served (if within BC) and 30 days (if served outside BC) (Small Claims Rule 3(4)). The defendant does not serve the reply, the **registry** does (Small Claims Rule 3(5)).

All registries accept e-filing (Small Claims Rule 22). E-filing works in much the same way as under SCCR 23-3, so that documents can be received and sent from an email address once the party follows the appropriate procedures.

What happens after the claim is made depends on the response to the claim, the nature of the claim (e.g. debt, personal injury, property damage only in a motor vehicle action, etc.), the amounts claimed, and the registry in which the action starts. All of these details are beyond the scope of this brief overview.

Some further practice points of note follow.

- (a) The Civil Resolution Tribunal (instead of Small Claims Court) deals with most small claims involving amounts of up to \$5,000 (see §1.10).
Small Claims Court still deals with claims of \$5,000 or less where:
 - (i) the Civil Resolution Tribunal does not have the authority to deal with the claim;
 - (ii) a judge orders that the matter proceed in Provincial Court instead of the Civil Resolution Tribunal;
 - (iii) one of the parties files a notice of objection to a decision of the Civil Resolution Tribunal; or
 - (iv) no objection to an order of the Civil Resolution Tribunal is filed, and a party asks to have the order enforced in Provincial Court.
- (b) The default method of attendance at conferences and hearings is in-person (Small Claims Rule 17(25)). However, pursuant to Small Claims Rule 17(16.1), a person may apply to change their own or another person's method of attendance at a conference or hearing.

- (c) Pursuant to Small Claims Rule 9.1, when the claim is for an amount between \$5,001 and \$10,000 in the Robson Square and Richmond registries, a simplified one-hour trial is scheduled before an adjudicator who is a judge or a justice of the peace and is called a justice of the peace adjudicator. The court will hear a claim for under \$5,001 only if the claim is outside of the jurisdiction of the Civil Resolution Tribunal or if a notice of objection to the decision of the Civil Resolution Tribunal has been filed.

At Robson Square this simplified trial procedure does not apply to financial debt claims under Small Claims Rule 9.2 (see below) or personal injury claims, and these trials are scheduled during evening hours. At Richmond, the simplified trial process does not apply to personal injury claims and the trials are scheduled during normal business hours.

- (d) When the claimant is “in the business of lending money or extending credit,” the claim is for financial debt (for a debt arising from a loan or extension of credit in the course of the claimant’s business), and the claim is filed at Robson Square, a 30-minute summary trial is scheduled (Small Claims Rule 9.2).
- (e) When the claim is for an amount greater than \$10,000 and less than \$35,000, a party may initiate mediation, unless the claim is for financial debt under Small Claims Rule 9.2, involves a protection order under the *Family Law Act* or a peace bond under the *Criminal Code*, or the parties are the same as those for an action brought in Supreme Court (Small Claims Rule 7.3).
- (f) After pleadings are closed, the registry at Robson Court schedules a settlement conference before a judge (if the case is not one that proceeds to default judgment, is referred directly to mediation, or scheduled for a summary or simplified trial).
- (g) If a case is not resolved at mediation (and is not one under Small Claims Rule 7.5, 9.1 or 9.2 nor a claim for property damage only in a motor vehicle accident claim), the court registry will send a notice of settlement conference to the parties and a settlement conference will be held pursuant to Rule 7 of the Small Claims Rules.
- (h) The parties usually must attend the conference. They must bring all relevant documents and reports to the conference (Small Claims Rule 7(5)). The powers of the judge at a settlement conference are outlined in Small Claims Rule 7(14). Small Claims Rule 10.1 provides for formal offers to settle (Form 18) to be served within 30 days following the settlement conference. A trial will be scheduled only if no settlement is reached.
- (i) Small Claims Rule 10 allows expert reports from qualified individuals to be used as evidence. A summary of the expert’s evidence must be served on the opposing party at least 30 days prior to the expert’s testimony. The Rules also permit expert reports to be entered into evidence without having to call the expert to testify, if the report is served on all parties 30 days before the report is introduced. If a party wishes to cross-examine the opposing party’s expert, notice requiring the expert to attend trial for the purpose of cross-examination must be served on the opposing party at least 14 days before the trial date.
- (j) The court must make a payment order following any monetary judgment (Small Claims Rule 11). If the unsuccessful party does not need time to pay, the judgment must be paid immediately. If time is required, the court may order a payment schedule or order a payment hearing. In a payment hearing (Small Claims Rule 12), the debtor gives evidence, under oath, of their assets and financial status. After hearing evidence and submissions, the court may order a payment schedule. The court has significant powers to order arrest and imprisonment.
- (k) Lawyers’ fees are not recoverable in Small Claims Court, although filing fees and certain disbursements are. The judge may order a penalty against the losing party if the judgment against the defendant was greater than the plaintiff’s offer to settle, or if the award to the plaintiff was less than the defendant’s offer to settle (Small Claims Rule 10.1). The penalty may be up to 20% of the amount of the offer to settle. In order to be eligible for the penalty, a settlement offer should be made as early as possible (see Small Claims Rule 10.1(8)(c)) and cannot be made later than “30 days after the conclusion of the settlement conference or the conclusion of a trial conference, whichever happens first” (Small Claims Rule 10.1(2)).
- (l) In addition, the judge has discretion to order one party to pay the other up to 10% of the amount claimed or the value of the claim or counterclaim if the party made a claim, counterclaim, or reply and proceeded through trial with no reasonable basis for success (Small Claims Rule 20(5)).
- (m) Decisions on the merits of a claim may be appealed to the BC Supreme Court (*Small Claims Act*, s. 5; SCCR 18-3). The appeal is based on the record from the Provincial Court trial on questions of both law and fact (*Small Claims Act*, s. 12). The procedure is set out in the Supreme Court Practice Direction PD-21. Under s. 5 of the *Small Claims Act*, there is no right of appeal from interlocutory decisions made by a judge, although

there is an avenue for the appeal of interlocutory matters through the *Judicial Review Procedure Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 241. An order not finally disposing of a claim that was made by a registrar, however, may be appealed to a Small Claims Court judge.

- (n) Certain types of applications may be made without a hearing before a registrar of the court (Small Claims Rule 16(2) and (3)).

See Chapter 9 for information on collections procedures in Small Claims Court.

The provincial government publishes a Small Claims Court Manual, which explains the system and provides direction to registry staff. Each registry also has free booklets explaining the process. See also the *Small Claims Handbook* and *Small Claims Act and Rules Annotated* (Vancouver: CLE). Further information about Small Claims Court is available at these websites:

- the website of the BC Attorney General, www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/courthouse-services/small-claims;
- the website of the Provincial Court of BC, www.provincialcourt.bc.ca; and
- the Small Claims BC Online Help Guide, www.smallclaimsbc.ca.

[§1.10] Tribunals

1. Civil Resolution Tribunal

British Columbia’s Civil Resolution Tribunal (the “CRT”), established under the *Civil Resolution Tribunal Act*, S.B.C. 2012, c. 25, has the authority to decide most strata property disputes, society disputes, minor civil claims, and certain motor vehicle accident claims for accidents which occurred on or after April 1, 2019, and most motor vehicle injury disputes involving accidents which occurred on or after May 1, 2021. The CRT also adjudicates certain claims brought pursuant to the *Intimate Images Protection Act*, S.B.C. 2023, c. 11. It is one of the first tribunals in Canada for resolving disputes online, although it also has the jurisdiction to hold hearings.

Section 2.1 of the *Civil Resolution Tribunal Act* sets out the CRT’s jurisdiction. The CRT cannot order the sale of strata lots, grant injunctions, or deal with builders liens claims. It also cannot resolve certain other claims, including claims for defamation or malicious prosecution, constitutional claims or claims against the government.

The Civil Resolution Tribunal Rules govern proceedings in the CRT and are published on the CRT website.

The CRT addresses a wide variety of strata disputes between owners of strata properties and strata corporations, including disputes about common property, non-payment of strata fees or fines, and interpretation of strata bylaws.

Most small claims up to \$5,000 go to the CRT rather than Small Claims Court. The CRT has jurisdiction over the same types of claims as the Small Claims Court (debt, damages, claims concerning personal property, and performance of agreements about personal property or services).

The CRT handles certain disputes under the *Societies Act*, S.B.C. 2015, c. 18 and the *Cooperative Association Act*, S.B.C. 1999, c. 28. It also has jurisdiction to decide liability and damages for injuries arising from motor vehicle accidents where the total damages are \$50,000 or less, to decide whether an injury is a “minor injury,” and to resolve disputes about the entitlement to receive motor vehicle accident benefits.

The CRT’s jurisdiction expanded effective May 1, 2021, when BC’s motor vehicle insurance system changed to a “no-fault” model. Under this system, ICBC directly compensates people for injuries from motor vehicle accidents, regardless of who is at fault. The injured party may only sue the person responsible for the accident in limited cases, such as where that person committed a criminal offence. Thus, in most cases, the CRT—rather than the courts—will resolve compensation for injuries resulting from motor vehicle accidents that occurred on or after May 1, 2021.

To begin a CRT dispute, an applicant files a dispute notice. Once a response is filed, the parties are encouraged to negotiate with each other. If negotiation does not result in a resolution, an assigned facilitator attempts to assist the parties to reach a resolution. If the dispute remains unresolved, it proceeds to adjudication by an independent CRT member. A decision of a CRT member is binding on the parties and enforceable as a court order, once filed in the Provincial or Supreme Court.

The general rule at the CRT is that parties represent themselves, unless they fall within an exception in s. 20(2) of the *Civil Resolution Tribunal Act* or they obtain the CRT’s permission to be represented by counsel. Parties to a motor vehicle accident claim may be represented by a lawyer as of right.

Counsel representing a party before the CRT, or assisting a party to prepare for self-representation before the CRT, should clearly communicate the limits of their retainer with the client prior to being retained. Fees may be recoverable in some cases.

For more information, visit the CRT’s website (www.civilresolutionbc.ca).

2. Other Tribunals

Other tribunals, boards and commissions make decisions in a wide range of legal areas. Legislation governs the duties and powers of these administrative bodies. Some, like the BC Securities Commission or the BC Human Rights Tribunal, are large bodies with detailed rules and practice directions. Others can be quite informal. For example, the Residential Tenancy Branch now accepts online applications for dispute resolution.

Depending on your practice area, you might deal with any of these provincial administrative bodies: the Health Professions Review Board, the Workers’ Compensation Appeal Tribunal, the Employment Standards Tribunal, the Labour Relations Board, the Property Assessment Appeal Board, the Agricultural Land Commission, the BC Utilities Commission, or the Surface Rights Board, among many others. There are also numerous federal administrative bodies: the Competition Tribunal, the Immigration and Refugee Board, the National Energy Board, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission and the Patent Appeal Board of Canada, among many others.

Some practice areas involve both federal and provincial jurisdiction. For example, there is an Information and Privacy Commissioner of BC and also a Privacy Commissioner of Canada. Similarly, there is a BC Human Rights Tribunal as well as a Canadian Human Rights Tribunal.

[§1.11] Further Reading

1. Advocacy

Bracken, Keith, *et al.* *British Columbia Courtroom Procedure*. 2nd ed. LexisNexis, 2018.

Clifford, W., *et al.*, *Cross-Examination: The Art of the Advocate*. 4th ed. LexisNexis, 2016.

Indigenous Laws. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC (conference proceedings, 2018).

Introducing Evidence at Trial: A BC Handbook. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC.

2. Supreme Court Civil Rules Annotations

Dillon, J. and G. Turriff. *British Columbia Annual Practice* (the “White Book”). Thomson Reuters.

McLachlin & Taylor. *British Columbia Practice*, with supplemental volume *British Columbia Court Forms*. LexisNexis.

Seckel, A. and J. MacInnis. *British Columbia Supreme Court Rules—Annotated*. Thomson Reuters.

3. Practice in Supreme Court

Fraser & Horn. *The Conduct of Civil Litigation in British Columbia*. 2nd ed. LexisNexis.

Macaulay, M. *Aboriginal & Treaty Rights Practice*. Thomson Reuters.

British Columbia Civil Trial Handbook. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC.

Civil Jury Instructions (CIVJI). Continuing Legal Education Society of BC.

Discovery Practice in British Columbia. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC.

Practice Before the Registrar. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC.

Supreme Court Chambers Orders—Annotated. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC.

4. Small Claims and Civil Resolution Tribunal

Provincial Court Small Claims Handbook. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC.

Small Claims Act & Rules—Annotated. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC.

5. Federal Court

Canadian Federal Courts Practice. LexisNexis.

Federal Courts Practice. Thomson Reuters.

Federal Court and Federal Court of Appeal Practice. Continuing Legal Education Society of BC (conference proceedings, 2016).

Chapter 2

Making a Claim in Supreme Court¹

[§2.01] Parties to a Civil Case in Supreme Court

You must ensure that the appropriate parties are named in the pleading and that they are named correctly. Individuals should be identified by their full names. Avoid nicknames. SCCR 20-1 to 20-3 govern how parties are to be named when partnerships, multiple parties, or parties under legal disability are involved in a case.

1. First Nations

First Nations and Indian Bands have the capacity to sue and be sued in British Columbia (*Kwicksutaineuk/Ah-Kwa-Mish First Nation v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2012 BCCA 193 at para. 75).

The provincial government has created “Directives on Civil Litigation Involving Indigenous Peoples” (<https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/CivilLitigationDirectives.pdf>) to guide counsel in litigating claims under s. 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. These directives seek to incorporate principles from the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and to promote resolution.

2. Corporations and Partnerships

When the plaintiff or defendant is a corporation, you should always do a corporate search to find the proper corporate name.

If a partnership is a party, it may sue or be sued under its firm name (SCCR 20-1(1)). It is not necessary to name each individual partner as a party. However, the notice of civil claim should state that the firm is a partnership and should set out the names of any known partners. SCCR 20-1(4) provides that a party may require the partnership to serve an affidavit setting out the names and addresses of all persons who were partners when the alleged right or liability arose. Consequently, there is no excuse for not naming the partners.

3. Parties Under Legal Disability

Special provisions apply if one or more of the parties is under legal disability. SCCR 20-2 is a complete code for the commencement, conduct and settlement of proceedings for persons under legal disability. Persons are under legal disability for the purpose of SCCR 20-2 if they are infants (under the age of 19, as defined by the *Age of Majority Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 7) or if they are adults who are incapable of managing themselves or their affairs as a reasonable person would do (*Boury v. Iten*, 2019 BCCA 81 at para. 47).

A person under a legal disability must commence or defend proceedings through a litigation guardian (SCCR 20-2(2)). The litigation guardian (often an adult family member) assumes all the normal duties of the party, including instructing counsel and paying costs (if they are ordered against that party). In special circumstances where the Public Guardian and Trustee has been asked to serve as a litigation guardian because no one else is able to do it, the Public Guardian and Trustee may consent to act as a litigation guardian.

The litigation guardian (unless it is the Public Guardian and Trustee) must act through a lawyer (SCCR 20-2(4)). To act as a litigation guardian, the litigation guardian must file forms in court with the pleadings. The first form is the “Consent to Act as Litigation Guardian” (SCCR 20-2(7)), which indicates that the litigation guardian consents to act in the proceeding. This form must be filed before the litigation guardian can act in the proceeding, unless the litigation guardian was appointed by the court or is a litigation guardian of a party to that proceeding under s. 35(1) of the *Representation Agreement Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 405.

The second form that must be filed in court is the “Certificate of Fitness” (SCCR 20-2(8)). The Certificate of Fitness states that the plaintiff is either an infant or is mentally incompetent and that the proposed litigation guardian has no interest in the proceeding adverse to that person. A Certificate of Fitness must be filed unless (in the case of an adult under a legal disability) a committee or representative has been appointed.

When the defendant is under a disability and does not appoint a litigation guardian to defend the matter, the plaintiff cannot take any further steps in the proceeding before obtaining an order from the court appointing a litigation guardian for the defendant (SCCR 20-2(16)).

¹ Michael J. Kleisinger kindly revised this chapter in November 2024. It was previously revised by Ellen S. Hong (2018, 2019, 2020, 2022 and 2023); Mark W. Mounteer (2016, 2012, and 2011); Adrienne G. Atherton (2004–2008); C. Michelle Tribe-Soiseth (2003); F. Matthew Kirchner (2002); Margaret M. MacKinnon and David R. MacKenzie (2001); Leonard M. Cohen (1996); and Mark M. Skorah, KC (1995).

4. Change in Status

If a party to an action becomes mentally incompetent, a litigation guardian should be appointed. If necessary, the court will appoint one (SCCR 20-2(10)). If a party dies or becomes bankrupt, or a corporation is wound up, you may continue the action against the person to whom the estate, interest, title, or liability was transferred (SCCR 6-2(3) and 6-2(4)).

When a child turns 19, they can no longer act through a litigation guardian (*Holland v. Marshall*, 2008 BCSC 333). Assuming that child has not become an adult under a legal disability, then that child must take over the proceeding on their own behalf by filing an affidavit confirming they attained the age of majority (SCCR 20-2(12)).

When the status of parties changes, the style of proceeding must be amended to reflect that change.

5. Self-Represented Parties

Parties commonly appear without a lawyer in all courts of the province. Many retain counsel at the start of the litigation, then later proceed on their own, often due to the costs associated with litigation. While dealing with self-represented litigants can be challenging at times, always remember your ethical duties to treat all persons with whom you have dealings with courtesy and civility and act in good faith.

If you are dealing with a self-represented litigant, inform them clearly at the outset that you do not represent them, and recommend they seek counsel. If you will require strict compliance with the Rules, inform them. Notably, in a 2021 decision, the Supreme Court set aside a default judgment obtained against a self-represented litigant by a lawyer who had advised the self-represented party to seek counsel but had not made it clear that the lawyer would seek default if the self-represented party failed to file a response in time (*Albo v. Haines*, 2021 BCSC 2200). For more on default judgment, see §5.02.

If you are litigating against a self-represented party, there may be times when you can assist both parties by drafting an agreement. Recommend that the self-represented party seek legal advice. If a judge makes an order in the matter, the judge may ask you to draft the order and send it to the self-represented party for approval before submitting it to the registry for entry. In other circumstances, the court may ask you to prepare and submit the order without requiring the other party's approval.

The Law Society has developed practice tips for lawyers dealing with self-represented litigants. These tips include such recommendations as taking complete written notes of all interactions with the self-represented litigant, including phone calls. For

more on ethical concerns in dealing with parties who are not represented by lawyers, see the *Practice Material: Professionalism: Ethics*.

[§2.02] How to Start a Proceeding in Supreme Court

Commence proceedings in Supreme Court by filing a notice of civil claim (SCCR 2-1(1)), a petition (SCCR 2-1(2) and 16-1), or a requisition (SCCR 2-1(2) and 17-1). Under SCCR 1-1, an “action” means a proceeding started by a notice of civil claim, a “petition proceeding” means a proceeding started by a petition, and a “requisition proceeding” means a proceeding started by a requisition.

If a statute or regulation does not specify the procedure to be followed, start a proceeding by filing a notice of civil claim in Form 1 (SCCR 2-1(1) and 3-1(1)).

As set out in SCCR 2-1(2), a petition or requisition **must** be used to start a proceeding when:

- (a) the person starting the proceeding is the only person who is interested in the relief claimed, or there is no person against whom relief is sought;
- (b) the proceeding is brought in respect of an application that is authorized by an enactment to be made to the court;
- (c) the sole or principal question at issue is alleged to be one of construction of an enactment, will, deed, oral or written contract or other document;
- (d) the relief, advice or direction sought relates to a question arising in the execution of a trust, or the performance of an act by a trustee, or the determination of the persons entitled as creditors or otherwise to the trust property;
- (e) the relief, advice or direction sought relates to the maintenance, guardianship or property of infants or other persons under disability;
- (f) the relief sought is for payment of funds into or out of court;
- (g) the relief sought relates to land and is for
 - (i) a declaration of a beneficial interest in or a charge on land, as to the character and extent of the interest or charge,
 - (ii) a declaration that settles the priority between interests or charges,
 - (iii) an order that cancels a certificate of title or makes a title subject to an interest or charge, or
 - (iv) an order of partition or sale;

- (h) the relief, advice or direction sought relates to the determination of a claim of solicitor and client privilege.

The procedure for advancing a claim using a petition or requisition is set out in §2.11 and §2.12.

[§2.03] Pleadings in Supreme Court²

1. General Purpose of Pleadings

The discussion below focuses on drafting a notice of civil claim, but the same general principles also apply to other pleadings.

Pleadings are foundational as they guide the litigation process. They give effect to the underlying objective of the SCCR: to ensure the litigation process is fair, to promote justice between the parties, and to enable all parties to take effective steps for pre-trial preparation.

Pleadings define the issues of fact and law for the court to decide and, therefore, must succinctly state material facts in an organized way so that the court can understand the issues before it (*Mercantile Office Systems Private Limited v. Worldwide Warranty Life Services Inc.*, 2021 BCCA 362 at paras. 20–23).

When considering the purpose, structure and content of a pleading, the starting point is the SCCR.

A notice of civil claim must comply with SCCR 3-7 and provide the following basic information (SCCR 3-1(2)):

- (a) a concise statement of the material facts giving rise to the claim;
- (b) the relief sought by the plaintiff against each named defendant;
- (c) a concise summary of the legal basis for the relief sought;
- (d) the proposed place of trial; and
- (e) the data required in the appendix to the form.

Also, if the plaintiff is acting through a litigation guardian, set that out in the notice of civil claim.

2. Proper Pleadings are Good Advocacy

In practice, pleading the case properly is critical. Pleadings come at an early stage of the litigation, often before all the facts are known. Some counsel

fail to craft pleadings carefully, perhaps expecting to clean them up later, if necessary, through amendments. This is poor practice: pleadings are the foundation upon which a case is constructed. If you take care and exercise diligence in framing the pleadings, the rest of the case will fall into line.

The pleadings determine what is relevant at the discovery stage. Proper pleadings ensure parties produce relevant documents and canvas relevant issues at examinations for discovery.

Note the following comments by Madam Justice Southin of the Court of Appeal in “Pleadings in Commercial Cases” in *The Commercial Case—1991* (Vancouver: CLE, November 1991):

If the profession pleaded properly ... and if it drew all motions, affidavits, judgments, and notices of appeal properly, the business of both the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal not only would be done more expeditiously but also would be of better quality ...

Good pleading will not, in my opinion, give a litigant with a bad case a victory. But bad pleading may very well deprive a litigant with a good case of a victory that ought to be his.

Careful pleading focuses your attention from the outset on the issues you must address to succeed at trial. It directs you to the evidence you must produce, so you prepare strategically in advance, and are not scrambling later. Spending the energy to produce a careful pleading from the outset will also help you to decide whether your client has a case at all. If it does not plead well, that is a warning to rethink and perhaps recast the cause of action.

As noted, SCCR 3-1(2)(a) requires a party to plead a concise statement of the material facts giving rise to the alleged claim. A material fact is one that is essential to formulate a cause of action. If you omit to include supporting material facts, a cause of action is not effectively pleaded. At trial, you will use evidence to prove each material fact alleged to establish your cause of action. However, when drafting your pleadings, you are not permitted to include evidence (SCCR 3-7(1)).

You will rely upon the pleadings at trial to permit you to lead the evidence you want, and to exclude irrelevant matters. The pleadings frame the issues, and when you raise an objection at trial, the trial judge should exclude any evidence not relevant to an issue. The clearer your pleadings are, the more likely you will be able to exclude your opponent’s irrelevancies and to demonstrate the cogency of your relevant evidence.

² Originally based on excerpts from materials prepared by Mr. Justice John Spencer for the CLE publication, *Preparing and Presenting a Civil Case* (September 1984). Updated regularly.

3. Preparation and Precision

Whether you are acting for the plaintiff or the defendant, you should have a thorough understanding of the applicable law before drafting the pleadings; otherwise, it will be difficult to appreciate how the material facts in the pleadings support the cause of action. You should be aware of every cause of action or defence available to the client.

Be careful of making statements in the pleadings that alter the client's rights in ways you did not intend. For example, a party has a right not to elect until judgment whether to take a remedy of specific performance or damages. However, in *Saunders v. Multi Builders Ltd.* (1981), 30 B.C.L.R. 236 (S.C.), this right was lost because of an allegation in the notice of civil claim that the defendant's anticipatory breach "is accepted by the plaintiff as ending the contract." The court held that by these words the plaintiffs had elected to seek damages rather than specific performance. This statement in their pleading bound the plaintiffs, because an election, once made, cannot be retracted.

In identifying the cause of action or defence, listen to your client's story. What went wrong? Has the client suffered harm, or is someone saying the client caused harm? Decide what type of action the client has. For example, is it in contract, negligence, nuisance, breach of trust, defamation, etc.? There may be more than one potential claim.

The next step is, for each cause of action, to identify the elements of that cause of action: what you need to prove. Identify any pitfalls and defences. You must know these things to be sure to raise all the facts that are necessary, or helpful, in order to succeed at trial. For example, in an action on a promissory note, you must plead that (1) it was made; (2) for consideration; (3) that it is due; and (4) that it has been presented and dishonoured. If presentment was waived, that should be pleaded. You might look at a resource like the forms in Atkin's *Encyclopedia of Court Forms and Precedents* for a reminder of the essential facts a particular pleading must establish.

In any pleading you should set out the material facts in the most logical sequence. Generally, that will be in a chronological order, but in some complex actions where there are a number of different issues, there may be topics that divide the facts in a better way. For instance, in a complicated construction case there may be a number of different areas of construction where each should be a subheading followed by a set of paragraphs. Remember, the object of the pleadings is to expose the material facts in as simple a way as possible so that the issues are clear.

In lengthy pleadings, it will be useful to use sub-headings so that the reader can see the relationship between the paragraphs. In drafting a notice of civil claim, suitable headings will suggest themselves. A response to civil claim should make use of these headings in referring to the notice of civil claim, to admit, deny, or take issue with each fact. So far as possible, a response should follow the same sequence as the notice of civil claim.

A properly written defence will serve as an opening for the defendant in a simple trial, just as a notice of civil claim serves for the plaintiff. A judge will read pleadings in advance of trial to find out what the case is about and whether there is anything to watch for. A response to civil claim that simply denies everything the plaintiff says is not effective. Therefore, before drafting the response to civil claim, you should review your instructions and confirm the client's goals. Does the client really expect to defeat the claim entirely? Should you identify apportioning liability, or should you raise a failure to mitigate? Is there a technical defence of law, such as a limitation or other statutory bar? You should put forward all promising defences, but you should highlight the heart and soul of your response to focus the reviewing judge's attention. "Counter-attack" should be the main thrust of your defence. It is not effective simply to deny liability. In other words, say why your defendant is not liable or is only partially liable.

4. General Drafting Guidelines

When drafting pleadings, define the issues between the parties clearly. At the same time, and without sacrificing accuracy, strive to keep the pleadings as brief as the circumstances permit.

If pleadings are inadequate, the matter will typically not get to trial. In a recent example of wholly inadequate pleadings, the plaintiff filed a 391-page notice of civil claim that was struck (see §2.06(3) below on striking pleadings) as being "prolix" and "bad beyond argument." In *Action4Canada v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, 2022 BCSC 1507, the plaintiffs sued a host of politicians and Crown corporations over pandemic-related measures they said were not based in science, exceeded the defendants' authority, and breached *Charter* rights. The court struck the notice of civil claim in its entirety, stating at para. 51:

To put those points another way, I have indicated above that the prolix nature of the NOCC makes it impossible for the defendants to respond to it. For the same reason, I am not able to parse the 391 pages of the improperly drafted NOCC and indicate whether paragraphs, categories or claims should remain in, or should be struck. That is not

the proper role of this court. It is counsel's obligation to draft pleadings that do not offend the mandatory requirements of the *Rules*.

5. Pleading the Facts

Plead a "concise statement of the material facts giving rise to the claim" (SCCR 3-1(2)(a)).

The "material facts" are those facts that are essential to forming a complete cause of action or defence, as the case may be (*Young v. Borzoni*, 2007 BCCA 16 at para. 20). The *evidence* that tends to prove those facts should not be pleaded (SCCR 3-7(1)). Suppose the issue is whether X has authority to make a certain contract on behalf of the defendant. It is sufficient for the plaintiff to plead that "the defendant employed X as agent to make the contract on his behalf" or that "the defendant held out X as having authority to make the contract on his behalf." It will be unnecessary and improper to plead that "X has been employed by the defendant for many years to execute contracts of this type on his behalf" or that "the defendant informed the plaintiff that X was the defendant's agent."

The material facts part of the pleadings should not include matters of law. However, if a particular statute is relied upon as the foundation of a claim or defence, you must plead the facts necessary to bring the case within the statute.

When pleading the material facts, be clear and brief. There should be no ambiguity in the allegations. Set out each separate allegation of fact in a separate paragraph, so that the defence, in responding to the pleading, will admit or deny each fact separately. The danger in combining facts in a larger paragraph is that defence counsel, in seeking to deny any part of that paragraph, would deny it all. That would put plaintiff's counsel to the burden of proving facts that might not really be in dispute.

In drafting allegations of fact, avoid colouring them, as that might force the other side to deny what would otherwise be basic facts. For example, in a motor vehicle action, it is good practice for the plaintiff's counsel to set out the fact of a collision (which likely will be admitted) and then in a separate paragraph set out the allegations of negligence of the defendant (which will be denied). Avoid, for example, combining the facts and allegations of lawful right or fault. If the pleadings state, for example, that the plaintiff was "driving in a lawful manner south on Granville Street," then defence counsel will deny the entire allegation.

When drafting pleadings, it is often helpful to refer to a precedent as a guideline. However, never follow a precedent blindly. You should understand in what context it was created, and how you should

adapt or modify it. For example, some plaintiffs' counsel make it their practice to allege in every case that the defendant driver's ability to drive was impaired by alcohol or a drug. If the plaintiff is a passenger in the defendant's motor vehicle, such a pleading opens the door to the defence to plead that the plaintiff was contributorily negligent or accepted the risk of riding with an impaired driver. Furthermore, if the defendant was impaired, that fact might affect their insurance coverage. You should consider precedents carefully and modify them as needed.

6. Pleading the Relief Sought

The plaintiff must set out the relief sought against each named defendant (SCCR 3-1(2)(b)). Tell the court what your client wants: for example, an injunction, a declaration, or damages.

Consider carefully any declarations you may be able to obtain from the court. When a court makes a declaration, it "declares" what the law or a fact is. It is not making an order. Declarations can establish a party's standing and legal rights, which can significantly determine the outcome of a proceeding.

There are two broad types of damages: general and special.

General damages are intended to cover injuries for which an exact dollar amount cannot be calculated. General damages are usually composed of pain and suffering (physical or emotional distress resulting from an injury for which a plaintiff can seek monetary compensation) but can also include compensation for such things as a shortened life expectancy, loss of the companionship of a loved one and, in defamation cases (libel and slander), loss of reputation.

Special damages are monetary compensation for the party's out-of-pocket expenses or for actual economic loss, such as medical costs and expenses, loss of income, etc. For example, in a motor vehicle accident, special damages typically include medical expenses, car-repair costs, rental-car fees, and lost wages, but the pain and suffering would be claimed as general damages.

In some circumstances other types of damages may be claimed. For example, punitive damages (sometimes called "exemplary damages") are awarded over and above special and general damages to punish a losing party's wilful or malicious misconduct. Statutory damages are those damages required by statutory law. For example, in some provinces, if a landlord fails to return a tenant's security deposit quickly or give a reason why it is being withheld, a statute gives the judge authority to order the land-

lord to pay damages of double or triple the amount of the deposit.

7. Pleading the Law

The notice of civil claim must contain “a concise summary of the legal basis for relief sought” (SCCR 3-1(2)(c)). Under the former Rules, this was not required in a statement of claim, so use precedents created before July 1, 2010 with extreme caution.

A party must not plead conclusions of law unless the party also pleads the material facts supporting them (SCCR 3-7(9)). Pleading the legal basis for the relief sought would be, for example, stating that the terms of a transaction breach the provisions of the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act* or that, as a result of the defendant’s conduct, the defendant is estopped from relying on a term of the contract.

It is necessary to plead a statute even if the material facts giving rise to the relief have been pleaded (*Sahyoun v. Ho*, 2013 BCSC 1143 at para. 33).

[§2.04] Service—Supreme Court

A notice of civil claim must be served on all defendants within 12 months of being filed (SCCR 3-2(1)). The court has discretion to renew the notice of civil claim for an additional 12 months if a defendant has not been served (SCCR 3-2(1)), although you typically serve the notice of civil claim immediately. If for some reason you cannot, diarize its expiry date.

Defendants must file and serve a response to civil claim in Form 2, within time limits that depend on where and when they were served with the notice of civil claim:

- 21 days of service, if served in Canada;
- 35 days of service, if served in the United States; or
- 49 days of service, if served anywhere else (SCCR 3-3(3)).

1. Ordinary or Personal Service—SCCR 4-2 and SCCR 4-3

Part 4 of the SCCR governs most service procedures in BC Supreme Court. Documents listed in SCCR 4-3(1) must be served personally. These documents include originating pleadings, such as notices of civil claim and petitions, as well as subpoenas. Documents that do not require personal service under the SCCR may be served by “ordinary” service (SCCR 4-2), which includes postal mail or email.

Personal service is effected as follows:

- (a) on an individual, by leaving a copy of the document with the individual (SCCR 4-3(2)(a));
- (b) on a partnership, by leaving a copy of the document with a person who is or was a partner at the relevant time, or with a person who appears to manage or control the partnership business at the partnership’s office or place of business (SCCR 20-1(2));
- (c) on a corporation, including a municipal corporation, by leaving a copy of the document with the president, chair, mayor or other chief officer of the corporation, or with the city or municipal clerk, or with the manager, cashier, superintendent, treasurer, secretary, clerk or agent of the corporation or of any branch or agency of the corporation in the province, or as provided by the *Business Corporations Act* (i.e. for a BC company, by serving the documents to the service address, or by mailing by registered mail to the company’s mailing address, which is the registered office of the company in the corporate register) or any enactment relating to the service of process (SCCR 4-3(2)(b) and *Business Corporations Act*, s. 9(1)); and
- (d) on a person who is mentally incompetent, by leaving a copy of the document with the following (SCCR 4-3(2)(f)):
 - (i) the mentally incompetent person’s committee, or the person with whom the mentally incompetent person resides or whose care they are in, or the person appointed by the court to be served; and
 - (ii) the Public Guardian and Trustee.

An Indian Band may be personally served by serving the elected Chief or a councillor of the Band. At least one court has held that a Band is not properly served by leaving the documents with the receptionist at a Band office (*William v. Lake Babine Indian Band* (1999), 30 C.P.C. (4th) 156 (B.C.S.C.)).

Special statutory provisions govern personal service to some other parties, including:

- (a) the provincial Crown (*Crown Proceeding Act*, R.S.B.C. 1990, c. 89, s. 8);
- (b) the Attorney General of BC (SCCR 4-3(6));
- (c) an extraprovincial corporation (*Business Corporations Act*, s. 9(2)); and
- (d) a society (s. 32 of the *Societies Act*, S.B.C. 2015, c. 18).

Although there are different methods of personal service, lawyers often use a private process server.

If a party is represented by a lawyer, the party must provide as their addresses for service both an email address, if available, and an accessible address that is an office address of that lawyer (SCCR 4-1(1)).

If the party is self-represented, that party must provide as their addresses for service both an email address, if available, and an accessible address within 30 kilometres of the registry; or, if the party's accessible address is not within 30 km of the registry, that party must have an email address, if available, and either a postal address in British Columbia or a fax number (SCCR 4-1(1.1)).

Any party may provide additional addresses for service, which can include a postal address, a fax number, or an additional email address (SCCR 4-1(2)).

If personal service is not required, ordinary service can be effected to the address given for service as set out in SCCR 4-2 by:

- (a) leaving the document at that address;
- (b) mailing the document by ordinary mail to that address;
- (c) faxing the document to a fax number provided for service (together with a fax cover sheet and following restrictions as to page count and time under SCCR 4-2(5)); or
- (d) emailing the document to an email address provided for service.

Documents served after 4:00 p.m. are deemed to have been served on the following day. Documents served on a weekend or holiday are deemed to be served on the next day that is not a Saturday or a holiday (SCCR 4-2(3)).

When a party is self-represented or has failed to provide an address for service as required under SCCR 4-1, ordinary service may be effected by mailing a copy of the document by ordinary mail to the person's last known address (SCCR 4-2(7)).

2. Alternative Methods of Service—SCCR 4-4

If a party is evading service, cannot be located or it is otherwise impracticable to personally serve a party, a party can apply to the court for an order for alternative service, so the document can be served in some other way (SCCR 4-4(1)). Examples of alternative service might include affixing the materials to a known residence of the party, delivery to an address that the party is thought to frequent, or publication in a newspaper or through social media channels. The court requires clear,

cogent, admissible evidence of attempts to serve or of evasion before it will issue such an order.

3. Service Outside British Columbia—SCCR 4-5

SCCR 4-5(1) provides that an originating pleading, petition or any other document may be served on a person outside British Columbia without leave in any of the circumstances listed in s. 10 of the *Court Jurisdiction and Proceedings Transfer Act*, S.B.C. 2003, c. 28. Section 10 lists circumstances where a “real and substantial connection” between British Columbia and the facts of the proceeding is presumed to exist, including when the proceeding concerns a tort committed in British Columbia or contractual obligations to be performed in British Columbia.

If the proceeding falls within one of the circumstances listed in s. 10, the document may be served outside of British Columbia without a court order. The originating pleading or petition must be specifically endorsed (using Form 11) with the claim of right to serve outside of British Columbia on one or more of the grounds set out in s. 10 (SCCR 4-5(2)).

If the proceeding does not fall within one of the listed circumstances in s. 10, leave of the court is required to serve the document (SCCR 4-5(3)).

4. Proof of Service—SCCR 4-6 and SCCR 4-7

SCCR 4-6 sets out the requirements to prove service, including an affidavit of personal service in Form 15 and a response to a pleading.

Under SCCR 4-7, a person may apply to show that the document did not come to the person's attention, or came to the person's attention later than when it was effectively served.

This application may be for an order to set aside the consequences of default, an order to extend time, or a request to adjourn.

[§2.05] Responding to a Civil Claim in Supreme Court

1. Submitting to the Court's Jurisdiction

Before responding to a notice of civil claim, it is critical to consider whether the court has jurisdiction over the claim. Once a response is filed, the opportunity to dispute jurisdiction may be lost. A defendant who disputes the jurisdiction of the court or the validity of the service must file a jurisdictional response in Form 108 (SCCR 21-8).

A party who disputes the jurisdiction of the court may apply to strike out a pleading or petition or to dismiss or stay a proceeding on the ground that the

originating pleading does not set out facts that, if true, would establish that the court has jurisdiction over the party (SCCR 21-8(1)(a)). A party may also apply to dismiss or stay a proceeding on the ground that the court does not have jurisdiction over that party in respect of the claim made against the party (SCCR 21-8(1)(b)). A party may also allege in a pleading that the court does not have jurisdiction over that party in respect of the claim made against that party in the proceeding (SCCR 21-8(1)(c)). In addition to, or in the alternative, a party may apply to court for a stay of the proceeding on the ground that the court ought to decline to exercise jurisdiction over that party in respect of the claim made against the party in the proceeding (SCCR 21-8(2)).

A party does not submit to the jurisdiction of the court if, within 30 days after filing a jurisdictional response (Form 108) in a proceeding, that party serves other parties of record a notice of application under SCCR 21-8(1)(a) or (b), or 21-8(3), or files a pleading under SCCR 21-8(1)(c) alleging the court does not have jurisdiction (SCCR 21-8(5)).

2. Response to Civil Claim and Counterclaim

If a response to civil claim is not filed within the period prescribed by SCCR 3-3(3), the plaintiff can apply for default judgment (SCCR 3-8).

Under SCCR 3-3, a response to civil claim must be in Form 2 and must comply with SCCR 3-7 on pleadings. A response will address facts:

- (a) for each fact set out in Part 1 of the notice of civil claim, the response must address whether that fact is
 - (i) admitted,
 - (ii) denied, or
 - (iii) outside the defendant's knowledge;
- (b) for any fact set out in Part 1 of the notice of civil claim that is denied, the response must set out the defendant's version; and
- (c) for any relevant facts that are missing from the notice of civil claim, the response must concisely set out the defendant's version.

The response to civil claim also addresses relief:

- (a) indicating whether the defendant consents to, opposes or takes no position on the granting of the relief sought against that defendant in the notice of civil claim; and
- (b) indicating the legal basis for any opposition to the relief sought.

As with a notice of civil claim, a response to civil claim should set out the material facts upon which

the defendant relies. If there are any allegations of a scandalous and embarrassing nature, counsel should take steps to have them struck out under SCCR 9-5.

Before admitting any allegation in a notice of civil claim, counsel should make certain that it is true. Once an admission has been made, it can only be withdrawn by agreement or with leave of the court, which is not easily obtained. For instance, when representing corporate clients, conduct a corporate search to ensure the plaintiff has named the correct corporate entity and provided correct particulars about your client.

When a defendant is pursuing a counterclaim against the plaintiff, the counterclaim must be filed within the same time limits as the response to civil claim. See SCCR 3-4 and Form 3 for the form that counterclaims should take.

When the counterclaim is filed against the plaintiff, the plaintiff becomes, in effect, a defendant in relation to the counterclaim, with the same rights and obligations as any other defendant (SCCR 3-4(6)). Accordingly, the plaintiff must file a response to the counterclaim.

You do not refer to the defendant as "plaintiff by counterclaim." The defendant simply remains the "defendant" (SCCR 3-4(3)).

Remember that by commencing an action, the plaintiff may revive the defendant's cause of action, which otherwise was time-barred.

[§2.06] Clarifying the Issues

1. Reply—SCCR 3-6

Under SCCR 3-6, a plaintiff may file a reply to a response to civil claim. A reply is seldom necessary since SCCR 3-6(3) provides that, in the absence of a reply, a joinder of issue on the defence is implied (that is, a denial of the facts alleged in the response to civil claim). A reply is needed if counsel wants to raise some new facts in answer to the response to civil claim. An example is in dealing with a limitation defence (for example, to raise the issue of postponement of the limitation) or a defence of satisfaction and release.

When the plaintiff chooses to file a reply, it must be filed (in Form 7) and served within seven days after the response to civil claim has been served (SCCR 3-6(1)).

2. Particulars—SCCR 3-7(18) to (24)

If a notice of civil claim does not properly set out the material facts, defence counsel may request particulars. SCCR 3-7(18) provides as follows:

If the party pleading relies on misrepresentation, fraud, breach of trust, wilful default or undue influence, or if particulars may be necessary, full particulars, with dates and items if applicable, must be stated in the pleading.

If the particulars required under SCCR 3-7(18) of debt, expenses or damages are lengthy, SCCR 3-7(19) states: “the party pleading may refer to this fact and, instead of pleading the particulars, must serve the particulars in a separate document either before or with the pleading.”

There are many reasons why a party might ask for particulars, including:

- to inform the other side of the nature of the case they have to meet as distinguished from the mode in which that case is to be proved;
- to prevent the other side from being taken by surprise at trial;
- to enable the other side to determine what evidence they ought to be prepared with and to prepare for trial;
- to limit the generality of the pleadings;
- to limit and decide the issues to be tried, and as to which discovery is required; and
- to tie the hands of the party, preventing the party from going into matters not included.

See *Steelhead LNG Limited Partnership v. Arc Resources Ltd.*, 2022 BCCA 128 at paras. 27–39.

Before applying to the court for particulars, a party must first demand them in writing from the other party (SCCR 3-7(23)). Although the demand may be in the form of a letter, the general practice is to prepare a formal demand for particulars using the style of the proceeding, because this can be included in the trial record (along with the reply to the demand for particulars).

A defendant often seeks particulars to answer a claim fully. A demand for particulars does not operate as a stay of proceedings or give an extension of time in which to file a response to civil claim (SCCR 3-7(24)). If the other side does not agree to an extension, it is up to defence counsel to apply to the court for an extension on the ground that the defence cannot be given until particulars are provided. If, as defence counsel, you require particulars in order to respond to a notice of civil claim, request both the particulars and an extension of time in which to file a response to civil claim.

If appropriate, you can obtain particulars after the filing of a response to civil claim. For example, if the plaintiff is unable to provide particulars until after their examination for discovery of the defendant,

the defence may seek particulars after the examination for discovery.

The requirement to provide particulars is ongoing. Under SCCR 3-7(20):

Particulars need only be pleaded to the extent that they are known at the date of pleading, but further particulars

- (a) may be served after they become known, and
- (b) must be served within 10 days of a demand is made in writing.

As counsel for the plaintiff, you should not hesitate to demand particulars of a response to civil claim; the same rules apply. For example, you may need to find out the particulars of an allegation of the plaintiff’s contributory negligence or failure to mitigate.

3. Applications to Strike Out Pleadings— SCCR 9-5

Pleadings must state material facts only and must be as brief as the nature of the case permits. If pleadings do not set out allegations of fact which if true would in law give rise to the relief sought, they are liable to be struck out.

A court may order any part of a pleading that discloses no reasonable claim or defence to be struck out (SCCR 9-5(1)(a)). It can also order the proceeding to be stayed or dismissed or may grant judgment. No evidence is admissible on this type of application (SCCR 9-5(2)). The court will approach applications as if the facts pleaded in the notice of civil claim are true. The court will not strike out the pleading unless it is plain and obvious that the pleading discloses no cause of action known to the law. Only if the action is certain to fail, because it contains a radical defect ranking with the others listed in SCCR 9-5(1), should the relevant portions of the pleadings be struck (see *Hunt v. Carey Canada Inc.*, [1990] 2 S.C.R. 959). If there is some realistic chance the cause of action could be saved by an amendment or a future development in the law, the court should allow the action to proceed (*Moses v. Lower Nicola Indian Band*, 2015 BCCA 61 at para. 41).

The court may strike out pleadings or portions of pleadings if they are unnecessary, scandalous, frivolous or vexatious, prejudicial, embarrassing, may delay the fair trial, or constitute an abuse of the process of the court (SCCR 9-5(1)(b), (c) and (d)). A party can present evidence on these applications.

4. Amending Pleadings and Changing Parties— SCCR 6-1 and SCCR 6-2

SCCR 6-1 deals with amendments to pleadings, except for amendments to change parties or withdraw admissions. SCCR 6-2 deals with amendments to change the parties to the action.

(a) Amending Pleadings

Under SCCR 6-1(1), a party may amend a filed pleading once without leave of the court at any time before the notice of trial has been served (SCCR 6-1(1)(a)). After the notice of trial has been served, a party may amend a pleading only with leave of the court, or with written consent of the opposing parties (SCCR 6-1(1)(b)). Note that SCCR 6-1(1) *does not* apply when a party seeks to amend a pleading to change parties or to withdraw an admission. Amendments to change parties are dealt with under SCCR 6-2(7), and admissions in pleadings can be withdrawn only with leave of the court or by consent (SCCR 7-7(5)).

When you realize that an amendment is needed, you should check to see whether the other side will consent, because it might save a trip to chambers.

Applications for leave to amend pleadings are considered on the same basis as applications to strike pleadings: is it plain and obvious that the proposed amendments are bound to fail? In assessing that question, it is not determinative that the law has not yet recognized a particular claim. In its analysis, the court must be generous and err on the side of permitting an arguable claim to proceed to trial.

Some general principles arise on an application to amend pleadings:

- (i) Amendments to pleadings ought to be allowed unless pleadings fail to disclose a cause of action or defence.
- (ii) Amendments are usually permitted to determine the issues between the parties and ought to be allowed unless it would cause prejudice to a party's ability to defend an action.
- (iii) The party resisting an amendment must prove prejudice to preclude an amendment. Potential prejudice is insufficient to preclude an amendment.
- (iv) Costs are the general means of protecting against prejudice unless it would be a wholly inadequate remedy.

- (v) Courts should only disallow an amendment as a last resort.

See *British Columbia (Director of Civil Forfeiture) v. Violette*, 2015 BCSC 1372 at para. 41.

Additional considerations apply where an amendment raises a new cause of action (see *Limitation Act*, s. 22). Factors a court will consider on an application to amend after the expiration of a limitation period are set out in *Chouinard v. O'Connor*, 2021 BCCA 161 at para. 10.

(b) Changing Parties

When the amendment seeks to change (i.e. add, remove, or substitute) the parties to the action, SCCR 6-2 applies.

Under SCCR 6-2(7), the court, on application by any person, may add, remove, or substitute parties. On an application to add a person as a party, there must be evidence that there exists between that person and any party to the action a question or issue connected with the subject matter or the relief claimed in the original action. Once this threshold has been met, the court will consider whether it would be just and convenient to add the party, considering such factors as the extent of and reasons for the delay, prejudice caused by the delay, and the nature of the connection between the existing claims and the proposed action involving the new party.

If a limitation period has expired, that does not preclude the addition of parties (s. 22 of the *Limitation Act*). If a court weighs the reasons for adding a party, despite a limitation defence, and orders the party to be added, that party loses their right to raise the limitation defence again in the proceeding (*Mullett (Litigation Guardian of) v. Gentles*, 2016 BCSC 802).

5. Third Party Proceedings—SCCR 3-5

A party of record who is not a plaintiff may commence a third party proceeding against any person, whether or not that person is a party to the action, if the party alleges one or more of the matters set out in SCCR 3-5(1):

- (a) the party is entitled to contribution or indemnity from the third party;
- (b) the party is entitled to any relief against the third party relating to or connected with the original subject matter of the action; or
- (c) a question or issue relating to or connected with any relief claimed in the action or with

the original subject matter of the action is substantially the same question or issue as between the party and the third party and should properly be determined in the action.

To pursue a third party proceeding, a party files a third party notice in Form 5. Leave is not required if the party files it within 42 days after the filing of the response (SCCR 3-5(4)). The filing party must serve the third party with the third party notice and copies of all pleadings to date (if the third party was not a party of record) (SCCR 3-5(7)). The third party must then file a response to third party notice (Form 6), in accordance with SCCR 3-5(9)(a), within the applicable time limits for a response as set out in Form 5.

A third party who has filed a response to third party notice may file and serve a response to civil claim to the plaintiff's notice of civil claim, raising any defence open to a defendant (SCCR 3-5(12)).

Under SCCR 3-5(13), any party affected by the third party procedure may apply for directions. Usually, the parties agree to the directions themselves. It is customary to agree that the third party action is to be tried at the same time or immediately after the trial of the main action. If counsel cannot agree, one or more of the parties will have to apply in chambers for directions.

SCCR 3-5(10) outlines the circumstances in which a response to a third party notice is not required.

The third party procedure under SCCR 3-5 is different from, and should not be confused with, the right of ICBC under the *Insurance (Vehicle) Act*, or another insurer under the *Insurance Act*, to join themselves as third parties to an action in certain circumstances.

Applications to shorten the service period for a notice of case planning conference must be made by requisition in Form 19.1 (SCCR 5-1(3)) and may be made without notice.

2. Content

Whether the parties request or the court directs a case planning conference, the parties of record must file case plan proposals in Form 20 before the first case planning conference (SCCR 5-1(6)). These proposals indicate each party's proposal with respect to:

- (a) discovery of documents;
- (b) examinations for discovery;
- (c) dispute resolution procedures;
- (d) expert witnesses;
- (e) witness lists; and
- (f) trial type, estimated trial length and preferred periods for the trial date.

Unless the court otherwise orders, the first case planning conference must be face-to-face. Subsequent meetings can be held by phone or video (SCCR 5-2(3)). Unless the court otherwise orders, each lawyer of record and each unrepresented party of record must attend a case planning conference (SCCR 5-2(2)).

Applications to exempt a person from attending a case planning conference must be made by requisition in Form 20.1 and may be made without notice (SCCR 5-2(4)).

3. Orders

At a case planning conference, a judge or associate judge may make any of the following orders (paraphrased from SCCR 5-3(1)):

- (a) setting a timetable for the steps to be taken;
- (b) requiring amendment of a pleading;
- (c) respecting discovery, production, or examination of documents or exhibits;
- (d) respecting discovery of parties or the examination of persons or property;
- (e) respecting interrogatories, admissions, or third party claims;
- (f) respecting witness lists or experts;
- (g) respecting offers to settle;
- (h) requiring the parties to attend a dispute resolution process;

[§2.07] Case Planning Conference

1. General

Any party or the court may initiate a case planning conference (SCCR 5-1). After the pleading period has expired, a party of record to an action may request a case planning conference by filing and serving a notice of case planning conference in Form 19 (SCCR 5-1(1) and (5)). Also, the court may direct that a case planning conference take place at any stage of an action after the pleading period has expired and, in that case, the court must direct that a party request one (SCCR 5-1(2)).

A judge or associate judge must conduct the case planning conference (SCCR 5-2(1)), and the proceedings must be recorded (SCCR 5-2(7)).

- (i) authorizing or directing the parties to try one or more issues in the action separately;
- (j) fixing the length or date of trial; or
- (k) any orders the judge or associate judge considers will further the object of the SCCR.

A judge or associate judge at a case planning conference must not hear any application supported by affidavit evidence or make an order for final judgment, except by consent (SCCR 5-3(2)).

[§2.08] Setting the Action Down for Trial in Supreme Court

1. General

To set a matter down for trial, a party must file a notice of trial in Form 40 (SCCR 12-1(2)). The filing party must then promptly serve a copy of the filed notice of trial on all parties of record (SCCR 12-1(6)). Practice Direction PD-25—*Notices of Trial and Trial Certificates* directs that a notice of trial must be filed within 30 days of the trial date being reserved. If a new trial date is set, a new notice of trial must be filed.

Setting a trial date involves these considerations:

- the length of time required for the trial;
- the form of the trial, either judge and jury or judge alone; and
- the availability of the parties, counsel, and witnesses.

The proper practice is to consult with all counsel involved when estimating the length of the trial. If there is a difference in estimates, it is safest to choose the lengthier estimate. While the shortest estimate may allow counsel to get an earlier trial date, it will also lead to an adjournment if a pre-trial judge thinks that the time required for the matter has been underestimated.

After deciding on the length of trial, you can set the matter down. Some counsel prefer to have their trials heard as quickly as possible. In some cases, it may be necessary to choose a trial date further away. Accordingly, before setting the matter for trial, consult with all witnesses to determine whether there are any dates on which they *will not* be available.

When setting the trial, leave enough time to conduct the examinations for discovery. If there is deposition evidence that may delay your preparation for the trial, allow enough time to complete it.

Also leave enough time to obtain expert evidence. Expert reports must be served at least 84 days before the scheduled trial date (SCCR 11-6(3)).

A trial management conference must take place if the court orders a trial management conference, more than 15 days have been reserved for the trial, any party of record is not represented by a lawyer (or may not be represented by a lawyer at the trial), the trial will be heard by the court with a jury, or a party of record requests a trial management conference by filing a requisition not less than 42 days before the scheduled trial date (SCCR 12-2(1)). Unless the court otherwise orders, a trial management conference must take place at least 28 days before the scheduled trial date (SCCR 12-2(1.1)).

The objective of the trial management conference is to provide increased judicial supervision of pre-trial steps in the litigation and conduct of the trial (*Landis v. Witmar Holdings Ltd.*, 2012 BCSC 762 at para. 5).

Unless the court otherwise orders, the plaintiff must file a trial brief in Form 41 and serve a copy on all parties of record at least 56 days before the scheduled **trial date** (SCCR 12-1.1(1)) and all other parties of record must file their trial briefs in Form 41 and serve a copy on all other parties of record at least 49 days before the scheduled **trial date** (SCCR 12-1.1(2)). Despite the deadlines for filing a trial brief before the scheduled trial date and unless the court otherwise orders, the plaintiff must file a trial brief and serve a copy on all parties of record at last 28 days before the date set for the **trial management conference** and all other parties of record must file their trial briefs and serve a copy on all other parties of record at least 21 days before the date set for the **trial management conference** (SCCR 12-1.1(2.1)). Failure of a party to file or serve a trial brief may result in an order for costs against that party (SCCR 12-1.1(4)). If no party files a trial brief, the trial must be removed from the trial list (SCCR 12-1.1(5)). If the trial is rescheduled to a date more than six months from the previously scheduled trial date, parties of record who already filed trial briefs must file new trial briefs (SCCR 12-1.1(8)).

A party of record must attend a trial management conference unless they are represented by a lawyer and the lawyer is able to communicate during the trial management conference with the party or an individual who has authority to make decisions for the party concerning the action (SCCR 12-2(5)).

At a trial management conference, a judge or associate judge may make orders respecting one or more of the following matters (paraphrased but using the numbering from SCCR 12-2(9)):

- (a) conduct of the trial;
- (b) whether the trial or any part of it will be heard without a jury;
- (c) amending pleadings;
- (d) admissions of fact at trial;
- (e) admission of documents at trial;
- (f) time limits for witness examinations, opening statements and final submissions;
- (g) directions for providing summaries of the evidence that witnesses will give at trial;
- (h) witness evidence to be by way of affidavit;
- (i) experts and expert reports, including orders that the parties' experts confer;
- (j) directions for opening statements and final submissions in writing;
- (k) third party matters that may depart from the main action;
- (l) adjournment of the trial;
- (m) the number of days set for the trial;
- (n) directions for a settlement conference;
- (o) adjourning a trial management conference;
- (p) a further trial management conference;
- (q) anything that may make the trial more efficient;
- (r) anything that may assist resolution; and
- (s) anything the judge or associate judge considers will further the object of the SCCR.

An order made at a trial management conference must be in Form 47.1 (SCCR 13-1(3)(a.1)).

The party who files a notice of trial must file a trial record at least 14 days (but not more than 28 days) before the scheduled trial date, and promptly serve a copy of the filed trial record on the other parties (SCCR 12-3(3)). SCCR 12-3(1) requires that the trial record contain the pleadings; particulars served under a demand, together with the demand made; the case plan order, if any; any order governing the conduct of the trial; the trial brief filed by each party of record; any amended witness list prepared by or served on the party under SCCR 12.1-1(6); and any document required by a registrar under SCCR 12-3(2).

SCCR 12-4 requires each party to file a trial certificate in Form 42 in the registry where the action was started at least 14 days (but not more than 28 days) before the scheduled trial date. The trial certificate must contain a statement that the party is ready to

proceed, a statement certifying that the party has completed all examinations for discovery that they intend to conduct, the party's current estimate of the length of the trial, and a statement that the trial management conference has been conducted or was not required (SCCR 12-4(3)). If the parties fail to file a trial certificate by the deadline, the trial will be removed from the list (SCCR 12-4(5)). Practice Direction PD-25 directs that where a trial has been reset to a new date, a new trial certificate must be filed unless the initial trial certificate was filed at least 14 days (but not more than 28 days) before the date of the re-scheduled trial date. It is important to diarize deadlines so that you do not inadvertently adjourn your trial.

2. Jury or Judge—SCCR 12-6

One final consideration is whether to choose a jury. A jury trial is not an option in all cases. Trials relating to certain types of matters must be heard by a judge alone; these cases are set out in SCCR 12-6(2) and include cases concerning the administration of estates, the redemption or foreclosure of a mortgage, the execution of trusts, and custody or guardianship of an infant or the care of an infant's estate. Fast track litigation must also be heard by a judge alone (SCCR 15-1(10)). In all other cases, SCCR 12-6(3) permits a party to issue a notice requiring a trial by jury.

The notice requiring trial by jury must be filed and served on all parties of record within 21 days after service of the notice of trial (and not later than at least 45 days before trial). In addition, the requiring party must pay to the sheriff, at least 45 days before trial, a sum sufficient to pay for the jury and the jury process (SCCR 12-6(3)).

It is difficult to set out in this brief overview the considerations involved in choosing whether to have a trial with a jury. Generally, a jury introduces some unpredictability, both as to liability and as to quantum of damages. Plaintiff's counsel often prefers a jury, but might consider that a judge alone is a better choice if the plaintiff's credibility could be in doubt. If the case depends on law that is in your favour, a judge alone may be preferable.

In all cases, discuss the choice with the client. Explain to the client that a jury trial requires jury fees to be paid to empanel the jury, and fees are payable before the trial begins (s. 17 of the *Jury Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 242). A party might serve a jury notice then give up their right to a jury trial, without notice to the other parties, by simply failing to pay the jury fees (*Conlin v. Struve* (1997), 28 B.C.L.R. (3d) 327 (C.A.)). Only the party that issued the jury notice is entitled to pay the jury fees associated with

the notice. Therefore, counsel should decide whether to choose a trial by jury independently of whether another party has issued a jury notice. If a party wishes to proceed with a trial by jury, it should issue its own jury notice regardless of whether another party has issued one. Diarize the deadline for paying the jury fees.

SCCR 12-6(5) applies to counsel receiving notice requiring a trial by jury. Within seven days of receipt of that notice, counsel must apply if they want to argue that the trial should be heard without a jury. Since seven days is a very short time in which to put together all the supporting material necessary to set out grounds for striking the jury notice, one practice is to file the notice with or without some material, but to set a date well in the future, or seek the consent of the other parties to extend the time to serve the materials. This will allow counsel time to have experts review the material and provide information that can be put into affidavit form to oppose the jury if counsel decides to do so.

A party opposing a jury usually relies on a ground in SCCR 12-6(5)(a), which provides—except in cases of defamation, false imprisonment, and malicious prosecution—that a party may apply:

- (a) within 7 days after service for an order that the trial or part of it be heard by the court without a jury on the ground that
 - (i) the issues require prolonged examination of documents or accounts or a scientific or local investigation that cannot be made conveniently with a jury,
 - (ii) the issues are of an intricate or complex character, or
 - (iii) the extra time and cost involved in requiring that the trial be heard by the court with a jury would be disproportionate to the amount involved in the action.

As SCCR 12-6(5)(a)(i) indicates, it is not enough to argue that the issues require scientific investigation—that investigation must be such that it “cannot be made conveniently with a jury.” The ground that “the issues are of an intricate or complex character” does not include that secondary requirement.

Also note that SCCR 12-5(68) allows a trial to be divided so that one portion of the trial is heard with a jury and another portion is heard by judge alone. While this is not common, it can be done so that, for example, liability might be separated from quantum and each dealt with in a different form of trial (*Footo v. Royal Columbian Hospital* (1982), 37 B.C.L.R. 225 (S.C.)).

Another concern affecting whether to have a judge-alone trial is the place of trial. The place of trial will determine where the members of the jury would be

drawn from, which could be significant depending on the facts of the case. While a trial is commonly set in the registry in which the action has been commenced, it is possible to move a trial to a different registry. You may obtain a fixed date for a trial of three days or more in certain registries outside Vancouver that normally deal with matters on assize, if the request is made either in Vancouver or in the registry where the action has been commenced.

[§2.09] Class Proceedings

A class proceeding (also known as class action) is a form of action that can be used where a group of two or more persons have claims that raise common questions that will need to be determined by the court.

A class proceeding is commenced using a notice of civil claim with an endorsement in the style of clause indicating that the action is brought under the *Class Proceedings Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 50. A notice of application is then filed asking the court to certify that action as a class proceeding. Practice Direction PD-5 sets out the procedure to be followed when seeking to schedule a certification application and submitting documents to the National Class Action Database.

Pursuant to s. 4 of the *Class Proceedings Act*, in order for an action to be certified as a class action, the plaintiff must demonstrate that:

- (a) the pleadings disclose a cause of action;
- (b) there is an identifiable class of 2 or more persons;
- (c) the claims of the class members raise common issues, whether or not those common issues predominate over issues affecting only individual members;
- (d) a class proceeding would be the preferable procedure for the fair and efficient resolution of the common issues;
- (e) there is a representative plaintiff who
 - (i) would fairly and adequately represent the interests of the class,
 - (ii) has produced a plan for the proceeding that sets out a workable method of advancing the proceeding on behalf of the class and of notifying class members of the proceeding, and
 - (iii) does not have, on the common issues, an interest that is in conflict with the interests of other class members.

If certification is granted, a common issues trial is held to determine the common issues. Unless the common issues trial determines all of the issues in the litigation (which is very unusual), then additional individual inquiries will need to be made to determine the issues individual to each class member, for example, the amount of damage they suffered.

Before commencing a class proceeding, seek the advice of experienced class action counsel. Many class actions fail, often with the plaintiff being responsible for significant costs. For example, in *The Consumers' Association of Canada et al v. Coca-Cola Bottling Company et al*, 2006 BCSC 1233, costs (reported to be as much as \$400,000) were awarded against the plaintiff.

[§2.10] Fast Track Litigation

Before preparing your notice of civil claim or response to civil claim, you should consider whether the case falls under the fast track litigation rule—SCCR 15-1.

The object of SCCR 15-1 is to provide a speedier and less expensive determination of the action.

An action can be fast-tracked as long as one of the following four criteria in SCCR 15-1(1) is met (*Hemani v. Hillard*, 2011 BCSC 1381 at paras. 10–17):

- (a) the only claims in the action are for one or more of money, real property, a builder's lien and personal property, and the total amount of damages sought is \$100,000 or less, exclusive of interest and costs;
- (b) the trial of the action can be completed within 3 days;
- (c) the parties to the action consent; or
- (d) the court so orders.

If one of these criteria is met, a party can file a notice of fast track action in Form 61 (SCCR 15-1(2)) to have the action proceed under the fast track rule.

Note that even if an action qualifies as a fast track action, a court may order under SCCR 15-1(6) that the action proceed as a regular action. The court will consider such factors as the time required for trial, whether all parties consented or acquiesced to using fast track procedures, the risk of prejudice to a party, whether a party is using the application of fast track procedures for an improper purpose (such as to strike a jury notice), and the interests of justice and the purpose of SCCR 15-1 (see *Connatty v. Bone*, 2018 BCSC 2336 at para. 25, citing *Bagri v. Bagri*, 2015 BCSC 2132).

When proceeding under SCCR 15-1, a party must add the words “Subject to Rule 15-1” to the style of proceeding in all documents filed after a notice of fast track action has been filed (SCCR 15-1(2)(b)).

SCCR 15-1 does not apply to a class action within the meaning of the *Class Proceedings Act* (SCCR 15-1(4)).

While actions under SCCR 15-1 may be quicker and less expensive, there are limits to the discovery process. For example, examinations for discovery in a fast track action must be completed within two hours and must be completed at least 14 days before the scheduled trial date, unless the parties consent or a court otherwise orders (SCCR 15-1(11) and (12)).

Further, in a fast track litigation proceeding, a case planning conference or a trial management conference is required before any contested application may be filed (SCCR 15-1(7)). However, SCCR 15-1(8) provides for exceptions. A case planning conference does not need to be held prior to the following:

- an application for an order under SCCR 15-1(6) that the fast track litigation rule cease to apply to the action;
- an application to obtain leave to bring an application referred to in SCCR 15-1(9) prior to a case planning conference or trial management conference having been held;
- an application under SCCR 9-5 (striking pleadings), 9-6 (summary judgment) or 9-7 (summary trial);
- an application to add, remove or substitute a party; or
- an application by consent.

SCCR 15-1(9) states that on application by a party, a judge or associate judge may relieve a party from the requirements of SCCR 15-1(7) if it is impracticable or unfair to hold a conference or if the application is urgent. In *Total Vision Enterprises Inc. v. 689720 B.C. Ltd. et al*, 2006 BCSC 639, the court exercised its discretion under former Rule 68(12) (now SCCR 15-1(9)) and allowed a date to be set for the hearing of an application to set aside a prejudgment garnishing order, without holding a case management conference beforehand.

Under SCCR 8-5(3), urgent applications can be brought without the requirements of SCCR 15-1(7) having been met.

SCCR 15-1(6) provides that the rule may cease to apply, by order of the court or by application by a party.

SCCR 15-1(10) prohibits a jury trial in a fast track action. A party wishing to proceed with a jury trial should immediately take steps to obtain the consent of the opposing party to remove the action from fast track, or barring consent, bring an application to remove the action from fast track.

SCCR 15-1(15) provides for a fixed amount of costs (exclusive of disbursements) to be awarded, unless the court otherwise orders or the parties consent.

Parties to a fast track action that includes a claim for vehicle injury damages are limited to one expert report each on the issue of vehicle injury damages, unless the parties consent to additional expert reports (*Evidence Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 124, ss. 12.1). This limit does not apply if the expert report was served before February 6, 2020 (*Evidence Act*, s. 12.2). These provisions of the *Evidence Act* do not apply to most claims involving motor vehicle accidents occurring on or after May 1, 2021,

when BC’s motor vehicle insurance system changed to a “no-fault” model (described in §1.10).

Review SCCR 15-1 carefully for all deadlines for pre-trial steps that are unique to this rule.

[§2.11] Petition Proceedings

Generally, a petition is used for proceedings concerning estates, trusts, interests in property of persons under a disability, or construction of documents. See SCCR 2-1(2) for proceedings that must be started by petition.

To begin a petition proceeding, a party files and serves a petition to the court in Form 66, along with all supporting affidavits (SCCR 16-1(2)). Among other things, Form 66 requires that the petitioner set out, in numbered paragraphs, the material facts on which the petition is based. The petition respondent must file and serve a response to petition in Form 67 along with all supporting affidavits within:

- 21 days of service, if served in Canada;
- 35 days of service, if served in the United States; or
- 49 days of service, if served anywhere else (SCCR 16-1(4)(c)).

These deadlines are the same as for a response to civil claim. The response to petition must set out the factual and legal bases on which the petition is opposed.

While a petition proceeding is generally quicker than an action, SCCR 22-1(7)(d) provides that the court can transfer the petition to the trial list. SCCR 16-1(18) also provides that the court may apply any of the rules governing actions to a petition proceeding (such as having cross-examination on an affidavit). Note also that a summary trial (SCCR 9-7) takes an action that was started by notice of civil claim and decides it in chambers, in a manner like how a petition proceeding is normally decided.

[§2.12] Requisition Proceedings

SCCR 2-1(2) identifies proceedings that must be started by petition or, in certain cases, requisition. A proceeding listed in SCCR 2-1(2) can be started by requisition when either all parties involved consent, or the proceeding is one that does not require notice (SCCR 17-1(1)).

[§2.13] Communications With the Supreme Court

In most cases, communicating with the court is not appropriate and is discouraged. However, there are limited situations in which it is proper to correspond with the court. In those exceptional circumstances, counsel should follow the procedures set out in Practice Direction PD-27—*Communicating with the Court*. The

Practice Direction states (in part) that in the rare circumstance in which it is necessary to write a letter to the court, the letter should be addressed to the Scheduling Manager, and *not* to a particular judge, associate judge or registrar, even if that judge, associate judge or registrar is seized of the matter. Counsel should first consult with other counsel or opposing parties, and the correspondence should state the views of opposing counsel if they are different from the writer’s view. The letter should not include argument or submissions since, in general, counsel is not entitled to submit written argument subsequent to the completion of oral argument. See PD-27 for more information.

Chapter 3

Discovery¹

[§3.01] Purpose of Discovery

“Discovery” is the pre-trial legal process by which each party is able to find out about the other party’s (or parties’) case, by obtaining documents, information and admissions that may be used at trial. Discovery procedures range from the production and examination of documents, to property inspections, to oral examinations of the parties and potential witnesses held outside court and under oath.

Procedure in the Supreme Court of British Columbia, including related to discovery, is governed by the SCCR. The rules for discovery come under Part 7—Procedures for Ascertaining Facts. The SCCR came into effect on July 1, 2010, and introduced a number of significant changes to discovery practice for proceedings in the Supreme Court, including modifications to the scope of document discovery and examinations for discovery, and to the use of interrogatories. These changes are intended to further the express object of the SCCR “to secure the just, speedy and inexpensive determination of every proceeding on its merits” including by “so far as is practicable, conducting the proceeding in ways that are proportionate to

- (a) the amount involved in the proceeding,
 - (b) the importance of the issues in dispute, and
 - (c) the complexity of the proceeding”
- (SCCR 1-3(1) and (2)).

This chapter refers to the previous Rules of Court as “the former Rules.” Although the former Rules were replaced more than a decade ago, many of the current Rules use language from the former Rules, and the courts often still refer to cases decided under that scheme.

¹ **Brian Duong, Julia Roos and Maryanna Dinh** of Hunter Litigation Chambers kindly revised this chapter in December 2024 and also in 2022 and 2023. It was previously revised by Brian Duong, Trevor Bant and Julia Roos (2019 and 2021); Mathew P. Good (2012, 2016 and 2018); Christopher M. Rusnak (2001–2011); Jeremy E. Shragge (2011); and Kenneth N. Affleck, KC (1997–1999). Comments about proceedings involving Indigenous claims were contributed in June 2002 by F. Matthew Kirchner. Portions of this chapter were originally prepared by John T. Steeves, KC, for the CLE publication, *Managing Commercial Litigation* (March 1983) and revised for PLTC; subsequently revised by Leonard M. Cohen (1996) and the other reviewers of this chapter.

In British Columbia, parties to a civil action must:

- (a) prepare a list of all documents in their possession or control that could be used by any party of record to prove or disprove a material fact (with some exceptions and qualifications discussed in §3.02);
- (b) attend and be cross-examined orally, under oath, as to the matters in issue (see §3.04);
- (c) answer written interrogatories concerning the matters in issue, where the other party has obtained leave of the court to serve interrogatories or the party receiving them has consented (§3.05); and
- (d) submit to a physical examination, where the physical or mental condition of a person is in issue (see §3.06).

The issues between the parties, as defined by the pleadings, will define the scope of the discovery process. However, there are many discovery tools available in the SCCR, and counsel should consider what they want to achieve in the discovery process and which tools best accomplish that.

[§3.02] Discovery of Documents

The discovery of documents is one of the most useful pre-trial procedures available in civil litigation. This procedure is fundamentally important to the proper preparation of a case and, ultimately, its trial. Documents can be used to prepare to examine opposing parties on examination for discovery and at trial. Documents may be used to impeach witnesses whose evidence is inconsistent with documentary evidence. Finally, documents may also be admissible evidence at trial in their own right.

A properly prepared list of documents should provide the other party with the foundation for an initial analysis of the case. If properly used, a list will not only shorten the time that would otherwise be taken in an examination for discovery, but will result in a much better understanding of the case at the conclusion of the examinations for discovery.

SCCR 7-1 governs the discovery of documents. The inherent jurisdiction of the court also includes the power to control the process of disclosing evidence and to set conditions for and limits on disclosure (*Jacques v. Pétroles Irving Inc.*, 2014 SCC 66).

1. Requirements Under the SCCR

SCCR 7-1 sets out the requirements for the discovery of documents. A “document” is defined in SCCR 1-1(1) as follows:

“[D]ocument” has an extended meaning and includes a photograph, video, recording of sound, any

record of a permanent or semi-permanent character and any information recorded or stored by means of any device.

Information recorded or stored on social media may constitute a “document” that must be listed (*Fric v. Gershman*, 2012 BCSC 614; *Travis v. Bittner*, 2022 BCSC 839). Metadata—information stored within a digital file that contains information about that file, such as the dates it has been accessed—may also be producible (*Sonepar Canada Inc. v. Thompson*, 2016 BCSC 1195). Even the physical hardware on which digital information is stored may be producible in exceptional circumstances, including where there is evidence that a party is deliberately thwarting the discovery process (*Sonepar; Bishop (Litigation Guardian of) v. Minichello*, 2009 BCSC 358, leave to appeal dismissed 2009 BCCA 555).

SCCR 7-1 provides:

- (1) Unless all parties of record consent or the court otherwise orders, each party of record to an action must, within 35 days after the end of the pleading period,
 - (a) prepare a list of documents in Form 22 that lists:
 - (i) all documents that are or have been in the party’s possession or control and that could, if available, be used by any party of record at trial to prove or disprove a material fact, and
 - (ii) all other documents to which the party intends to refer at trial, and
 - (b) serve the list on all parties of record.

Note that this rule reflects a different scope of relevance for the purposes of document disclosure than under the former Rules. Under the former Rules, a very broad relevancy test was applied for document disclosure, based on the standard established in *Compagnie Financiere du Pacifique v. Peruvian Guano Co.* (1882), 11 Q.B.D. 55 (Eng. C.A.). The *Peruvian Guano* standard required initial disclosure of all documents that could fairly have led to a “train of inquiry” that either advanced the adversary’s case or damaged one’s own. This standard is frequently referred to in the case law and by senior judges or practitioners, but care should be taken when using cases decided under the former Rules (*MacKinnon v. Rabeco Holdings (1989) Ltd.*, 2014 BCSC 1703).

The *Peruvian Guano* test no longer applies to the initial production of a list of documents, as the language of SCCR 7-1 restricts the scope of relevance to the standard set out in SCCR 7-1(1)(a): that is, to documents that are or have been in a party’s possession or control and could be used by any party of record at trial to prove or disprove a material fact,

or to which a party intends to refer at trial (*Este v. Blackburn*, 2016 BCCA 496). A “material” fact refers to a fact that is in dispute on the pleadings, the resolution of which will have legal consequences between the parties to the litigation. What is “material” requires analysis of the constituent elements of each cause of action or defence raised (*Richter v. Richter Estate*, 2023 BCSC 105 at para. 53).

The requirement to list documents is ongoing. If a party comes into the possession of a new document that could be used by any party of record to prove or disprove a material fact, or if it comes to the party’s attention that the list is inaccurate or incomplete, SCCR 7-1(9) requires the party to promptly amend the list of documents and serve the amended list (*Walker v. John Doe*, 2012 BCSC 1091).

SCCR 7-1(1) only requires that parties list documents in their “possession or control.” “Control” has been interpreted more broadly than possession to mean an “enforceable right to obtain documents from a person who has possession” (*Wolansky v. Davidson* (1992), 67 B.C.L.R. (2d) 211). There is no obligation on a party to create new documents that are not already in existence (*Natural Trade Ltd. v. MYL Trading Ltd.*, 2019 BCSC 1368).

If the receiving party believes there is a document (or a class of documents) that must be listed pursuant to SCCR 7-1(1)(a) or (9) that has not yet been listed, that party may, by written demand under SCCR 7-1(10), require the party who prepared the list to amend the list to include the document (or class of documents). If a party who receives a demand under subrule (10) does not comply within 35 days of receiving the demand, the demanding party may apply for an order requiring compliance (SCCR 7-1(13)).

Alternatively, if the receiving party believes documents which should have been listed have been omitted from the list, that party may apply under SCCR 7-1(8) for an order requiring the listing party to verify its list of documents by affidavit. The party seeking the affidavit must establish the foundation for the order by showing that production has been clearly inadequate or the other party has displayed a casual or dilatory attitude towards production (*Copithorne v. Benoit*, 2010 BCSC 130). A fundamental consideration is whether lawyers have been given complete access to sources where relevant documents can be found (*Araya v. Nevsun Resources Ltd.*, 2019 BCSC 262 at para. 19). However, even if production is not clearly inadequate or dilatory, an affidavit verifying a list of documents may be ordered where appropriate, such as where there has been unwarranted delay. This order is a serious remedy not suitable to minor deficiencies in

document production (*NMH Holdings Ltd. v. Crestmark Developments Limited Partnership*, 2012 BCSC 2215 at paras. 54–60).

In practice, before considering an application under SCCR 7-1(8) for an affidavit verifying the list of documents, counsel should make a demand under SCCR 7-1(10) for the listing party to amend its list of documents.

In addition to the mandatory disclosure under SCCR 7-1(1)(a)(i) and (9) of all documents that could be used by any party of record at trial to prove or disprove a material fact, the court may order a broader scope of disclosure pursuant to SCCR 7-1(11) to (14), that is, disclosure of a document or class of documents that “relate to any or all matters in question in the action” (SCCR 7-1(11)(b)). This “two-tier” process of document disclosure reflects the principle of proportionality, which governs how the SCCR achieve their objectives (SCCR 1-3(2)).

Prior to applying to the court for such an order, the party seeking further disclosure must make a written demand for the document(s) under SCCR 7-1(11) (*Dhugha v. Ukardi*, 2014 BCSC 387). If a party who receives a demand under SCCR 7-1(11) does not, within 35 days of receipt, comply with the demand, the demanding party may apply for an order requiring compliance (SCCR 7-1(13)). Failure to serve a written request with reference to SCCR 7-1 may prevent the requesting party from successfully applying to the court for the production of the same documents (*Lit v. Hare*, 2012 BCSC 1918; *Hill v. Dhandra*, 2024 BCSC 2145).

A party seeking disclosure of documents under SCCR 7-1(11), or opposing such a request under SCCR 7-1(12), must explain with reasonable specificity why the additional documents or classes of documents should or should not be disclosed (*Przybysz v. Crowe*, 2011 BCSC 731). This requirement aims to prevent the disclosure of a substantial number of irrelevant documents in the proceeding without hampering a party’s ability to prosecute or defend a trial on the merits. The party seeking production must also have evidence that the documents sought actually exist (*More Marine Ltd. v. Shearwater Marine Ltd.*, 2011 BCSC 166).

Notwithstanding these disclosure rules, the court may order that a party be excused from compliance with document disclosure under SCCR 7-1(14), but must consider whether such an order is consistent with the object of the SCCR (*Richter v. Richter Estate*, 2023 BCSC 105 at para. 62).

If a party is asserting that a document is privileged from production, the party must still list the document in the list of documents and state the grounds

for privilege (SCCR 7-1(6)). (The topic of claiming privilege is discussed in the next subsection.)

Each party that serves a list of documents must allow the other party to inspect and copy those listed documents that are within their possession or control (SCCR 7-1(15)). Form 22 also specifies the location where the documents may be inspected and copied during normal business hours. The usual custom, outside personal injury cases, is for counsel to deliver to the other side electronic copies of the listed documents along with the service of the list, rather than engaging in a two-step process. This is, however, only a usual practice, and not required by the SCCR.

The Supreme Court’s *Electronic Evidence Practice Direction* establishes a default electronic document exchange protocol and encourages parties to work together at an early stage in the proceeding to discuss and manage the discovery of electronic material including emails, video and sound recordings, and other original data. In practice, parties generally do come to their own agreements regarding electronic disclosure, but the Practice Direction is available to be applied in the absence of such an agreement (*Long Lake Hydro Limited v. Western Versatile Constructions Corp.*, 2019 BCSC 1760).

If a party does not provide a list of documents within 35 days after the end of the pleading period, an opposing party is entitled to bring an application under SCCR 22-7(5) to have that party’s pleading dismissed and judgment entered accordingly (*Schwarzinger v. Bramwell*, 2011 BCSC 304). In the past, the court has rarely struck pleadings on this basis but has more regularly set a time limit in which a list of documents must be provided.

When producing documents, the entire document is relevant and producible if any of its contents are relevant. It is not open to the lawyer to redact out those portions that the lawyer feels are irrelevant (*0878357 B.C. Ltd v. Tse*, 2012 BCSC 516). However, documents that contain privileged material or that engage the privacy interests of litigants or third parties may be redacted, following the procedures outlined in *North American Trust Co. v. Mercer International Inc.* (1999), 71 B.C.L.R. (3d) 72 (S.C.). Any redactions made on these grounds must be noted in the list of documents. The opposing party may then challenge the redaction under SCCR 7-1(14)(a) (*Este v. Blackburn*, 2016 BCCA 496).

Counsel who receive documents through the discovery process do so subject to an implied undertaking to keep those documents in confidence. The documents may not be used for a purpose outside of the litigation in which they were produced, unless the owner of the documents gives permission

or the court, on application, releases a party or counsel from the implied undertaking (see *Hunt v. T&N plc* (1995), 4 B.C.L.R. (3d) 110 (C.A.); *Petitioner No. 1 v. A Lawyer*, 2011 BCSC 921). The documents may be shown to potential witnesses (including experts) to permit them to prepare their evidence. They may also be shown to the client to obtain instructions. Finally, they can be used on oral discovery or at trial if they meet the test of relevance. Some counsel place an assertion of confidentiality on lists of documents, but this is not necessary: the implied undertaking applies regardless. Where an applicant demands documents under SCCR 7-1 for an ulterior or improper purpose (for example, to obtain information to bring additional claims), thereby using the court's process unfairly or dishonestly, the court may exercise its discretion to deny the application and to award costs against the applicant (*Canada Life Assurance Company v. Siddoo A.K. Investments Ltd.*, 2024 BCSC 1057).

In addition to providing for discovery of documents from parties to the action, the SCCR set out the procedure for compelling disclosure from third parties. Under SCCR 7-1(18), an application in chambers can be made against a third party from whom documents are sought for an order for production and inspection of the document or a certified copy. As a matter of practice, the application must be supported by affidavit evidence that the documents exist and are in the possession of the non-party (*Kaladjian v. Jose*, 2012 BCSC 357; *Moukhine v. Collins*, 2010 BCSC 621; *Harder v. Growers Supply Company Limited*, 2022 BCSC 746).

SCCR 7-1(18) is intended to enable a party to obtain a specific document or class of documents that is not available from a party to the action. Orders sought under SCCR 7-1(18) should be narrowly framed. There is a higher level of specificity required when seeking documents from a third party, and orders will not be made, for example, requiring a non-party to list every document in that non-party's possession that could be used to prove or disprove a material fact in the action (*Northwest Organics, Limited Partnership v. Roest*, 2017 BCSC 673; *Mann v. Jagpal*, 2020 BCSC 1919).

Records created by a doctor or hospital are not considered to be within the patient's possession or control and do not need to be listed by the patient under SCCR 7-1(1) (*Cook v. Kang*, 2019 BCSC 12 at para. 67). A party seeking such documents should apply for third party disclosure under SCCR 7-1(18).

Protection of privacy of a non-party can be an important limiting factor in an application for discovery of documents under SCCR 7-1(18). In

Pereira v. Rodrigue, 2005 BCSC 1778, the court refused to order production of documents by a non-party after weighing the relevance of the documents sought against the privacy interest that attached to the documents. The court held that where the probative value of the documents sought is minimal and the intrusion on privacy is great, the application (under former Rule 26(11)) should be denied. Like former Rule 26(11), SCCR 7-1(18) is a complete code for the production of documents in the possession or control of persons who are not parties to the action (*British Columbia (Director of Civil Forfeiture) v. Angel Acres Recreation & Festival Property Ltd.*, 2011 BCSC 198).

Alternatively, in the face of security and privacy concerns, the court may impose protective conditions on the production of documents in the possession of the non-party, for example, to ensure that the documents do not form a part of a public court record without adequate notice to the non-party; impose limitations on who may access the materials and how they are stored and used; and ensure return of those documents at the conclusion of the litigation. Such an order is within the jurisdiction of an associate judge (*Lepard v. Greenwood*, 2023 BCSC 684).

Where the non-party's documents include privileged material, the court may order that copies first be sent for vetting to counsel for the party to whom the privilege belongs (*Halliday v. McCullough* (1986), 1 B.C.L.R. (2d) 194 (C.A.)). This order is called a *Halliday* order. A *Halliday* order will be made when there is a likelihood that direct production will lead to disclosure of irrelevant, private information, or documents properly subject to litigation privilege (see *Gorse v. Straker*, 2010 BCSC 119).

Finally, SCCR 11-6(8) has express disclosure requirements triggered by the service of an expert report and demand for disclosure of the expert's file. Access to expert file materials places counsel in a position to use materials in the file to test whether the opinion evidence tendered through the expert is of such a nature and quality that the court may reasonably rely on it (see *One West Holdings Ltd. v. Owners, Strata Plan LMS 2995*, 2020 BCSC 1544 at para. 24). (For further discussion of SCCR 11-6(8), see Chapter 6.)

2. Claims of Privilege

A party who asserts privilege over a document pursuant to SCCR 7-1(6) need not produce or make the document available for inspection; nevertheless, the document must be included in the list of documents (*Cominco Ltd. v. Westinghouse Canada Ltd.* (1978),

9 B.C.L.R. 100 (S.C.), decided under former Rule 26(10)). The party must state the grounds upon which privilege is claimed in the list of documents (SCCR 7-1(6) and (7); *Garder v. Viridis Energy Inc.*, 2013 BCSC 580).

The party against whom privilege is claimed may apply to the court for an order for production (SCCR 7-1(17)). On such an application, the court may inspect the document for the purpose of deciding whether the objection to its production is valid (SCCR 7-1(20)), but this should be done only where the affidavit evidence in support of the claim for privilege raises concerns for the court (*Soprema Inc. v. Wolrige Mahon LLP*, 2016 BCSC 813). In making an order for production the court may impose terms and conditions (*Noland v. Organo Gold Enterprises Inc.*, 2012 BCSC 493).

SCCR 7-1(2), (6) and (7), together with Form 22, provide the basic requirements for claiming privilege over a document. In the list of documents, the party must provide a statement of the grounds of privilege respecting each document over which privilege is claimed, and each document must be described in a manner that, without revealing information that is privileged, will enable other parties to assess the validity of the claim of privilege. Blanket statements such as “all documents made or obtained in contemplation of litigation ... for the purpose of inclusion in counsel’s brief” have been held to be inadequate. Nevertheless, lawyers must be careful to describe the document in a way that does not disclose any privileged aspect of the document (*Leung v. Hanna* (1999), 68 B.C.L.R. (3d) 360 (S.C.)). The amount of information to be included in the description of a document varies depending on the document, but the document must be sufficiently described so that it may be considered by a judge in chambers if challenged (*Babcock v. Canada*, 2004 BCSC 1311 at para. 39).

In circumstances where privilege attaches to only part of a document and the remainder of the document is material and producible, a party may assert privilege over only the part of the document that is protected by the privilege. Counsel should redact the privileged part of the document, list the redacted document in Part 1 of Form 22, complete the description of the redacted document (without revealing privileged information) but indicate that the document has been redacted for privilege, and produce the redacted document to the other parties of record. Counsel must also list the document in Part 4 and state the grounds upon which privilege is claimed over the redacted part of the document. Reference should be made to the Part 1 redacted document in order to allow the other parties of record to assess the validity of the claim of privilege.

There are two main categories of privilege—“class” privilege and “case-by-case” privilege—and different degrees of protection attach to each category.

“Class” privileges benefit from a *prima facie* presumption of inadmissibility. In other words, once it is established that the relationship fits within the class, the communications are inadmissible unless the party urging admission can show the communications should not be privileged because “the justice of the case requires it” (*Sable Offshore Energy Inc. v. Ameron International Corp.*, 2013 SCC 37). Such communications are excluded from production not because they are irrelevant, but because there are overriding policy reasons to exclude them despite their relevance. Solicitor-client privilege, litigation privilege and settlement privilege are all class privileges that protect communications from production as follows:

- Solicitor-client privilege protects communications between lawyer and client relating to the giving or seeking of legal advice, because the relationship and the communications between solicitor and client are essential to the effective operation of the legal system (*Canada (Attorney General) v. Federation of Law Societies in Canada*, 2015 SCC 7). Such communications will only be producible if they fall within clearly defined exceptions (*Solosky v. The Queen*, [1980] 1 S.C.R. 821); for example, in estate litigation these communications are producible if they are needed to determine whether a will-maker was subject to undue influence, what the will-maker’s true intentions were, or whether the will-maker possessed testamentary capacity (*Geffen v. Goodman Estate*, [1991] 2 S.C.R. 353; *DeCotiis v. DeCotiis Estate*, 2024 BCSC 892).
- Litigation privilege, sometimes known as “solicitor’s brief privilege,” protects documents created for the dominant purpose of litigation that is either underway or “in reasonable prospect” (*Voth Bros. Construction (1974) Ltd. v. North Vancouver School District No. 44* (1981), 29 B.C.L.R. 114 (C.A.)). Unlike legal advice privilege, litigation privilege generally ends with the litigation (*Blank v. Canada*, 2006 SCC 39).
- Settlement privilege protects communications made in the course of settlement, including settlement offers and settlement agreements (*British Columbia Children’s Hospital v. Air Products Canada Ltd.*, 2003 BCCA 177; *Sable Offshore Energy Inc. v. Ameron International Corp.*, 2013 SCC 3). Settlement privilege promotes settlement by ensuring that

communications made in the course of settlement negotiations are inadmissible, whether or not an agreement is ultimately reached.

The second main category of privilege is referred to as “case-by-case” privilege. Under this category of privilege, there is no *prima facie* presumption that the communications are privileged and exempt from disclosure. The party asserting the privilege must establish, on a case-by-case basis, that the communication should be protected. Unlike class privileges, which are presumptively protected in every case, case-by-case privileges are subject to a discretionary balancing test. The test for establishing a case-by-case privilege is the “Wigmore test” which contains the following four criteria (see e.g. *R. v. McClure*, [2001] 1 S.C.R. 445):

- (1) The communications must originate in a confidence that they will not be disclosed.
- (2) This element of confidentiality must be essential to the full and satisfactory maintenance of the relationship between the parties.
- (3) The relationship must be one which in the opinion of the community ought to be sedulously fostered.
- (4) The injury that would inure to the relationship by the disclosure of the communications must be greater than the benefit thereby gained for the correct disposal of litigation.

If a privileged document is inadvertently disclosed to another party, counsel should request the immediate destruction of the privileged document by all recipient parties. It is still open to any recipient party to apply for the production of such document on the basis of a waiver of privilege. On such an application, the court will consider the following factors to determine whether privilege has been waived:

- (1) the way in which the documents came to be released;
- (2) whether there was a prompt attempt to retrieve the documents after the disclosure was discovered;
- (3) the timing of the discovery of the disclosure;
- (4) the timing of the application;
- (5) the number and nature of the third parties who have become aware of the documents;
- (6) whether maintenance of the privilege will create an actual or perceived unfairness to the opposing party; and
- (7) the impact on the fairness, both actual and perceived, of the processes of the court.

(*Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia*, 2024 BCSC 0987.)

A full discussion of the effects of privilege on the compelled production of documents is beyond the scope of the *Practice Material*. The main point to remember is that a claim for privilege must be made very carefully; the lawyer must know beforehand the kind of privilege being claimed and identify that privilege with sufficient particularity in the list of documents.

3. Consequences of Failure to Properly List and Disclose Documents

When a party neglects to list a document, SCCR 7-1(21) provides that the party will be prevented from putting the document in evidence in the proceeding or using it for the purpose of examination or cross-examination, without leave of the court.

Failure to list documents may also lead to an order adjourning a scheduled trial (*Muscroft et al v. Eurocopter*, 2002 BCSC 1680, aff'd 2003 BCCA 229).

A party can be prevented from putting unlisted documents to a witness at an examination for discovery (*Cominco Ltd. v. Westinghouse Canada* (1978), 9 B.C.L.R. 100 (S.C.)). In *Cominco*, the court also held that it was proper to challenge the other party's list of documents at an examination for discovery.

As noted earlier, if a party does not provide a list of documents within 35 days of the end of the pleading period, an opposing party is entitled to bring an application under SCCR 22-7(5) to have that party's pleading struck out and judgment entered accordingly (see *Schwarzinger v. Bramwell*, 2011 BCSC 304). In practice, that draconian remedy will rarely be available. The court will instead set a deadline for the party to prepare and serve its list of documents.

A failure to disclose critical documents may also attract an award of special costs (*Laface v. McWilliams*, 2005 BCSC 1766; *North Pender Island Local Trust Committee v. Conconi*, 2009 BCSC 1017).

[§3.03] Discovery of Documents and Duty of Counsel

Nowhere in civil procedure is the responsibility of the lawyer greater than in the area of discovery of documents (*Boxer v. Reesor* (1983), 43 B.C.L.R. 352 (S.C.) at 357–58, quoting *The Conduct of Civil Litigation in British Columbia*).

It is the responsibility of counsel to ensure that proper document disclosure has taken place (*Atlantic Waste Systems Ltd. v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2017 BCSC 19). The lawyer's legal and ethical responsibilities in relation to the production of documents are comprehensive and continue through to the end of the litigation.

When preparing a list of documents, it is the lawyer's duty to impress upon the client the importance of listing all documents, whether they help the client's case or not. The lawyer will usually understand much better than the client what documents could be used to prove or disprove a material fact. The client may be reluctant to disclose documents that could harm their case. As an officer of the court, a lawyer must ensure that the client discloses documents required by the SCCR.

It can be a breach of a lawyer's ethical responsibilities to tell the client to produce a list of "relevant" documents without overseeing and aiding the client in selecting the documents. In *Myers v. Elman*, [1940] A.C. 283 (H.L.), a lawyer had entrusted a managing clerk with the responsibility of preparing an affidavit of documents, which turned out to be incorrect and inadequate. The client had selected the relevant documents without the lawyer inspecting them. The House of Lords held that the lawyer was guilty of professional misconduct in allowing the inadequate affidavit of documents to be made and delivered, and made an order against the lawyer for costs. Every litigator should be familiar with the statements made by Lord Wright in *Myers* at 322, which have been adopted by the Court of Appeal (see e.g. *Henriques v. Spraggs*, 2008 BCCA 282 at para. 7):

The order of discovery requires the client to give information in writing (and on oath) of all documents which are or have been in his corporeal possession or power, whether he is bound to produce them or not. A client cannot be expected to realize the whole scope of that obligation without the aid and advice of his solicitor, who therefore has a peculiar duty in these matters as an officer of the Court carefully to investigate the position and as far as possible see that the order is complied with. A client left to himself could not know what is relevant, nor is he likely to realize that it is his obligation to disclose every relevant document, even a document which would establish, or go far to establish, against him his opponent's case. The solicitor cannot simply allow the client to make whatever affidavit of documents he thinks fit nor can he escape the responsibility for careful investigation or supervision. If the client will not give him the information he is entitled to require or if he insists on swearing an affidavit which the solicitor knows to be imperfect or which he has every reason to think is imperfect, then the solicitor's proper course is to withdraw from the case. He does not discharge his duty in such a case by requesting the client to make a proper affidavit and then filing whatever affidavit the client thinks fit to swear to.

Commentary [1] to rule 5.1-1 of the *BC Code* provides as follows:

In adversarial proceedings, the lawyer has a duty to the client to raise fearlessly every issue, advance every argument and ask every question, however distasteful, that the lawyer thinks will help the client's case and to endeavour to obtain for the client the benefit of every remedy and defence authorized by law. The lawyer must discharge this duty by fair and honourable means, without illegality and in a manner that is consistent with the lawyer's duty to treat the tribunal with candour, fairness, courtesy and respect and in a way that promotes the parties' right to a fair hearing in which justice can be done. Maintaining dignity, decorum and courtesy in the courtroom is not an empty formality because, unless order is maintained, rights cannot be protected.

Rule 5.1-2 of the *BC Code* also provides as follows:

When acting as an advocate, a lawyer must not

[...]

- (b) knowingly assist or permit the client to do anything that the lawyer considers to be dishonest or dishonourable;

[...]; or

- (e) knowingly attempt to deceive a tribunal or influence the course of justice by offering false evidence, misstating facts or law, presenting or relying upon a false or deceptive affidavit, suppressing what ought to be disclosed, or otherwise assisting in any fraud, crime or illegal conduct.

These excerpts from the *BC Code* cast a positive duty on a lawyer to ensure they do not knowingly suppress evidence or assist a client to do so. The common law principles set out in *Myers v. Elman* go even further, saying that a lawyer has a duty as an officer of the court to investigate, and cannot simply allow the client to determine what documents are relevant.

That said, at least with respect to large-scale, complex document production, the court has recognized the principle of proportionality, and that document production may be a lengthy and ongoing process where documents may be overlooked initially and come to light later in the process (*Century Building Systems Ltd. v. Blackcomb Mountain Development Ltd.*, 2007 BCSC 939). While counsel having conduct of the case is ultimately responsible for ensuring that (a) the client has been properly advised as to the disclosure that is required, and (b) disclosure has been provided consistent with those instructions and the SCCR, counsel is not required to lay hands upon and review each document to be disclosed (*Pro-Sys Consultants Ltd. v. Infineon Technologies AG*, 2011 BCSC 1128 at paras. 45–46).

Nevertheless, the failure to properly instruct and supervise junior lawyers in the collection and review of documents, leading to the adjournment of a trial, may be deserving of the court's rebuke in the form of an order

for special costs (*Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia*, 2023 BCSC 1554).

If a party discloses a document that appears to be privileged, the other party's lawyer has an ethical duty to inquire as to whether the disclosure was inadvertent and, if so, return the document, unread and uncopied, to the party to whom it belongs (*BC Code*, rule 7.2-10(a)). If the document is an electronic document, the lawyer must delete it, unread and uncopied, and advise the person to whom it belongs that this was done. If the document was read before the mistake was recognized, the lawyer must advise the other party of the extent to which the lawyer is aware of the contents, and of how the lawyer intends to use them (rule 7.2-10(c)).

[§3.04] Examination for Discovery

Perhaps the most important step in an action, short of the trial itself, is the examination for discovery. Under SCCR 7-2, a party is permitted to cross-examine every adverse party to the action, under oath (which includes a solemn promise to tell the truth), on the issues between them. It is normally an essential step in the preparation of every case.

An effective examination for discovery allows counsel to obtain three key things:

- (1) details of the case to be met (which will help counsel prepare their own case for trial);
- (2) admissions of facts and documents, which are necessary for the case and which would otherwise have to be proved at trial; and
- (3) admissions that may be used against the adverse party at trial.

Examination for discovery also provides an opportunity to see how one's own client fares under cross-examination. The information gained at the discovery gives the parties a better base for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each party's case, and frequently leads to more meaningful and successful settlement negotiation (*No Limits Sportswear Inc. v. 0912139 B.C. Ltd.*, 2015 BCSC 1121).

1. Who May Be Examined

A party to an action may examine for discovery any party of record who is adverse in interest (SCCR 7-2(1)). "Adverse interest" has been interpreted as a flexible term meaning a direct pecuniary or other legal interest in the matters and in the results involved in the litigation, as distinguished from a moral interest (*Liverside v. Wang*, 2012 BCSC 1974).

Parties may conduct discovery only on the issues on which the parties are adverse in interest, as disclosed by the pleadings (*Whieldon v. Morrison* (1934), 48 B.C.R. 492 (C.A.); *Lougheed v. Filgate* (1995), 5 B.C.L.R. (3d) 101 (S.C.)). Co-defendants are considered adverse in interest if the pleadings of one of the defendants allege the other defendant contributed to or was responsible for the damage (*Karsten v. Young*, 1999 CanLII 4804).

Where there exists a commonality of interest between co-parties, their rights to conduct and be subjected to multiple examinations may be restricted (*Soprema Inc. v. Wolridge Mahon LLP*, 2014 BCCA 366, but see *Kovacevic Consult Inc. v. Coastal Contacts Inc.*, 2015 BCSC 569).

There are occasions on which a plaintiff may want to examine a named third party or vice versa. The rule remains that an examination of a party of record may take place only if there is an issue between them (SCCR 7-2(1)). However, the authorities suggest that the party wishing to examine may be able to assert that right if the issue between the parties is apparent in some manner beyond the pleadings (*Manzke v. Thompson*, [1969] 70 W.W.R. 766 (B.C.S.C.); *Sisters of St. Joseph v. Hilsen & Co.*, [1976] 3 W.W.R. 220 (Sask. Q.B.)).

In representative actions, the representative plaintiff or defendant is subject to examination for discovery on behalf of the party (SCCR 7-2(5)). Since actions by and against First Nations are often brought as representative actions, counsel to a Band or Nation should select a representative plaintiff who is knowledgeable to give discovery evidence on behalf of the Band or Nation.

When a party has a right to examine a corporation for discovery, the party is entitled to examine a past or present director, officer, employee, agent or external auditor. Under SCCR 7-2(5), the corporation must disclose the name of the person to be examined who is knowledgeable concerning the matters in question to the action. Counsel is not required to examine the person named by the corporation and may examine any other person the examining party considers appropriate (*B.C. Lightweight Aggregate v. Canada Cement LaFarge* (1978), 7 B.C.L.R. 108 (C.A.)). Where a former agent is selected, the corporate party must take all steps necessary to secure the attendance of the agent.

SCCR 7-2(5) applies to partnerships as well. For example, if the party to be examined is a partnership, one of the partners may be examined. However, SCCR 7-2(5) does not apply when the federal Crown or an agency is a party; instead, the designation of the Crown representative is governed by legislation with respect to Crown liability and

proceedings (*Lindgren (Litigation Guardian of) v. Parks Canada Agency*, 2016 BCCA 459).

Unless the court otherwise orders, when the party to be examined is an infant, counsel is entitled to examine the infant, the infant’s guardian, and the infant’s litigation guardian (SCCR 7-2(8)). If the party is a mentally incompetent person, their litigation guardian or committee may be examined for discovery, but the mentally incompetent person may be examined only with leave of the court, if the court is satisfied that the person can give sufficiently reliable evidence (SCCR 7-2(9); *Karrington v. Morrison*, 2023 BCSC 570).

In a class proceeding, the parties are entitled to examine the representative plaintiff(s) as of right in the ordinary course, but must seek leave of the court to discover other class members: *Class Proceedings Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 50, ss. 17–18.

Prior to an examination, the person examined for discovery must inform themselves as to matters within their knowledge (or means of knowledge) regarding the issues in the action (SCCR 7-2(22)). The witness’s obligation under the SCCR is not limited to information within the witness’s personal possession. Accordingly, at discovery the witness may be asked for information that requires the witness to ask third parties for the information (*Saunders v. Nelson* (1994), 35 C.P.C. (3d) 168 (B.C.S.C.) at 173)). Pursuant to SCCR 7-2(23), a party may be asked to respond to outstanding requests from a discovery by letter; if so, the questions and answers set out in the letter are deemed to be given under oath in the examination for discovery (SCCR 7-2(24)). If a witness refuses to answer requests from a discovery, the examining party may seek an order that responses to such requests be provided in writing (*Wu v. Ma*, 2024 BCSC 1403).

2. Where Examination Takes Place

Unless the court otherwise orders, or the parties to the examination consent, an examination for discovery must take place at a location within 30 kilometers of the registry that is nearest to the place where the person to be examined resides (SCCR 7-2(11)). In practice, an examination for discovery is held at a mutually agreeable location, usually the office of a court reporter.

Unless the parties otherwise agree, on application a person residing outside British Columbia is subject to being examined for discovery at the place and in the manner the court considers appropriate (SCCR 7-2(27); *Huang v. Silvercorp Metals Inc.*, 2016 BCSC 778).

Although the SCCR do not specifically provide for examination by video or electronic means, this practice became commonplace during the COVID-19 pandemic. If the parties cannot agree to examination by video, the court may order a virtual examination where it is just and convenient to do so, including to avoid substantial out-of-pocket expenses of the party being examined, beyond witness fees or conduct money (*Scott v. Fresh Tracks (Canada) Inc.*, 2023 BCSC 1724 at paras. 36 and 46).

3. Arranging the Examination

An examination for discovery is arranged by serving an appointment to examine for discovery in Form 23 along with witness fees (unless waived) on the party to be examined, or their counsel, with notice to all other parties to the action (SCCR 7-2(13)). The date for the examination is arranged with a court reporter and, customarily, also with counsel for the other side. If the witness does not have “sufficient understanding” of English or French, whichever is the language in which the discovery proceedings are to be conducted, the witness is entitled to an interpreter (*Chung v. Chung*, 2023 BCSC 1778). The examining party customarily arranges and bears the upfront cost of court reporting and any interpreting services required for the conduct of their examination for discovery (subject to later costs orders). Qualified interpreters may be found through the Society of Interpreters and Translators of British Columbia.

A party may elect to examine a different representative of the adverse party than the representative identified in an appointment to examine for discovery, even following service of the appointment, provided the initial representative has not yet been examined and is released from their obligation to attend at the examination for discovery (*Bene (Oval) Development Ltd. v. 1148538 B.C. Ltd.*, 2021 BCSC 2498). This is the case even if the initial representative has already been discovered by a co-defendant, provided the party changing its election has not yet commenced its own examination (*Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia*, 2023 BCSC 1723).

The order of examinations does not require the plaintiff to examine the adverse party or parties first (*Torok (litigation guardian of) v. Sekhon*, 2006 BCSC 1940).

4. Who May Attend

Unless the court otherwise orders, all parties to the action and their lawyers are entitled to attend at an examination for discovery of any of the other par-

ties, and any person who is not a party to the action is not entitled to attend (*Saltman v. Sharples Contracting Ltd.*, 2018 BCSC 883). A corporate litigant is only permitted to have its one proposed representative in attendance (*Buskell v. Bethesda Christian Assn.*, 2014 BCSC 950). If counsel is concerned that credibility is crucial and that the examination of one party will cause a co-party to change their evidence, then counsel should apply to court for an exclusion order (*O'Neal v. Murphy* (1964), 50 W.W.R. 252 (B.C.S.C.)); however, a party's right to be present at an examination for discovery at which that party's interests may be affected is fundamental and not easily abrogated (*Sissons and Simmons v. Olson*, [1951] 1 W.W.R. (NS) 507 (C.A.)). There is a heavy onus upon a party seeking to exclude another from attending (*Saltman v. Sharples Contracting Ltd.*).

5. Scope of Examination

Under SCCR 7-2(18), the scope of examination for discovery is very broad: the person being examined is required to answer any questions within their knowledge or means of knowledge regarding any matter, not privileged, relating to a matter in question in the action (*Kendall v. Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada*, 2010 BCSC 1556).

Unless otherwise ordered by the court or agreed to by the parties, examinations for discovery must not exceed, in total, seven hours or any greater period to which the person examined consents (SCCR 7-2(2)). This limit places even greater importance on ensuring document discovery is complete before proceeding to examination for discovery (*Sysco Victoria Inc. v. Wilfert Holdings Corporation*, 2011 BCSC 1359). Additional time may be sought from the court, taking into account the requirement of proportionality (*Mainstream Canada v. Staniford*, 2011 BCSC 1692). The calculation of time exhausted on an examination for discovery does not include any breaks taken or unexpected technical delays: parties who engage in unreasonable "clock-watching" giving rise to an application for an extension of discovery time may be ordered to pay costs in any event of the cause (*Manson v. Mitchell*, 2022 BCSC 617). An order for the extension of the duration of an examination can occur before the examination has begun (*Huang v. Silvercorp Metals Inc.*, 2016 BCSC 778). That said, counsel should not waste time on marginal matters during the examination (*Henneberry v. Humber*, 2014 BCSC 1133).

The matters in question in an action are defined by the pleadings as they stand at the time of the examination (*Jackson v. Belzberg* (1981), 31 B.C.L.R. 140 (C.A.); *Rogers v. Hunter* (1982), 37 B.C.L.R.

321 (C.A.)). Any question is permissible on a discovery if the answer might be relevant to those issues (*Hopper v. Dunsmuir (No. 2)* (1903), 10 B.C.R. 23 (C.A.); *Cominco v. Westinghouse Canada* (1979), 11 B.C.L.R. 142 (C.A.)). The following passage from the reasons of Hunter C.J. in *Hopper v. Dunsmuir (No. 2)* has been cited frequently with approval:

No doubt some of the questions propounded and refused to be answered seem at first sight to be somewhat remote from the matter at hand, but I think it is impossible to say that the answers may not be relevant to the issues, and such being the case, they are within the right given the cross-examining party by the Rule.

It is also obvious that useful or effective cross-examination would be impossible if counsel could only ask such questions as reveal their purpose, and it is needless to labour the proposition that in many cases such preliminary skirmishing is necessary to make possible a successful assault upon the citadel, especially where the adversary is the chief repository of the information required.

It was argued by the learned counsel for the respondent that only a sort of cross-examination was allowed by the Rule; that it consisted in asking leading questions bearing directly on the issues and, if thought proper, in a loud tone of voice. I cannot agree. I think that the function of a cross-examiner is not to play the role of the ass in a lion's skin but to extract information that will be of use in the decision of the issues, and by the most circuitous routes if it [appears] necessary to do so.

6. Exhibits

As a general rule, any document that has been referred to in the discovery should be marked as an exhibit for identification. Permission of opposing counsel is not required to mark an exhibit. Even if the party being examined cannot identify the document, it may still be marked as an exhibit, even if only to establish that the witness could not (or did not want to) recognize it.

The lawyer acting for the party being examined should advise the client before the discovery not to speak while an exhibit is being marked by the court reporter. It is not possible for the reporter to mark an exhibit and take down the evidence at the same time.

7. Matters to be Covered

Before each discovery, counsel should prepare a checklist of the matters counsel intends to cover at the discovery. Certain matters are common to all discoveries. Counsel will want to obtain the witness's full name, address, and the fact that the witness has been sworn to tell the truth. If the wit-

ness is appearing in a representative capacity, counsel will need to clarify their authority to give evidence and the scope of their knowledge. If there are any oral admissions which have been made before the discovery and which have not been placed in writing, they should be put on the record at the discovery proceeding.

As the examination proceeds, counsel may want to leave a formal request on the record that the witness provide copies of relevant documents through their counsel. Counsel may also want to ask for the names and addresses of other potential witnesses (SCCR 7-2(18)). Witnesses' phone numbers cannot be requested (*Shilton v. Fassnacht*, 2006 BCSC 431).

Checklists are available that set out common matters to be covered at examinations for discovery in various types of actions. Consult *Bender's Forms of Discovery* and the Continuing Legal Education Society of BC's *Discovery Practice in British Columbia* manual and other litigation series.

8. Manner of Questioning

An examination for discovery is in the form of cross-examination and, therefore, permits a broad range of questioning. Counsel may ask leading questions, that is, questions that suggest the answer. It is also possible to impeach the witness, that is, bring out contradictions in the witness's evidence and seek to show that the witness is not telling the truth. This does not mean, however, that counsel should seek to bludgeon the witness into agreeing with counsel's point of view.

The style of questioning that counsel adopts will depend on what they are trying to achieve and the personality of the witness being examined. The personality of the witness may not be known until the discovery. The witness may be hostile, cooperative, intelligent or confused. Counsel may have to adjust their style of questioning accordingly. This makes it even more important for counsel to have decided beforehand what they are trying to achieve.

A lawyer should be cordial with the opposing party and counsel at all times. This does not prevent counsel from being firm with a witness. Occasionally a witness is hostile towards the examiner. The witness may be flippant or answer a question with a question and not a proper answer. In those circumstances, the witness should be firmly advised that counsel is the one asking the questions and that counsel is entitled to the answers in proper form.

Counsel should ask questions one at a time. If two or more questions are strung together or compounded, not only is the form of question objectionable,

but counsel may later find out, upon reading the transcript, that the court would be unable to tell which question the witness was answering. Counsel should visualize the question and answer as they will look on paper in the transcript. Both question and answer must be clear and complete if they are to be useful at trial.

9. Objections

During the course of an examination, counsel conducting the examination might ask objectionable questions. However, an examination for discovery is not limited by the rules of admissibility at trial. A question that could not be asked at trial is not necessarily objectionable on discovery.

One important difference between discovery and trial is the scope of relevance (see §3.04(5) "Scope of Examination" above). Relevance objections are rarely appropriate on discovery because the scope of the examination is broad.

Another important difference is hearsay, which is not a valid objection on discovery. A witness must answer discovery questions that call for hearsay.

A question is of course objectionable if it seeks information that is privileged (*Nwachukwu v. Ferreira*, 2011 BCSC 1755).

A question is also objectionable if it calls for a legal conclusion (see e.g. *Camp Development Corp. v. South Coast Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority*, 2011 BCSC 88) or speculation (*Telus Communications Inc. v. Centurion Investment Properties Inc.*, 2007 BCSC 491). A common objection on the basis of speculation arises where a question asks for an opinion on another party's state of mind.

A question that calls for opinion evidence is usually objectionable, but there are two recognized exceptions: when the sole issue in the action is the value of property, and when a professional is being sued for negligence and is asked for an opinion as to the appropriate standard of care (*Teachers' Investment & Housing Co-operative v. Jennings (Trustee of)* (1991), 61 B.C.L.R. (2d) 98 (C.A.)). In the latter case, however, counsel is not entitled to ask whether or not a professional was negligent—that is a matter for the court to decide.

A question that contains an assumption that has not been established is objectionable. For example, "Did you see the green Chevrolet that was on your left?" is not a permissible question unless it has already been established that there was a green Chevrolet on the left.

Questions that are vague, confusing, unclear, overbroad, or misleading may also be objectionable (*Forliti (Guardian of) v. Wolley*, 2002 BCSC 858).

The proper procedure for making an objection is for opposing counsel to state: “I object to that question and I advise the witness not to answer.” It is customary to give the ground for the objection, if requested. The witness may then state: “I refuse to answer the question” (or the examining counsel will assume as much and move on). The court may later determine the validity of an objection, and may order the witness to submit to a further examination for discovery (SCCR 7-2(25)).

Discovery Practice in British Columbia (2023), by Lyle Harris, KC, sets out a list of the most common objections (see §3.138 in that text):

- (a) “Not related to a matter in question”
- (b) “Protected by privilege”
- (c) “Relates solely to credibility”
- (d) “The document speaks for itself”
- (e) “Relates to similar facts/acts and is collateral”
- (f) “Relates to another person’s out-of-court statement”
- (g) “Elicits an opinion”
- (h) “Calls for the witness to write something”
- (i) “Begs an ambiguous answer”
- (j) “Which one is the question?”
- (k) “Argumentative” or “calling for a legal conclusion”
- (l) “That calls for speculation on the part of the witness”
- (m) “Asked and answered” (However, Harris, KC, notes that “merely asking the same question twice does not seem to be objectionable”; instead it “may be objectionable if the purpose relates solely to credibility or amounts to intimidation of the witness.”)
- (n) “The question presumes a fact that hasn’t been elicited”
- (o) “The question is too vague”
- (p) “That wasn’t the evidence”
- (q) “The area is confidential/protected by a confidentiality agreement”
- (r) “My client claims the protection of s. 5 of the *Canada Evidence Act*”
- (s) “The question is confusing/misleading/ambiguous/unintelligible”
- (t) “How can my client know what was in another’s mind?”
- (u) “That is a question of law”

Some commonly made objections, however, are not proper objections. Improper objections include:

- (a) “That’s a leading question”
- (b) “My client lacks personal knowledge”
- (c) “How is that relevant?”
- (d) “That’s not admissible”
- (e) Statements “for the record” and “laying the foundation”
- (f) “You haven’t laid the foundation”
- (g) Objecting to “Are you refusing to answer on the advice of your counsel?”

The only time counsel for the party being examined should say anything during the examination is to make an objection. It is inappropriate to continually interrupt the “flow” of the questioner (*C.P. v. RBC Life Insurance Co.*, 2013 BCSC 1434).

Counsel should not use an objection to lead their witness by supplying an answer in the form of an objection. While such leading might be helpful to clarify matters, counsel conducting the examination is entitled to the evidence of the witness, not that of the lawyer. Moreover, counsel is entitled to the evidence of the witness without any prompting or interference from opposing counsel (*Cominco Ltd. v. Westinghouse Canada Limited* (1980), 14 B.C.L.R. 346 (S.C.)).

10. Preparing the Client

It is important for counsel to prepare the client for the examination for discovery by meeting well in advance, and not immediately before the discovery. The lawyer should explain to the client the purpose of the examination, where it will be held, who will be there, and what the resulting transcript can be used for. Counsel should tell the client to stay calm and answer the questions fully, truthfully and to the best of their ability, but not volunteer information or become agitated. Counsel should review with the client the issues in the action, the documents that have been produced, and the types of questions that will be asked.

Counsel should tell the client to say “yes” or “no” rather than nod or mumble. Counsel should also instruct the client to wait until the question is completed before beginning to answer: failure to do so often results in a confusing transcript and may

also lead the witness to answer a question not yet asked and therefore to volunteer information.

Counsel should not discuss evidence with the client during a break in the client's examination for discovery (*BC Code*, rule 5.4-2).

11. Re-Examination

Following the cross-examination of the witness, counsel for the party being examined has a right of re-examination. As a general rule, counsel should be cautious about re-examining on an examination for discovery. If the witness has stated something that counsel believes to be untrue or incomplete, counsel should discuss the matter with the witness in the privacy of the office when the discovery has been concluded. Any correction that is necessary can be made by sending a letter to the other side and, ultimately, addressing and explaining the issue in direct examination at trial. That said, an effective re-examination can address a clear problem that has emerged in the examination and reduce the chances of it being read in at trial. Re-examination of a witness may also be prudent where there is some prospect that a party will bring an application for summary trial. If a party does not use re-examination to correct a problem that has emerged in the facts, then that party may be unsuccessful in arguing that a court cannot find the necessary facts for the purpose of a summary trial, and may be unprepared to defend or prove their claim (*Sandhu v. New Western Plumbing & Lighting Supplies Ltd.*, 2018 BCSC 1930).

12. Concluding the Examination

An examination for discovery is not concluded as long as there are outstanding requests on the record for the party to obtain information and produce evidence or documents. Continuation of a discovery on the basis of newly produced material is as of right under SCCR 7-2(24)(b) and is distinct from a second examination, which requires leave of the court (*Li v. Oneil*, 2013 BCSC 1449).

The court has discretion to order a second examination or an examination of an additional representative of a corporate party. This discretion will be exercised only where the court is satisfied that the first examinee is unable or unwilling to inform themselves about the subject of the examination. In making the determination as to whether the first representative can satisfactorily inform themselves, the court will consider such factors as the circumstances of the case, the responsiveness of the witness under examination and the degree to which the witness has taken pains to inform themselves, the nature and materiality of

the particular evidence sought to be canvassed with the second representative, and what appears to be the most practical, convenient and expeditious alternative (see e.g. *Murao v. Blackcomb Skiing Enterprises Limited Partnership et al*, 2003 BCSC 558; *Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia (Education)*, 2012 BCSC 582; *Samaroo v. Canada Revenue Agency*, 2016 BCSC 531).

As with documents produced during document discovery, evidence elicited during examinations for discovery is protected by an implied undertaking. Parties to litigation and their lawyers may use discovery evidence, including transcripts, strictly for the purposes of the court case and not for other purposes (*Doucette (Litigation Guardian of) v. Wee Watch Day Care Systems Inc.*, 2008 SCC 8).

13. Depositions

The basic rule is that witnesses should testify live before the court (*Byer v. Mills*, 2011 BCSC 158). However, where an examination for discovery is not possible or where a witness will not be available to testify at trial, a person may, by consent or by order of the court, be examined on oath and the recording tendered as evidence at trial (SCCR 7-8). Factors the court must take into account in exercising its discretion to order an examination by deposition include the convenience of the person sought to be examined, the possibility that the person may be unable to testify at the trial, and the expense of bringing the person to trial. This procedure is usually invoked to obtain evidence from witnesses outside BC or those unlikely to be present at trial by reason of illness, location, expense or death.

As an alternative to depositions, since the COVID-19 pandemic, examinations for discovery are also regularly conducted by video, either by consent of the parties or by leave of the court. Portions of the discovery transcript can then be read in as evidence at the trial.

14. Equitable Bill of Discovery

Extraordinarily, a person may seek discovery of a third party before an action is even commenced by obtaining an equitable bill of discovery, also known as a *Norwich Pharmacal* order (*Kenney v. Loewen* (1999), 64 B.C.L.R. (3d) 346 (S.C.)). Such an order is often sought to obtain the identity of a potential defendant who is known to the third party but unknown to the plaintiff. *Norwich Pharmacal* orders are not limited to circumstances where the information is being requested prior to the commencement of the action, and may be sought

after an action has been commenced against “Doe” defendants (defendants whose identity is unknown, named in the claim as “Doe 1,” “Doe 2,” etc.) (*Brito v. Terry L. Napora Law Corporation*, 2016 BCSC 1476).

[§3.05] Interrogatories

Interrogatories are written questions relating to a matter in issue that are put to a party adverse in interest. In other words, they are a written question and answer form of discovery. SCCR 7-3 governs interrogatories and is intended to limit their use. Whereas interrogatories were issued as a matter of right under the former Rules, SCCR 7-3(1) allows a party to an action to serve interrogatories in Form 24 on any other party of record, or on a director, officer, partner, agent, employee or external auditor of a party of record if:

- the party of record to be examined consents; or
- the court grants leave.

Counsel should consider using interrogatories in appropriate cases to obtain uncontroversial evidence, narrow and focus the issues in the action, and reduce the length of examinations for discovery.

Within 21 days of service of the interrogatories, the receiving party must serve an affidavit in answer to the interrogatories (SCCR 7-3(4)).

The fundamental rule regarding the scope of interrogatories is that they must relate “to a matter in question.” Although the scope of interrogatories is broader than initial document discovery in the sense that it is not limited to proof of facts necessary to establish a party’s case, it is more limited than the scope of examinations for discovery (*Hamouth v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2006 BCSC 105). In deciding whether to order interrogatories, a court must consider the object of the SCCR to secure a just, speedy and inexpensive determination of a proceeding on its merits, proportionate to the amount involved, the importance of the issues, and the complexity of the dispute (*Credential Securities Inc. v. Qtrade Canada Inc.*, 2012 BCSC 1902).

Interrogatories are narrower in scope than examinations for discovery, should not be in the nature of cross-examination, should not include a demand for discovery of documents, and should not duplicate particulars (*Credential Securities Inc.*). As well, interrogatories are directed only to facts within the deponent’s personal knowledge or that can be ascertained on reasonable inquiry, and should not include questions that require the deponent to obtain an expert’s opinion (*Martin v. British Columbia* (1986), 3 B.C.L.R. (2d) 60 (S.C.)). Interrogatories are not intended to provide a parallel opportunity for discovery and cannot be used to ask questions that should have been asked at the examination for discovery. Interrogatories also cannot be used to require a party

to create a document or narrative that did not exist at the material time, or to synthesize the evidence—a party is only required to identify which parts of the evidence were known to the party at material times (*Solomons v. Endnight Games Ltd.*, 2016 BCSC 404). Where a party has not made reasonable inquiries to answer the interrogatories, a court may order that party to provide further and better answers to the interrogatories (*Yen v. Ghahramani*, 2024 BCSC 1407).

If a party objects to an interrogatory on the grounds that it will not further the object of the SCCR, the party may apply to the court to strike the interrogatory pursuant to SCCR 7-3(8) (*Loo v. Alderwoods Group Canada Inc.*, 2010 BCSC 1471). If a party objects to an interrogatory on the grounds that the response is privileged or that it does not relate to a matter at issue, the party may make the objection in an affidavit in answer (SCCR 7-3(6)).

There is a continuing obligation to update or correct an interrogatory even after a response has been provided. SCCR 7-3(11) states that if a person who has given an answer to an interrogatory later learns that the answer is inaccurate or incomplete, that person must promptly serve on the party who served the interrogatory an affidavit deposing to an accurate or complete answer.

[§3.06] Physical Examination and Inspection

SCCR 7-6 provides a mechanism for a party to seek an order to physically examine or inspect property or persons.

Pursuant to SCCR 7-6(1), a court may order a person to submit to examination by a medical practitioner or other qualified person if the physical or mental condition of that person is “in issue” in a proceeding (*Jones v. Donaghey*, 2011 BCCA 6).

In personal injury cases, orders that the plaintiff submit to a medical examination are routinely granted. The examining medical practitioner is generally chosen by the defendant, but that right may be challenged by the plaintiff in certain circumstances (*Sinclair v. Underwood* (2002), 99 B.C.L.R. (3d) 379 (S.C.)). The present practice is to require the defendant to provide the entire resulting report to the plaintiff, provided that the plaintiff reciprocates by providing to the defendant all medical reports that the plaintiff has acquired or will acquire in the future (*Bates v. Stubbs* (1980), 15 B.C.L.R. 65 (C.A.)). These reports usually form the expert evidence at trial in personal injury cases.

An order will usually not be necessary to arrange a medical examination. However, court orders may be necessary if a party seeks multiple examinations (from one or different specialists) (*Hamilton v. Pavlova*, 2010 BCSC 493) or if counsel for the party to be examined objects to the examiner or the type of examination proposed. A party asking the court to order subsequent

examinations need not meet a higher threshold or establish extraordinary circumstances: the court's concern is always putting the parties on an even footing in being able to present their evidence (*Tran v. Abbott*, 2018 BCCA 154).

Pursuant to SCCR 7-6(4), a court may order the production, inspection or preservation of any property, and authorize samples to be taken, observations to be made or experiments to be conducted on or with property by a party, when it considers it necessary or expedient for the purpose of obtaining full information or evidence. Such an order serves to equalize the position of the parties by providing to one side an opportunity to inspect what would otherwise only be available to the other (*Tran v. Abbott*, 2018 BCCA 365). The information or evidence sought should be relevant to a material issue in dispute between the parties (*Ralmax Properties Ltd. v. Pt. Ellice Properties Ltd.*, 2022 BCSC 240). In its consideration of what is necessary and expedient, the court may consider numerous factors, including the timing of the application relative to any trial scheduled and how burdensome the inspection or examination will be on the parties (*Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia*, 2024 BCSC 1127).

In practice, an application under SCCR 7-6(4) may be required to provide an expert retained by a party with the access to and examination of property required to prepare an expert report. A court may order that such examination or inspection take place on specified conditions, including the subsequent provision of raw data to an opposing party (*Teck Cominco Metals Ltd. v. Shanghai Broiler Works Co.*, 2010 BCCA 51; *Ralmax Properties Ltd. v. Pt. Ellice Properties Ltd.*, 2022 BCSC 240).

[§3.07] Pre-Trial Examination of Witnesses

When a person who is not a party to the legal proceedings may have material evidence relating to the matters in question, a court may order that the person be examined (SCCR 7-5(1)). The purpose of this rule is to facilitate full disclosure of the facts and information, not evidence or admissions, before trial. In practice, the rule permits examination of an uncooperative witness (*Gardner v. Viridis Energy Inc.*, 2014 BCSC 232).

As a prerequisite to the application, the proposed witness must refuse or ignore an applicant's request to give a responsive statement (SCCR 7-5(3)). It is good practice for counsel for the applicant to put questions in writing for the proposed witness and ask for responses in writing. Counsel does this for two reasons:

- If the witness refuses to answer, counsel can show the court specifically what questions counsel wants to ask.

- If counsel receives written answers, counsel is in a position to have a note of what the witness's evidence will be at trial.

If the proposed witness neglects or refuses to provide a responsive statement, counsel can apply for an order that the person be examined on oath (SCCR 7-5(1)). In support of the application, counsel must provide affidavit evidence setting out what relevant evidence counsel thinks the witness has, and that the witness has refused to provide it. If counsel has asked for the information in writing, counsel should attach the written request. An opposing party has only limited standing on an application for an order under SCCR 7-5. Because there is no property in a witness, the opposing party does not have standing to object to a witness being questioned, but does have standing to address issues of procedure, proportionality and privilege (*Brooks v. Abbey Adelaide Holdings Inc.*, 2014 BCSC 2075).

When granting an order for the examination of the witness, the court may also order that the examining party pay the witness's costs in relation to the application and the examination, other than on a party and party basis. For the examination itself, counsel may serve a subpoena in Form 25 requiring the witness to bring any relevant documents or physical objects in their possession (SCCR 7-5(5)).

Once leave to examine is obtained, at least seven days' notice of the appointment for the examination is required (SCCR 7-5(7)). At the examination, the proposed witness is cross-examined by the person who obtained the order, and then may be cross-examined by any other party. At the conclusion of the further cross-examination there may be additional cross-examination by the person who obtained the order (SCCR 7-5(8)). The examination takes place before a court reporter. As in examinations for discovery, the person being examined may be required to inform themselves. Objections may be made during this examination in the same way as during an examination for discovery.

[§3.08] Admissions

SCCR 7-7 provides a procedure for parties to admit to the truth of facts and the authenticity of documents that are not disputed. A party may serve a notice to admit in Form 26, requesting any party of record to admit to the truth of a fact or the authenticity of a document set out in the notice (SCCR 7-7(1)).

The party receiving the notice to admit must serve on the other party, within 14 days, a written statement that:

- specifically denies the truth of the fact or the authenticity of the document;
- sets out in detail the reasons why the party cannot make the admission; or

- states that the refusal to admit the truth of the fact or the authenticity of the document is on the grounds of privilege or irrelevance, or because the request is otherwise improper, and sets out in detail the reasons for the refusal (SCCR 7-7(2)).

If the party receiving the notice to admit does *not* respond within 14 days, the truth of the fact or the authenticity of the document is deemed admitted (SCCR 7-7(2)). Counsel receiving the notice to admit should carefully diarize it, so that the deadline for responding does not pass without response.

If a party unreasonably denies or refuses to admit the truth of a fact or the authenticity of a document contained in the notice, a court may order that party to pay the costs of proving the truth of the fact or the authenticity of the document, and may award costs against that party or deprive them of costs (SCCR 7-7(4)). It is open to the court to make other orders for unreasonable denials or refusals to admit the truth of a fact, including to deem the admissions to have been made, to order that the recipient party provide a more fulsome response, or to convert the notice to admit into interrogatories: *Yen v. Ghahramani*, 2023 BCSC 1421.

Counsel should consider using SCCR 7-7 to expedite proceedings and reduce matters that will be contentious at trial, in order to reduce the trial's length and expense (*Yen v. Ghahramani*, 2023 BCSC 1421).

When drafting a notice to admit, the lawyer should break matters down as finely as possible and set out each individual fact in a separate numbered paragraph. The lawyer should avoid colouring the facts with emotive or subjective language; instead, the lawyer should set out the facts plainly and simply, thereby forcing the other side to think seriously before denying or refusing to admit the truth of the facts set out. Conclusions of law or mixed fact and law should be avoided, as they do not come within SCCR 7-7 (*Kaay v. Phagura*, 2024 BCSC 1084).

Once an admission is made in response to a notice to admit or in a pleading, or becomes a deemed admission under SCCR 7-7(2), then the admission can only be withdrawn by consent or with leave of the court (SCCR 7-7(5); *Nagra v. Cruz*, 2016 BCSC 2469).

In *Munster & Sons Developments Ltd. v. Shaw*, 2005 BCCA 564, the Court of Appeal restated the test (set out earlier in *Hamilton v. Ahmed* (1999), 28 C.P.C. (4th) 139 (S.C.)) to be applied where there is an application to withdraw an admission with leave of court. The test is “whether there is a triable issue, which, in the interests of justice, should be determined on the merits and not disposed of by an admission of fact.” Although the existence of a triable issue must be determined without weighing the evidence, the court may engage in a limited weighing of the evidence when it considers the interests of justice of the case (*Mand v. Cheema*, 2023 BCSC

1388). In applying that test, all the circumstances should be taken into account, including the following:

- that the admission has been made inadvertently, hastily, or without knowledge of the facts;
- that the fact admitted was not within the knowledge of the party making the admission;
- that the fact admitted is not true;
- that the fact admitted mixes fact and law;
- that the withdrawal of the admission would not prejudice a party; and
- that there has been no delay in applying to withdraw the admission.

Munster & Sons was decided under the former Rules, but the test has since been applied to the SCCR (*Sidhu v. Hothi*, 2014 BCCA 510). Admissions of fact are not lightly set aside (*Lam v. U.B.C.*, 2012 BCSC 670).

[§3.09] Discovery in Fast Track Litigation

Proceeding under the fast track provisions in SCCR 15-1 means that counsel can access fewer pre-trial processes. This restrictive measure aims to ensure that the value of a claim is not eclipsed by the time spent and costs incurred in litigation. In accordance with this objective, the scope of the discovery process is narrower for actions brought under SCCR 15-1.

The requirements for discovery of documents in SCCR 7-1 apply equally to an action that proceeds under SCCR 15-1. Pre-trial examination of a witness pursuant to SCCR 7-5 and the requirement to serve a list of witnesses also apply to a fast track action. However, a party's right to conduct an examination for discovery in a fast track action is limited under SCCR 15-1(11), which provides that, unless otherwise ordered by the court or consented to by the person to be examined, the examination for discovery of a party of record must not exceed two hours in total. SCCR 15-1(12) further provides that all examinations for discovery in fast track litigation must be completed at least 14 days before the scheduled trial, except by court order or consent.

For more on fast track litigation, see §2.10.

Chapter 4

Chambers Practice¹

[§4.01] Matters Heard in Chambers

1. Jurisdiction

Matters heard in chambers comprise a large part of a civil litigation practice.

All pre-trial applications that would not result in a final disposition of the matter (generally called “interlocutory” applications) are heard in chambers, except for those heard during trial. All petition proceedings, all requisition proceedings requiring a hearing, and all applications for summary judgment are heard in chambers (SCCR 22-1).

The procedures for chambers applications in civil proceedings are set out in SCCR 8-1, 8-2, 16-1 and 22-1. The starting point for all chambers applications is to determine the legal basis for the order sought. The majority of chambers applications are based on the SCCR. Always consider and review the rule governing the application you intend to make.

The order you seek must be one the court has jurisdiction to make. In identifying the order you seek, determine whether that order must be made by a judge, or if an associate judge can make that order.

Many chambers applications are heard and decided by associate judges. Associate judges are court officials appointed under the *Supreme Court Act*. Note that prior to January 15, 2024, associate judges were referred to as “masters.” Associate judges have more limited jurisdiction than judges. Generally, an associate judge will hear:

- (a) all interlocutory applications authorized by the SCCR, whether contested or not;
- (b) applications that will result in final orders where no determination of fact or law is required; and
- (c) uncontested foreclosure petitions.

The jurisdiction of an associate judge is founded in s. 11.3(2) of the *Supreme Court Act* and in SCCR 23-6, with further directions in Supreme Court Practice Direction PD-50—*Associate Judges’ Jurisdiction*.

Examples of orders an associate judge does not have jurisdiction to make are orders for contempt, orders based on the inherent jurisdiction of the court, and orders granting injunctive relief, except certain interim orders in family law cases (see the Practice Direction).

The party setting down the hearing must indicate on the notice of application whether or not the application is within the jurisdiction of an associate judge. If a notice does not indicate whether the application is within the jurisdiction of an associate judge, the registry will generally treat it as if it is (AN-1—*Document Filing Standards*, s. 8).

Address an associate judge as “Your Honour.” Address a judge as “Madam Justice,” “Mr. Justice,” or “Justice,” as the context requires (see PD-64—*Form of Address*). Judges include their preferred address in the list of judges on the Supreme Court website (www.bccourts.ca/supreme_court/) (under “About the Supreme Court”).

2. When to Apply

Applications in chambers are normally made after a proceeding has been commenced. However, there are rare occasions—pre-judgment garnishing orders are an example—when applications can be made in an “intended action” before the action is even commenced.

SCCR 8-1(5) provides that an application must be set for 9:45 a.m. on a date on which the court hears applications. In Vancouver, there are sittings of both associate judge’s chambers and judge’s chambers on almost every court day. Both Victoria and New Westminster also have associate judges or judges hearing chambers matters on many (but not all) days. Counsel should consult with the particular registry to find out on what days there will be chambers sittings—in some registries there may only be chambers sittings once a week or sometimes even less often. In those circumstances, keep in mind that an application may be set for hearing at another registry within the same “judicial district” in which the proceeding was commenced (SCCR 8-2(1) and *Supreme Court Act* s. 8(1)). Thus, for example, an application in an action filed in the Vernon registry may be set for hearing at chambers in Kelowna. (Note that information is available on scheduling for each registry at www.bccourts.ca/.)

¹ **Jaspreet S. Malik** and **Ravneet K. Diocee** of South Fraser Law Group kindly revised this chapter in December 2024. It was previously revised by Jaspreet S. Malik and Melorin Naimi (2023); Jaspreet S. Malik and Ravneet K. Diocee (2022); Gurminder Sandhu and Kelsey Croft (2021); Gurminder Sandhu, Andrew Scarth, and Joshua Ingram (2019); H. William Veenstra (periodically from March 2002–2009, and in 2010 and 2017); Craig P. Dennis (1998–2000); Leonard M. Cohen (1996) and Mark M. Skorah (1995).

A few days are set aside each year for judicial conferences, when there are no regular chambers sittings.

When the action is proceeding under SCCR 15-1 (fast track litigation), SCCR 15-1(7) prohibits most interlocutory applications until after a case planning conference or trial management conference has been held. SCCR 15-1(8) lists the exceptions to SCCR 15-1(7), and SCCR 15-1(9) allows a judge or associate judge to relieve a party from the requirements of SCCR 15-1(7).

[§4.02] Procedure on Chambers Applications

1. Applications Without an Oral Hearing

A party can obtain some orders without an oral hearing: these are often referred to as “desk orders.” When all parties affected by an order in an action consent, SCCR 8-3 sets out the procedure. When the nature of the application in an action is such that notice need not be given, SCCR 8-4 governs. Similar rules apply to proceedings that, pursuant to SCCR 2-1(2), are commenced by petition or requisition, and are either consented to by all parties or do not require notice (SCCR 17-1).

To apply for a desk order, file a requisition, a draft order, and supporting material or evidence of consent to the application. There is no restriction on the type of order that may be made by desk order, but the material filed must satisfy the judge or associate judge that the application is appropriate for proceeding in that manner. If the registrar, associate judge or judge has concerns about the application, then the application may be rejected or, in appropriate cases, a judge or associate judge may give directions, including a direction that the application be spoken to (SCCR 8-3(3) and 17-1(5)).

Among the more frequent grounds for rejection of desk orders are:

- in the case of a consent order, a party of record has not consented and it is not clear to the registrar that the party is not affected by it;
- the court believes that notice must be given; or
- the draft order is unclear or makes little sense.

In some situations, counsel will make an application in chambers even if it could usually be handled by desk order—for example, where the application is urgent and cannot wait for the ordinary processing of desk orders, or where the order sought is complex or unusual and requires some explanation. SCCR 8-1(2) contemplates this possibility. The procedure for these applications is set out in the next section.

2. Preparing an Application for Chambers

The bulk of chambers applications are dealt with by way of a hearing. Applications to be heard in chambers are initiated by a notice of application in Form 32 for interlocutory applications in proceedings (SCCR 8-1(3) and (4)), or by petition in Form 66 for proceedings referred to in SCCR 2-1(2) (SCCR 16-1(2)). The discussion in this section focuses on the procedure for initiating an application by notice of application. The procedure for dealing with an application by petition, which is similar, is briefly discussed in §4.02(10). In addition to these rules, pay close attention to Administrative Notices and Practice Directions from the Supreme Court.

(a) Notice of Application

Most chambers applications are initiated by a notice of application in Form 32. The most important element of a notice of application is the list of the order(s) sought. Counsel should state, with precision, the order requested (Part 1 of Form 32), with each part of the relief sought in separate numbered paragraphs. A notice of application must also contain:

- (i) a brief summary of the factual basis for the application (Part 2);
- (ii) the legal basis for the application (Part 3), including the rule, enactment or other jurisdictional authority relied on for the orders sought, and a brief summary of the legal arguments on which the orders sought should be granted (including, if appropriate, citation of applicable cases); and
- (iii) a list of the affidavits and other documents the applicant intends to rely on (Part 4).

The rules prescribe a ten-page limit for the notice of application (SCCR 8-1(4)). This rule is not always strictly enforced by the court registry. Instead of setting out the orders sought in the notice of application form, the applicant can attach a draft of the order sought. This draft order does not count toward the ten-page limit (SCCR 8-1(4)).

However, if more than ten pages are required for a notice of application, the matter should be brought in “long chambers” (*Anonson v. Insurance Corporation of British Columbia*, 2020 BCSC 2039; *Arbutus Investment Management Ltd. v. Russell*, 2021 BCSC 1496). Long chambers proceedings exceed two hours and are booked through the registry.

Lawyers should keep in mind that the factual summary is just that—a summary—and the

affidavits themselves may contain a more fulsome explanation of the underlying facts.

The “legal basis” section should fully disclose the argument to be made in chambers. This rule is meant to prevent the application respondent from being caught by surprise by the applicant’s argument. It is also meant to ensure parties understand the basic arguments being made on the application so that they can have informed discussions and possibly resolve the application without attending court (see *Boury v. Iten*, 2019 BCCA 81 at paras. 31–33 and 62). In *Zecher v. Josh*, 2011 BCSC 311, Master Bouck stated (at paras. 30–33):

No doubt the *Lieutenant Governor-in-Council* intended Part 3 of Form 32 to contain more than a cursory listing of the *Rules* that might support the particular application. For example, common law authorities can and should be included as well as a brief legal analysis. Such an analysis is particularly helpful given that parties are not able to present a separate written argument in civil chambers unless the application is scheduled to take two hours or more of court time.

In *Dupre v. Patterson*, 2013 BCSC 1561, Madam Justice Adair agreed with Master Bouck’s comments concerning what the “legal basis” section of the notice of application should contain:

The argument to be made in chambers should be fully disclosed and should contain more than a cursory listing of the rules that might support the particular application.

Many lawyers include a statement in a notice of application that the “pleadings and proceedings herein” will be relied upon. Such a statement serves no useful purpose and does not discharge a party’s responsibility to list the material to be relied upon (*Keenoy v. Keenoy* (1921), 59 D.L.R. 699 (Sask. Q.B.)).

Similarly, the inclusion in the list of affidavits to be relied upon of words like “such further and other material as counsel may advise” is redundant. The rule requires that all material be listed, so a party seeking to rely on other information would have to obtain leave to introduce that other information and explain why it was not originally included. That party runs the risk of the court refusing to consider the new material or, alternatively, of the court granting an adjournment to the opposing party on the basis that proper notice was not given (see *Leskun v. Leskun*, 2004 BCCA 422; *Boury v. Iten*, 2019 BCCA 81 at para. 63).

It is clear that the court *may* rely on material not specified in a notice of application, either generally or under SCCR 22-1(4)(e). See *Lackmanec v. Hoffman* (1982), 133 D.L.R. (3d) 502 (Sask. C.A.); aff’g (1980), 15 Sask. R. 10 (Q.B.) (statement of claim, collective agreement and union constitution looked at) and *Nichols v. Gray* (1978), 9 B.C.L.R. 5 (C.A.) (statements of counsel at hearing held admissible as “other evidence” under the predecessor to SCCR 22-1(4)(e)). However, the court is not required to do so if other parties will be prejudiced.

A notice of application must also specify the date and place for the hearing of the application. The date must be at least eight business days after the notice of application is filed and served, or 12 business days in the case of an application under SCCR 9-7 (i.e. a summary trial) (SCCR 8-1(8)).

Counsel must be realistic as to the time it will take for parties to respond. Counsel also should keep in mind that applications that will require more than two hours to be heard must be booked with the court registry on days when the registry expects to have judges available (SCCR 8-1(6)). (See §4.02(5) below.) As not all registries have chambers hearings every business day, in registries other than Vancouver it is important to ensure that there will be a judge or associate judge sitting in chambers on the day you select.

The place an application is to be heard is dealt with in SCCR 8-2. Normally an application is heard in the registry in which an action was commenced, but SCCR 8-2(1) permits an application to be heard at any other registry in the same judicial district, or at any other registry to which all parties consent. However, an applicant who selects an inappropriate location may face costs consequences (SCCR 8-2(3)).

Counsel is responsible for preparing any evidence required at the hearing of the application. Evidence on chambers applications is usually given by affidavit, but the court can receive other forms of evidence (*Vernon v. BC (Liquor Distribution Branch)*, 2010 BCSC 1688 at para. 12; SCCR 22-1(4)). See §4.03 for a full discussion of affidavit drafting. The court is empowered by SCCR 22-1(4) to hear the oral testimony of a witness, but this seldom occurs. Documents other than affidavits that are frequently included in chambers materials are pleadings, previous orders, previous reasons for judgment and, for applications under SCCR 9-7, notices to admit, discovery transcripts and expert reports.

Once counsel has finalized the written material needed for the application, the notice of application and all affidavits (that have not already been served for a prior application) must be filed in the court registry and then served, along with any notice that the applicant is required to give under SCCR 9-7(9), on each party of record and any other person who may be affected by the order sought (SCCR 8-1(7)).

If the nature of the application is such that there is nobody to whom notice must be given (*ex parte*), but it is not being dealt with by way of desk order, there is no need for service of the application. Alternatively, if an application is served and none of the respondents choose to respond to it, then it may also be set down without further notice. Such an application would still have to be filed in accordance with applicable filing windows (or grounds given for urgency). Counsel would appear in court on the date specified and explain the basis for the application. In the event of an application without notice, counsel should also be prepared to deal with any questions as to whether notice should have been given.

SCCR 4-1(1) mandates that a party who is represented by counsel must have both an email address for service and an accessible address that is an office address of that lawyer. This means that the application materials (and response materials) may be served via email.

(b) Application Response

In most cases, notice will have to be given to at least one other party. Any person who wishes to respond to an application must prepare an application response in Form 33 as well as any responsive affidavits needed to support the application response.

The application response will indicate, for each order sought on the notice of application, whether the application respondent consents, opposes, or takes no position with respect to such order. It will also contain a brief summary of the factual and legal bases on which the orders opposed should not be granted, to which the same approach should be taken as in a notice of application. The application response must also list the affidavits and other documents on which the application respondent will rely.

The application response is subject to the same ten-page limit as the notice of application (SCCR 8-1(10)). If the application respondent has not already provided an address for service in the proceeding, it must do so on its application response (SCCR 8-1(11)).

The application response, as well as originals of any supporting affidavits that have not already been filed, must be filed in the court registry within five business days after service of the notice of application, or eight business days in the case of an application under SCCR 9-7 (SCCR 8-1(9)).

The application respondent must also serve on the applicant, within the same time limits, *two* copies of, and on every other party of record, *one* copy of, the filed application response, the filed affidavits and documents referred to in the application response that have not already been served, and if the application is brought under SCCR 9-7, any notice that the application respondent is required to give under SCCR 9-7(9) (SCCR 8-1(9)).

(c) Reply Materials

The original applicant may serve reply affidavits on the other parties no later than 4:00 p.m. on the business day that is one full business day before the day set for the hearing (SCCR 8-1(13)).

Reply affidavits should be responsive to matters raised in the application respondent's affidavits, and should not be used to put forward evidence that should have been included in the original application. Reply evidence cannot be used to repair defects in the original materials. Such a practice violates the rule against case splitting (*Tietz v. Affinor Growers Inc.*, 2022 BCCA 307; *L.M.U. v. R.L.U.*, 2004 BCSC 95; *Century Group Lands Corporation v. Galitos Investments Inc. dba Tsawwassen Athletic Club*, 2022 BCSC 1313). It is not necessary to repeat evidence that appears already in the affidavits originally served with the application.

Without a court order or consent of all parties, no party may serve further affidavits beyond those served with the application response and in accordance with SCCR 8-1(7), (9) and (13).

(d) Application Record

An application record combines all of the documents the court will need to refer to in a convenient bound format and is intended to make chambers proceedings more efficient.

The applicant must file an application record with the registry between 9:00 a.m. on the business day that is three full business days before the date set for hearing and 4:00 p.m. on the business day that is one full business day before the date set for the hearing (or if an earlier date is fixed by a registrar, on or before that date) (SCCR 8-1(15)(e)). Unless the court otherwise

orders, if the application record is not filed by the deadline, the application will be removed from the hearing list (SCCR 8-1(15.2)). Applicants can apply for leave to permit late filing of the application record (SCCR 8-1(15.3) and to apply for an order that the application be reinstated to the hearing list (SCCR 8-1(15.4)).

Since the application record is what is seen by the judge or associate judge deciding the application, its contents are key. It is customary to circulate a draft index among counsel in advance for comment. In any event, the applicant must serve the index to the application record on all parties by 4:00 p.m. on the business day that is one full business day before the hearing (SCCR 8-1(17)). Typically, all parties will prepare a binder of their own with materials organized in the same manner as the version that is to be used by the judge or associate judge.

The application record must contain (SCCR 8-1(15) and Administrative Notice AN-19):

- (i) a cover page, including:
 - a. the style of proceedings, court file number, and registry;
 - b. a brief description of the nature of the material;
 - c. contact information for counsel or the parties, including a telephone number and a fax number or email address, which may be used by the registry for contact purposes;
 - d. the date, time, and place of the hearing;
 - e. the names of the lawyers appearing for the applicant and application respondents; and
 - f. the time estimate for the hearing;
- (ii) an index;
- (iii) filed copies of the notice of application and any application responses; and
- (iv) copies of every filed affidavit and pleading, and every other document other than a written argument, that is to be relied on at the hearing.

There are certain items that an application record *may* contain, but which are not mandatory (SCCR 8-1(15)(c)). They include a draft order, a list of authorities, a draft bill of costs, and (if permitted or the hearing is estimated to take more than two hours) a written argument. The application record should not include affidavits

of service or copies of authorities (SCCR 8-1(15)(d)).

The contents of the application record must be either consecutively numbered throughout the document or separated by tabs. The application record must be contained in a three-ring binder, cerlox bound, or placed in some comparable secure binding (SCCR 8-1(15)(a) and (b)). Note that under SCCR 8-1(15.1), an extra copy of the filed notice of application must be provided to the registry with the application record. The extra copy should be separate from and not bound with the application record, and should be highlighted or marked to indicate which of the orders listed in Part 1 will be spoken to at the hearing. (Similar requirements are set out in SCCR 16-1(11.1) for providing an extra copy of the filed petition at the time of filing the petition record.)

If there are cross-applications being heard at the same time, then the parties should, so far as is possible, prepare a joint application record for both applications (SCCR 8-1(18)).

If the application is a summary trial application under SCCR 9-7, then *all* filed pleadings should be included in the application record (SCCR 8-1(15)(b)(vi)).

The application record will normally be returned to the applicant at the conclusion of the hearing (unless judgment is reserved or the hearing is adjourned) (SCCR 8-1(19)). Only the filed original documents will be retained in the court file.

If an application is adjourned after the application record has been filed, the applicant should retrieve the application record and refile it in accordance with the filing window for the new hearing date.

(e) Written Argument

Both the notice of application and application response require inclusion of a summary of the facts and legal argument supporting or opposing the application. These arguments will be read by the other side in advance, allowing them to adequately respond, and they may also be read by the judge or associate judge in advance of the application (depending on when the judge or associate judge was assigned to hear the application). Note, however, that in many cases the judge or associate judge hearing an application will have little or no opportunity to review the materials, so counsel should not assume that anything has been read before the hearing commences.

SCCR 8-1(16) prohibits the parties from providing any further written arguments to the court, except when the application is estimated to take more than two hours. This rule is intended to prevent parties from holding back on their true position until the last minute, and to avoid any need for adjournments caused by parties being taken by surprise.

Where applications are estimated to take more than two hours, it is likely that the ten-page limit on the notice of application and application response will be inadequate to fully explore the underlying facts and legal issues. In many complex applications, the parties will agree to exchange written arguments in advance of the hearing, or they may already have a good understanding of the positions that are to be taken by each side. In those cases, it is permissible to file written arguments at the hearing.

In *Labrecque v. Tyler*, 2011 BCSC 429, Master Bouck stated:

Since July 1, 2010 and pursuant to Rule 8-1(16), a written argument may only be presented to the court if the application consumes more than two hours. There is no discretion under the Rule to receive written argument in other circumstances. The application was estimated to be heard in 35 minutes but took one hour. Thus, no written argument can or should have been considered by the court.

However, see *Simon Fraser University v. A&A Plumbing & Heating Ltd.*, 2011 BCSC 1507, which suggested that some written submissions may be permissible.

3. Calculating Time

In order to understand and meet deadlines, counsel must know how to calculate time limits under the SCCR. The calculation of time is governed by SCCR 22-4(1) and s. 25 of the *Interpretation Act*.

If the time period prescribed by the SCCR or a court order is *less than seven days*, holidays do not count in calculating time (SCCR 22-4(1)). “Holidays” mean Sundays as well as many statutory holidays (*Interpretation Act*, s. 29). Note that Saturdays are always counted, except in the fairly rare instances when Saturday is a statutory holiday.

If the time period is *seven days or more*, all days (including holidays and Sundays) are counted.

The particular words used to describe the time period also affect how time must be calculated (*Interpretation Act* s. 25.2–25.4):

- If the time is expressed as “clear days,” “clear weeks,” “clear months,” or “clear years,” or as

“at least” or “not less than” a number of days, weeks, months or years, then the first and the last days are excluded (not counted) in calculating time.

- Otherwise, the first day is excluded and the last day is included.

Some time limits are described in terms of “business days.” The SCCR define a “business day” as “a day on which the court registries are open for business” (SCCR 1-1(1)). This means every day except Saturdays and holidays (which by definition include Sundays) (SCCR 23-1(2)).

When documents are served after 4:00 p.m. on a particular day, they are deemed to have been served on the next day that is not a Saturday or a holiday (SCCR 4-2(3) and (6)).

The *Interpretation Act* provides further guidance for when the deadline falls on a day that is a holiday or a day an office is closed (s. 25):

- If the time for doing an act falls on a holiday, the time is extended to the next day that is not a holiday.
- If the time for doing an act in a business office falls on a day that the office is not open during regular business hours, the time is extended to the next day that the office is open.

4. Applications for Short Notice or to Extend Time

The time limits set by the SCCR may not be appropriate in every circumstance. In urgent cases a party may ask the court to allow that party to bring its application sooner than the regular time limits for notice provide. Alternatively, there might be a reason why counsel needs more time.

The usual practice is for counsel for a party seeking a reduction (or extension) of time limits to first approach counsel for the other parties. If the parties cannot agree, a judge or associate judge when deciding an application to reduce or extend time limits will balance such matters as the urgency of an application, its complexity, and the prejudice to the parties arising from delay or lack of time to respond.

The general jurisdiction of the court to extend or shorten time limits is found in SCCR 22-4(2). However, there is a specific provision for short notice applications (SCCR 8-5). The application is generally brought in a summary manner by filing a requisition in Form 17.1 (SCCR 8-5(2)). The requisition should append the main application to be heard. As with a regular application, counsel must file an application record in the proper format (SCCR 8-1(15)); it is not necessary to include the materials to be relied upon for the main application. Once the requisition is filed, the short notice

application will then be added to the hearing list for the same day. On a short notice application, the court will typically fix the date and time for the main application to be heard and set a schedule for the exchange of documents (SCCR 8-5(4)).

A party seeking short notice must establish that the application is urgent enough that it would be inappropriate to make the applicant wait for the normally applicable time limits to expire. Although the application may be made without notice (SCCR 8-5(2)), it is customary to advise other parties that short notice will be sought. A judge or associate judge hearing such an application may ask what each party's position is on the matter, and whether the other parties are available on the proposed hearing date. The opposing party may have good reasons to oppose an application for short notice—for example, the client or counsel may require the full time allowed in order to properly respond, or may argue that the substantive application is not urgent and need not proceed on an urgent basis. See Master Baker's decision in *O'Callaghan v. Hengsbach*, 2017 BCSC 2182 at paras. 18 and 19, for a summary of considerations in short notice applications.

A party seeking an extension of time must establish that the ordinary time limit is insufficient. It is prudent to seek an extension of time before the time frame has expired, but the passing of the ordinary time frame is not a bar to seeking an extension (SCCR 22-4(2)).

The applicant seeking short notice must allow the responding party sufficient time to respond. In *Henry v. Fontaine*, 2022 BCSC 733 at para. 12, Master Robertson denied the applicant short leave (as it was then known):

[T]here is some irony in the fact that they are seeking to bring forth an application with the plaintiff having only one or two business days to respond, despite being unable themselves to prepare the materials in seven or eight days. Quite simply, defence counsel has not been exhibiting the sense of urgency that they ask this court to find exists in order to grant short leave.

5. Setting Matters Down in Chambers

Most applications with a time estimate of two hours or less are heard in regular chambers and are scheduled for hearing in a chambers courtroom along with numerous other similar applications set for two hours or less.

An application that is estimated to take more than two hours ("long chambers") is not heard in regular chambers. SCCR 8-1(6) requires that a hearing date be fixed by a registrar. Note that effective January 1, 2026, dates for lengthy chambers applications will

be booked using the Court Online Booking System (COBS).

It is common to have to wait several weeks for a hearing date. However, in cases of urgency it may be possible to obtain an earlier date.

Because the court registries anticipate that a substantial portion of the cases set for hearing will not proceed—either because of settlement or for some other reason—it is unfortunately also common to find that there are not enough judges to hear all scheduled applications when the hearing date arrives. If this happens, the application will be scheduled for the next available date that is convenient for all counsel. If it is anticipated that the application will take longer than one hour but less than two hours, it is useful for all counsel to discuss alternative dates ahead of time in case the application is not heard on the hearing date.

Hearings will also be booked through the court registry, whether or not the time estimate is over two hours, if a particular judge or associate judge is seized of a matter and is to hear further applications. To set down an application before the judge or associate judge who is seized, follow the procedure in Practice Direction PD-18—*Request to Appear Before a Specific Judge, Associate Judge or Registrar*. This procedure eliminates the need in most cases to write letters to the court. In those cases where communication with the court is required, follow the guidelines set out in Practice Direction PD-27—*Communicating with the Court*.

In case of emergency, urgent civil and family applications that cannot wait to be heard on the next scheduled chambers day may be arranged to be heard after-hours at the Vancouver Law Courts. See AN-15—*Emergency After-Hours Applications in Vancouver*.

6. Adjournments

Not every hearing will go ahead on the date specified in the original notice of application. It may be that the parties end up agreeing to do some or all of what was sought in the application, or it may be that the application is not ready to be heard on the date set out originally. In those cases, provided that all parties who were to appear at the hearing agree, the application can be removed from the chambers hearing list by way of a requisition "adjourning" the application. It is important to specify on the requisition that it is made "By Consent"—the registry will not accept a requisition adjourning an application unless it so provides.

A consent adjournment may be made:

- (a) until 9:00 a.m. of the day set for hearing, by filing a requisition (either by filing at the

registry during regular hours or by fax filing);
or

- (b) after 9:00 a.m., communicated in person in the chambers courtroom.

Adjournments made in person should be followed up with a filed requisition so that the court file properly reflects the course of events.

A matter may be adjourned “generally”—that is, to no fixed date—or it may be adjourned to a specific date. A matter that is adjourned generally may be re-scheduled by way of a further requisition that refers to the earlier notice of application, that it was adjourned generally, and that it should be reset.

In many cases the parties will agree to an adjournment. Even if a party is not happy to have a matter delayed, it makes sense to agree to an adjournment (and reduces costs to all parties) if it is obvious that the hearing would be adjourned in any event.

If not all parties agree to an adjournment, the party seeking an adjournment will have to attend court and apply to the judge or associate judge who was to hear the application for an order adjourning the application. If you are in regular chambers, you should advise the court clerk that there will be an adjournment application (give a time estimate) and then, if the adjournment is not granted, argument on the main application. In many cases, depending on time estimates, any adjournment applications will be heard early in the day and separately from argument on the main application.

7. The Day of the Hearing

Each day in chambers, the registry staff prepare a chambers list of applications scheduled for the day. All applications scheduled for regular chambers state that they are to be heard at 9:45 a.m.

You should arrive by 9:45 a.m. and check in with the clerk in the courtroom. The clerk will deal with consent adjournments and confirm time estimates for applications that will proceed. This is also a convenient time for opposing counsel to discuss whether it is possible to agree about all or part of the application. The judge or associate judge will enter the chambers at 10:00 a.m. The usual practice is for uncontested applications to be heard first, then contested applications with the order of hearing determined by the time estimates (the shortest applications heard first). Most counsel wait in or near the courtroom because, from time to time (particularly in Vancouver or New Westminster), longer applications will be referred to other judges or associate judges who become available.

In more complex applications, the party initiating the hearing should provide an “Appearance List” setting out the names of all parties and counsel

(Practice Direction PD-44—*Requirement for Appearance List*). This applies in various circumstances: for example, if there are more than three parties, or more than six counsel, or if two or more proceedings are involved in the application.

Effective chambers advocacy—how you present your application—is dealt with in §4.04 below.

At the conclusion of the hearing, consider whether you need to ask for a specific order as to costs. (For the types of orders that may be made, see Chapter 8.)

8. Fax and Electronic Filing

Many documents are filed by manually filing paper copies at the court registry during regular business hours. However, SCCR 23-2 and 23-3 provide for filing of documents by fax or by electronic filing. Note that fax filing is only available for certain registries, and electronic filing is only available to persons who have entered into electronic services agreements with the Court Services Branch. Not all documents can be filed under these rules. In particular, an application record cannot be filed electronically (SCCR 23-3(5)(b)(ii)).

9. Summary Trial

SCCR 9-7 allows the court to decide a case or an issue based on affidavits, transcripts, and other written evidence. SCCR 9-7 is discussed in detail in §5.04.

While an application for a summary trial generally follows the same procedure as other chambers applications, it is worth noting that the applicant must give the respondent 12 business days’ notice in advance of the hearing date instead of eight business days’ notice (SCCR 8-1(8)).

10. Petition Proceedings

SCCR 2-1(2) requires certain applications to be made by petition or requisition (generally, proceedings concerning estates, trusts, interests in property or construction of documents). When all parties consent or the proceeding does not require notice, the proceeding can be started by requisition—that process is described in §4.02(1), above. Otherwise, a proceeding listed in SCCR 2-1(2) is commenced by petition in Form 66.

Typically, petition proceedings are heard and decided based on affidavit evidence. The petition and all supporting affidavits must be filed and then served on all persons whose interests may be affected by the order sought (SCCR 16-1(3)). A petition respondent served with a petition has 21 days to prepare, file, and serve on the petitioner two copies of a response to petition (Form 67), together with

any affidavits the petition respondent intends to rely on at the hearing (SCCR 16-1(4) and (5)). (The time is longer if the petition respondent resides outside of Canada.) The petitioner may then file and serve affidavits in response and set the matter down for hearing, giving at least seven days' notice of the hearing (SCCR 16-1(6) and (8)).

SCCR 16-1 requires that the applicant prepare and file a petition record (SCCR 16-1(11)). The petitioner must file the petition record with the registry between 9:00 a.m. on the business day that is three full business days before the date set for hearing and 4:00 p.m. on the business day that is one full business day before the date set for the hearing, or if an earlier date is fixed by a registrar, on or before that date (SCCR 16-1(11)(e)).

If a petition is contested and there are disputes of a nature that cannot be resolved based simply on the documents that have been filed, the court has the discretion to order a trial (SCCR 22-1(7)(d)). The factors to be considered by the court in referring a petition to the trial list are discussed in *Cepuran v. Carlton*, 2022 BCCA 76 at paras. 160–166.

[§4.03] Affidavit Drafting²

1. Form and Use of Affidavits

Most chambers applications will be supported by an affidavit or affidavits providing evidence as to the facts on which the application is based.

An affidavit is a written statement of evidence sworn by the person giving the evidence (called the “deponent” or the “affiant”) before a person authorized to take affidavits. The general law of evidence and the SCCR permit (and sometimes require) the use of affidavits in legal proceedings. There is, however, no formal definition of an affidavit in the SCCR. There is a definition in s. 29 of the *Interpretation Act*, but it merely states that the term affidavit or oath “includes an affirmation, a statutory declaration, or a solemn declaration made under the *Evidence Act*, or under the *Canada Evidence Act*.”

A court relies on affidavit evidence in the same way as it relies on oral testimony. Accordingly, counsel should take care when preparing affidavits to ensure that the affidavit tells the true story (*Rummens v. Cecil* (1910), 129 L.T. Jo. 263 (Ch. D.)). The purpose of an affidavit is not only to tell the true and full story, but to set out all relevant facts before the court. Affidavits should contain only facts, not in-

admissible legal arguments, or accusations (see *Cretu v. Cretu*, 2022 BCSC 305 at paras. 13–16).

SCCR 22-2 sets out certain requirements as to form for affidavits. Those requirements do not necessarily apply to affidavits required under other enactments. An affidavit sworn in a foreign jurisdiction or one that meets the requirements of a particular proceeding authorized by statute might not satisfy all the requirements of SCCR 22-2 (see SCCR 22-2(14) as well as *Banque d'Hochelaga v. Hayden* (1922), 63 D.L.R. 514 (Alta. C.A.)). An affidavit sworn in a foreign jurisdiction which does not meet the requirements of SCCR 22-2 may not be filed by the registry. Generally, the formal requirements of the SCCR may be varied if appropriate (SCCR 22-3(1)), without invalidating the document's validity (SCCR 22-7(1)).

2. Swearing or Affirming

The words “swear” or “affirm” in the introductory paragraph of an affidavit mean that the person making the affidavit is swearing an oath in the same manner as a witness testifying orally in court.

At one time, a notary public or commissioner would administer the oath in the same manner as a court clerk, with the deponent holding a Bible and assenting to the oath. Today, these formalities are not usually observed. A recommended procedure is set out in §4.03(10)(c).

On what constitutes swearing or affirming an affidavit, see *Owen v. Yorke*, [1985] B.C.D. Civ. 1231-03 (S.C.):

What constitutes the swearing or affirming of an affidavit? Is it sufficient merely to have the document signed, as occurred in this case before me? ...

I do not for one minute state that what is required are some specific words engraved in granite; indeed not. What is required, though, is that the person swearing or affirming is asked and replies to some simple fundamental inquiry as to the veracity of the content. Some such inquiry is necessary. I repeat, nothing elaborate; no Bible is necessary, no elaborate ceremony, but, rather, a simple inquiry which places some special meaning to the document that is complete. What we have in the case at bar is at best the witnessing of a signature ... That is not enough. The Respondent's argument that the document itself is the legal act can't be successful. The affixing of the signature does not end the process, something further is required ...

The integrity of the procedure of swearing or affirming an affidavit is so fundamental that such procedures are not to be compromised.

² Subsections 1 to 11 of this section were originally based on a paper entitled “The Written Material,” prepared by Professor James P. Taylor for the CLE publication, *Chambers Practice* (February 1987).

Like witnesses in court, persons who do not wish to swear an oath may make a solemn affirmation instead (the *Evidence Act* (British Columbia) and *Canada Evidence Act*, s. 14).

Generally, the standard form affidavit states the following: “I, [deponent], [address], SWEAR (OR AFFIRM)...”. Before an affidavit is sworn or affirmed, the deponent’s chosen method must be indicated. The failure to indicate which method binds the conscience of the deponent results in a defective affidavit (*PKS v. ANR*, 2024 BCSC 2110 at para. 77). This means the words in the usual introductory paragraph and the jurat should be changed before the affidavit is sworn or affirmed (for example, if the deponent is swearing, then use “I, [deponent], [address], SWEAR THAT” in the opening and “SWORN BEFORE ME” in the jurat). For more suggested wording see the Affidavit Precedents at the end of this chapter.

The court has discretion to allow defective affidavits under SCCR 22-2(14) and the *Evidence Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 124, s. 67. Despite this, counsel should take precautions to ensure the deponent’s chosen method is properly indicated.

3. When an Affidavit May Be Sworn or Affirmed

Generally, an affidavit is made and filed in a proceeding that has already commenced. However, an affidavit may also be made before the proceeding commences (SCCR 22-2(15)). In such a case, to ensure that the court is not misled into thinking that a proceeding has been commenced, it is customary to mark the affidavit header as “In the matter of an intended proceeding.”

4. Parts of an Affidavit

(a) Style of Proceeding

An affidavit is headed with the style of proceeding, which may be abbreviated under SCCR 22-3(5) to name only the first plaintiff, defendant and other party, if any, followed by the words “and others.” The abbreviation “et al.” is no longer used. Ensure that the registry location and file number are included.

Each affidavit must be endorsed, in the top right-hand corner of the first page, above the style of proceeding, with the first and last name of the deponent, the sequential number indicating whether it is the first, second, third, etc. affidavit of that specific deponent, and the date on which the affidavit was made (SCCR 22-2(3)).

(b) Introductory Paragraph

An affidavit is expressed in the first person and shows the name, occupation and address of the deponent (SCCR 22-2(2)(a)). If the deponent has good reason to keep their address secret, it should be expressed as being in care of the appropriate party’s address for service. If the deponent is retired, unemployed or has no particular occupation, state this. There is a distinction between an occupation, which refers to vocational function (that is, nurse, carpenter, lawyer), and employment, which refers to the deponent’s employer. It is the deponent’s occupation, rather than employment, that is required to be given by SCCR 22-2(2)(a).

5. The Deponent

(a) Person with Direct Knowledge

Wherever possible, an affidavit should be made by a person who has direct knowledge of the facts deposed to (*Campbell v. Bartlett* (1979), 3 W.W.R. 571 (Sask. C.A.)). There are two reasons for this: first, hearsay evidence is not acceptable in certain applications; second, the evidentiary value of direct evidence is always greater than that of hearsay evidence. An affidavit on information and belief invites the inference that the party with direct knowledge is afraid to face cross-examination (*Meridian Printing (1979) Ltd. v. Donald* (1981), 4 W.W.R. 476, 12 Sask. R. 234 (Dist. Ct.)). When extraordinary or discretionary relief such as an injunction is sought, a court may decline to accept hearsay evidence unless there is an explanation as to why first-hand evidence is unavailable (*Litchfield v. Darwin* (1997), 29 B.C.L.R. (3d) 203 (S.C.)).

(b) Corporate Party

A natural person must make an affidavit on behalf of a corporate party. That person must depose to their personal knowledge of the matters contained in the affidavit (*Bank of Montreal v. Brown* (1956), 21 W.W.R. 287 (B.C.S.C.)), unless hearsay evidence is permitted in the circumstances. For suggested wordings, see the Affidavit Precedents (Precedent 3).

(c) Identifying Deponent’s Relationship to Party

When the deponent is a party, or the lawyer, agent, director, officer or employee of a party, this fact must be stated in the body of the affidavit (SCCR 22-2(2)(b)). It is usual to state this in the first paragraph. For suggested wordings, see the Affidavit Precedents (Precedents 3 and 4).

(d) Solicitor on Behalf of Client

For their own convenience and that of their clients, lawyers occasionally swear affidavits, deposing to facts told to them by their clients. When this is done, the body of the affidavit should include a paragraph stating that the deponent is the client's lawyer and that the affidavit is made on behalf of the client.

A lawyer swearing an affidavit on behalf of a client must consider the questions of admissibility and credibility that are involved when an affidavit is made on information and belief. In addition, the lawyer must take care to ensure that tendering the evidence of the lawyer will not effect an inadvertent waiver of solicitor-client privilege. See on this issue *Murao v. Blackcomb Skiing Enterprises Ltd. Partnership*, 2003 BCSC 558 at para. 83 and *Re Mannix Resources*, 2004 BCSC 1315.

The lawyer must also consider whether swearing an affidavit will subsequently restrict that lawyer from acting as counsel in the matter. Consider the rules governing "speaking to one's own affidavit" in section 5.2 of the *BC Code*:

- 5.2-1 A lawyer who appears as advocate must not testify or submit their own affidavit evidence before the tribunal unless
- (a) permitted to do so by law, the tribunal, the rules of court or the rules of procedure of the tribunal;
 - (b) the matter is purely formal or uncontroverted; or
 - (c) it is necessary in the interests of justice for the lawyer to give evidence.

- 5.2-2 A lawyer who is a witness in proceedings must not appear as advocate in any appeal from the decision in those proceedings, unless the matter about which they testified is purely formal or uncontroverted.

(See also the Commentary and Annotations to this section of the *BC Code*.)

The following statement by Judge J.P. van der Hoop, in the CLE publication, *Chambers Practice* (February 1982) reflects the general practice:

I have no objection to a lawyer speaking to his own affidavit. I get a little annoyed, however, when opposing counsel gets up and says I consent to my learned friend speaking to his affidavit and halfway through starts to argue that the facts are not true. The decision the chambers judge must make is whether or not there is any issue arising from the facts as stated in the affidavit. If there is no issue over the facts, then speak to your own affidavit. I real-

ize that frequently you are coming from a firm where you must use your own affidavit or be silent. If there is an issue arising out of the facts stated I do not care how much opposing counsel consents, I will not hear counsel on that affidavit because counsel then turns into a witness as well. That has to be cleared up before the affidavit is referred to.

The following are the reasons advanced against counsel acting as witness:

- (i) If counsel testifies, the court is compelled to assess counsel's credibility as a witness, and this is incompatible with the assumption that counsel, as an officer of the court, meets the ethical requirement of never misleading the court.
- (ii) If counsel testifies, opposing counsel may need to attack their credibility, which is incompatible with the requirement that counsel treat each other with respect and professional courtesy.
- (iii) When the testimony of a witness previously examined by counsel is contradicted by counsel's own testimony, the credibility of the lay witness may be unfairly prejudiced. The credibility of counsel as a witness may be prejudiced because the trier of fact will regard counsel as an interested party. The result will be that counsel's duty to serve the best interests of their client is endangered and they may be compelled to withdraw.

For statements supporting the view of Judge van der Hoop, refer to *Pioneer Lumber Company v. Alberta Lumber Company* (1923), 32 B.C.R. 321 (C.A.), particularly the statements of Martin J.A.

It is clear that a lawyer is competent to testify on behalf of their client. In some cases, counsel is obliged to do so. In *Roland Roy Fourrures Inc. v. Maryland Casualty Co.* (1973), 35 D.L.R. (3d) 591 (S.C.C.), the court found that counsel was obliged under the circumstances to testify to establish that his client's inaccurate answer in a deposition was a misunderstanding rather than perjury. In *obiter*, the court also noted:

Counsel for the appellant was correct in saying that counsel [for the plaintiff] ought to have refrained from taking any part in the trial, not even to provide evidence pertaining to other points in the case. Nor should the judge have tolerated such participation.

Many strong statements have been made condemning the practice of counsel giving

evidence. See, for example, Cartwright J. in *Stanley v. Douglas* (1952), 1 S.C.R. 260 at 274, 4 D.L.R. 689, where he quotes Ritchie C.J. in *Bank of British North America v. McElroy* (1875), 15 N.B.R. 462 (S.C.). See also *National Financial Services Corp. v. Wolverton Securities Ltd* (1998), 52 B.C.L.R. (3d) 302 (S.C.) at para. 7.

6. Body

(a) Format

Form 109 is a standard form of affidavit. However, this form is not mandatory (SCCR 22-2(1)(d)).

The body of the affidavit must be divided into consecutively numbered paragraphs (SCCR 22-2(1)(c)). Some argue that each paragraph of an affidavit should contain only a single sentence. The better rule is that each paragraph should deal with a single matter. Long and complicated paragraphs can create difficulties, particularly when counsel wishes to draw the court's attention to a specific part of a long paragraph.

SCCR 22-2(1)(a) requires that affidavits be in the first person.

(b) Scandalous or Unnecessary Material

At any stage of a proceeding, the court may order any document that is unnecessary, scandalous, frivolous or vexatious to be amended or struck out, either completely or in part (SCCR 9-5(1)). A common error is including arguments in affidavit materials. The court may order the offending affidavit, or relevant sections, to be struck (see *Sermeno v. Trejo*, 2000 BCSC 846; *Chu v. Chen*, 2002 BSC 906; *Kennedy v. Kennedy*, 2006 BCSC 190).

The court may order that the entire affidavit be removed from the file, sealed by the registrar and destroyed after a period of time, or that an offending passage be expunged by the registrar in such a manner as to make it entirely illegible (*Black v. Canadian Copper Co.* (1917), 13 O.W.N. 255 (C.A.)).

(c) Statements on Information and Belief

(i) Final Orders

In general, an affidavit may state only what a person swearing or affirming the affidavit would be permitted to state in evidence at trial (SCCR 22-2(12)). Statements on information and belief are hearsay and when used in an application for a final order they are generally not admissible as proof of the truth of the mat-

ters deposed to. However, if statements on information and belief are not rendered for the truth of their contents, but rather to show that the statements were made, they do not offend the hearsay rule and may be included in applications for final orders. The court has discretion to order statements on information and belief to be entered as evidence in an application for a final order (SCCR 12-5(71)(a), 22-1(4)(e) and 22-2(13)(b)(ii)). See also SCCR 12-5(59) to (65) on the use of affidavits. There is a good general discussion of these issues in *Ulrich v. Ulrich*, 2004 BCSC 95.

In applications for summary judgment, courts have permitted defendants to rely on statements made on information and belief in affidavits in reply on the issue of whether the matter is appropriate for summary resolution. Because a successful defence is often based on facts that emerge only in discovery or at trial, the courts have held that a defendant should not be deprived of the right to defend an action merely because the defendant cannot tender proof of those facts before discovery (*Memphis Rogues Ltd. v. Skalbania* (1982), 38 B.C.L.R. 193, 29 C.P.C. 105 (C.A.)), citing with approval *Federal Business Development Bank v. Pallan* (1978), 9 B.C.L.R. 59 (S.C.)).

(ii) Orders that are not Final Orders

Statements on information and belief are permitted as of right under SCCR 22-2(13) "in respect of an application that does not seek a final order," provided that the source of the information is given. Note that the predecessor to SCCR 22-2(13) used the term "interlocutory orders" to refer to orders that are not final orders.

SCCR 22-2(13) is an enabling rule of general application and is not to be interpreted as restricting other rules or provisions which merely require the person swearing or affirming the affidavit to depose to a belief (*Soucy v. Routhier* (1967), 68 D.L.R. (2d) 154 (S.C.N.B.A.D.)). Even if hearsay evidence is permitted, in certain applications (like injunctions) judges will proceed cautiously when provided with hearsay evidence (*British Columbia v. Malik*, 2011 SCC 18).

(iii) Distinguishing Final Orders from Pre-Trial Orders

As noted above, the predecessor to SCCR 22-2(13) referred to pre-trial orders as “interlocutory orders.” While the current rules seek to eliminate this terminology, it is used in many case authorities. The classic definition of an interlocutory order is found in *Gilbert v. Endean* (1878), 9 Ch. D. 259. The court defined it as an order that maintains the *status quo* or gives directions pending a final order determining the action.

A final order is one that determines the parties’ rights or status. Final orders were identified in *Purewal Blueberry Farm Ltd. v. J.T. Johnson Co.*, 2005 BCCA 30 at para. 6:

To determine whether an order is final, the effect of the order is examined. If the effect is to finally dispose of the rights of the parties, the order will be held to be a final order ... If the order does not finally dispose of the rights between parties, the order will be considered interlocutory.

However, orders that are interlocutory in form may be final in effect. For example, in *Rossage v. Rossage* (1960), 1 All E.R. 600 (C.A.), which concerned an application to suspend visiting rights, statements on information and belief were held to be unacceptable because the order, although interlocutory in form (in that it could be altered at any time in the best interests of the child) was final in effect (in that it decided rights between the parties). The case was cited with approval in *Re CJOR Ltd.* (1965), 53 W.W.R. 633 (B.C.S.C.).

In *Glazer v. Union Contractors Ltd.* (1960), 26 D.L.R. (2d) 349 (B.C.C.A.), the court said that in proceedings such as contempt of court, the issue is not so much whether the proceedings are final or interlocutory as whether they are so severed from the general suit that they are to be treated as something separate in nature and not as incidental to the suit. If so, affidavits on information and belief will not be accepted.

(iv) Source of Information

Even where statements on information and belief are acceptable in affidavits, the source of the information must be given (SCCR 22-2(13)(a)). The source of information should be described in detail and

any facts that enhance the credibility of the source should be given. If the source is not given, the court may disregard the statements in question, or the entire affidavit (*Tate v. Hennessy* (1901), 8 B.C.R. 220 (S.C.); *Scarr v. Gower* (1956), 2 D.L.R. (2d) 402 (B.C.C.A.); *Meier v. C.B.C.* (1981), 28 B.C.L.R. 136 (S.C.); *Albert v. Politano*, 2013 BCCA 194 at paras. 19–23).

Many lawyers include a standard paragraph in all affidavits such as, “I have personal knowledge of all facts deposed to except where stated to be on information provided to me by an identified person and in each such case, I believe the identified person and I believe the statement I make to be true.” This practice can be dangerous because it may mislead deponents and lawyers into thinking that statements made on information and belief can properly be included in all affidavits. Relying on the standard paragraph can also lead lawyers to not provide the source of information that should be described in relation to specific facts. Statements on information and belief are acceptable only in applications for interlocutory orders and in cases where the court grants leave (SCCR 12-5(71), 22-1(4)(e) and 22-2(13)).

The person drafting the affidavit should consider and support each instance of hearsay specifically and individually.

A common error with respect to third party statements is failing to distinguish between third party statements that the deponent heard and believes (and wants the court to believe), and third party statements that the deponent heard but does not believe. The distinction must be made clear.

It is not sufficient to state that the source is a “corporation” without naming a specific person (*Re Mintz; Malouf v. Mintz* (1930), 24 Sask. L.R. 290, 2 D.L.R. 777 (C.A.); *Preiswerck (K.J.) Ltd. v. Los Angeles-Seattle Motor Express Inc.* (1957), 22 W.W.R. 93 (B.C.S.C.)). Generally, an informant’s desire for anonymity is insufficient reason for refusing to name the informant (*Meier v. C.B.C.*). However, if the informant desires anonymity, this should be stated in the affidavit.

When statements on information and belief are permitted, disclosure of the source of the information is the only requirement

imposed by the SCCR. The case of *R. v. Board of Licence Commissioners (Point Grey)* (1913), 18 B.C.R. 648 (C.A.) is sometimes cited for the proposition that evidence on information and belief will not be received unless the deponent's statement on information and belief is corroborated by some person who speaks from their own knowledge. This is not now, and never has been, the law in British Columbia.

(v) Public Interest Exception

In a case filed by a taxpayer involving the public interest, the court accepted an affidavit including statements on information and belief, even where the belief and the grounds of belief were not deposed to, on the basis that an action of this type should not be defeated on technical objections (*Wilin Construction Ltd. v. Dartmouth Hospital Commission* (1977), 75 D.L.R. (3d) 145 (N.S.S.C.A.D.)).

(vi) Double Hearsay

Generally speaking, double hearsay (that is, "I am informed by my secretary that X told her ...") is **not** admissible even on interlocutory applications (*Trus Joist (Western) Ltd. v. United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America Loc. 1958*, [1982] 6 W.W.R. 744 (B.C.S.C.); *AG Canada v. Acero*, 2006 BCSC 1015).

(vii) Opinion Evidence

Opinion evidence may be given by affidavit, provided that the expertise of the deponent and the basis for the opinion are stated (*Trus Joist (Western) Ltd.*).

7. Exhibits

An exhibit is a document or object referred to in an affidavit. The person before whom the affidavit is sworn or affirmed must identify the exhibits. This is done by referring to the exhibit in the affidavit by a letter, and then endorsing the exhibit with a certificate as follows: "This is Exhibit [letter] referred to in the affidavit of [name] sworn (or affirmed) before me on [date], [signature of person taking oath]" (SCCR 22-2(8)). When referring to the exhibit in the affidavit, a simple style is preferable: "I attach a true copy of the letter [or other document] as Exhibit 'A.'"

The rules that apply to an exhibit referred to in an affidavit depend on whether the exhibit is a document that complies with SCCR 22-3(2). That rule

requires that, unless the nature of the document renders it impracticable, every document prepared for use in the court must be in the English language, legibly printed, typewritten, written or reproduced on 8 ½ inch x 11 inch durable white paper or durable off-white recycled paper.

If the exhibit is a document that complies with SCCR 22-3(2), then these rules apply:

- If it does not exceed ten pages, a true reproduction must be attached to the affidavit and to all copies served (SCCR 22-2(9)(a)).
- If it exceeds ten pages, it need not be filed with the affidavit but must be made available for use by the court and for the prior inspection of a party to the proceeding (SCCR 22-2(9)(b)).

If the exhibit is *not* a document that complies with SCCR 22-3(2), the exhibit must not be filed with the affidavit, but must be made available for the use of the court and for the prior inspection of a party to the proceeding (SCCR 22-2(9)(c)).

When an exhibit is *not* attached to the affidavit, the affidavit should state "the letter [document] is Exhibit 'A' to this affidavit."

Notwithstanding the wording of the SCCR, the usual practice in British Columbia is to serve a copy of all documentary exhibits on each party, and a party who does not receive a copy of an exhibit will normally immediately request it.

Each page of the documentary exhibits referred to in the affidavit must be numbered sequentially (SCCR 22-2(10)).

As to what items should be included as exhibits, the general rule is that matters already before the court should never be attached as an exhibit. Attaching documents or pleadings already filed in the proceeding as exhibits adds to costs without assisting the court in any way. This material should simply be referred to in the affidavit and included in the application record.

The contents of an exhibit should not be summarized in detail in the body of an affidavit. The exhibit speaks for itself.

Parties sometimes seek to rely on statements made in exhibits as evidence of the truth of those statements. Such evidence may be admissible as hearsay evidence on interlocutory applications, or as an admission against interest if the author of the document is the opposing party. However, if the deponent of the affidavit wishes to adopt a statement in the exhibit as their own evidence, that should be reflected in the text of the affidavit itself (*Ulrich v. Ulrich*, 2004 BCSC 95).

8. Jurat and Signature

(a) Form and Location of Jurat

The jurat is the clause that states where, when, and before whom the affidavit was made. The jurat should immediately follow the last line of text. At least one line of text should appear on the page where the jurat is printed, to forestall allegations that material was removed after swearing. The jurat is usually placed on the left side of the page, leaving room for the deponent's signature on the right.

(b) Several Deponents

The 1961 Supreme Court Rules provided that an affidavit could be made by two or more persons. No comparable rule is found in the current Supreme Court Civil Rules and arguably, therefore, the practice of having several deponents swear one affidavit is no longer authorized. It could be argued that SCCR 1-3(1), 1-2(3) and 22-2(14) authorize such affidavits in an appropriate case. However, the safer practice is to have the second deponent file a separate affidavit adopting the contents of the first.

(c) Deponent Who is Blind or Cannot Read

If the deponent is blind or is unable to read, the person before whom the affidavit is made must certify in the jurat that the affidavit was read to the deponent in their presence, and the deponent appeared to understand the affidavit (SCCR 22-2(6)). For suggested wordings see the Affidavit Precedents (Precedent 7(c)).

(d) Deponent Who Does Not Understand English

If it appears that the deponent does not understand English, the affidavit should be interpreted to the deponent by a competent interpreter. The absence of information that an affidavit was prepared based on a translation can be a serious breach of the SCCR. Without certification of an interpreter, an affidavit may be found to be inadmissible (*British Columbia (Director of Civil Forfeiture) v. Vu*, 2020 BCSC 106).

The interpreter must certify by an endorsement in Form 109 on the affidavit that the interpreter has interpreted the affidavit to the deponent (SCCR 22-2(7)). For suggested wordings, see the Affidavit Precedents (Precedent 6(d)).

(e) Signature

The deponent must sign the affidavit and the person before whom the affidavit is made must sign the jurat (SCCR 22-2(4)).

A deponent unable to sign an affidavit may place their mark on it (SCCR 22-2(4)). An affidavit by a person who could not make any mark at all was accepted by the court in *R. v. Holloway* (1901), 65 J.P. 712 (Magistrates Ct.).

The commissioner's signature should be placed on the page on which the jurat appears. To do otherwise is an irregularity as to form (*Pashko v. Canadian Acceptance Corp.* (1957), 12 D.L.R. (2d) 380 (B.C.C.A.)).

Affidavits prepared for filing in the Supreme Court must include, as part of the jurat, the name, legibly typed or written, of the commissioner before whom the affidavit was sworn (see Practice Direction PD-1—*Affidavits-Identification of Counsel or Commissioner*).

(f) Capacity of Person Taking Affidavit

The person before whom the affidavit is made should indicate their capacity in the jurat. However, failure to indicate capacity does not render the affidavit invalid where there is no statutory requirement that capacity be indicated (*Cameron-Hutt Ltd. v. MacMillen* (1933), 3 W.W.R. 241 (Sask. K.B.)).

(g) Remote Commissioning

An affidavit may be commissioned virtually via video technology if the lawyer and deponent are not physically together. For further information, including the procedure regarding commissioning an affidavit via video technology, please refer to the *BC Code*, Appendix A, paragraph 1, commentary [12].

9. Effect of Defects in an Affidavit

Courts have held that formal irregularities do not affect the validity of an affidavit (*Crown Lumber Co. v. Hickie*, [1925] 1 D.L.R. 626 (Alta. S.C.A.D.)). Refer also to s. 67 of the *Evidence Act* (British Columbia) and SCCR 22-2(14), both of which allow the court to use a defective affidavit. Whether it will do so in any given case is, however, a matter of discretion. The best practice is to observe all the formalities.

There is authority that the affidavit is inadmissible where the introductory paragraph omits the words "makes oath" or "swears" or "affirms" (*Allen v. Taylor* (1870), L.R. 10 Eq. 52, 39 L.R. Ch. 627 (Ch. D.); *Dobrinsky v. Kubara* (1950), 1 W.W.R. 65 (Man. K.B.)). The better view is that this omission is an irregularity (*R. v. McKimm* (1903), 2 O.W.R. 163 (H.C.)); this case may, however, be distinguishable as the opposing party was held to have waived his right to object by taking a fresh step in the proceedings.

The omission of the words “Sworn before me” from the jurat has been held a fatal defect (*R. v. Bloxham (Inhabitants)* (1844), 6 Q.B. 528. In other cases, omission of these words was held to be an irregularity of form only (*Eddows v. Argentine Loan and Agency Co.* (1890), 59 LF Ch. 392 (Ch.)); *Watrous Credit Union Ltd. v. Sikorski* (1969), 70 W.W.R. 521 (Sask. D.C.)).

When reviewing the various cases on this topic—which are not necessarily consistent—it is important to consider the context of the underlying applications. Some of them involve prejudgment garnishing orders, in which there is an overriding requirement of “meticulous compliance” with procedural rules, which may not be applicable in other cases.

Where the application sought to alter a final order, in *Cretu v. Cretu*, 2022 BCSC 305, Mr. Justice Kent made strong comments about the court’s expectations of counsel, after being provided with improper affidavits having defective contents:

[13] In this case, the Court was presented with three affidavits sworn at various times by Mrs. Cretu, six affidavits sworn by Mr. Cretu, and three affidavits sworn by articling students purporting to shovel volumes of correspondence and other documents into evidence. The parties’ affidavits were voluminous and filled with inadmissible argument and accusation. Still worse was their serial nature, i.e., reply affidavits containing multiple separate paragraphs framed as follows: “In response to paragraph [of one of the opposing side’s affidavits], I disagree”, followed by statements, mostly just argument, explaining and expanding upon the disagreement.

[14] Regretfully, one of the parties’ children was also called upon to supply two affidavits, adding his voice to disputed facts regarding physical and verbal abuse and otherwise challenging his father’s evidence to the Court.

[15] These serial affidavits are expressly forbidden by SCFR 10-(13) in the absence of the other party’s consent or a court order permitting service. That rule was flouted here, as is so often the case in family law cases.

[16] SCFR 10-4(12) makes it mandatory for an affidavit to contain only what the deponent “would be permitted to state in evidence at a trial”. Self-represented litigants might be forgiven for their ignorance of the law related to the admissibility of evidence at trial. Counsel should know better, particularly where, as here, the application seeks to change a Final Order (see SCFR 10-4(13)(b)(i)).

10. Taking Affidavits

(a) Who May Take

The *Evidence Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 124, sets out, in ss. 56 to 64, who is authorized to take affidavits. In British Columbia, affidavits may

be taken only by the following statutorily empowered commissioners:

- (i) judges, justices of the peace, court registrars, practising lawyers as defined in s. 1(1) of the *Legal Profession Act* (which includes articulated students), notaries public, municipal clerks, regional district secretaries, coroners, government agents, and other office-holders prescribed by the Attorney General by regulation (s. 60 of the *Evidence Act*);
- (ii) persons appointed by order of the Attorney General (s. 56 of the *Evidence Act*); and
- (iii) all commissioned officers of the Canadian Armed Forces (s. 64 of the *Evidence Act*).

Section 63 of the *Evidence Act* contains a list of persons authorized to take affidavits outside of British Columbia for use in British Columbia.

Various statutes confer a limited power on certain persons to take affidavits in connection with their statutory powers and duties, including the *Evidence Act*, *Geothermal Resources Act*, *Land Act* and *Vital Statistics Act*.

In British Columbia, it is acceptable for lawyers, their partners and associates, to take affidavits from their own clients.

(b) Counsel Taking Clients’ Affidavits

The 1961 Supreme Court Rules rendered affidavits unacceptable if they were sworn before the solicitor acting for the party on whose behalf the affidavit was used, or before any agent of that solicitor. This provision is no longer included in the current Supreme Court Civil Rules and consequently in British Columbia it is acceptable for lawyers, their partners and associates, to take affidavits from clients. Some reference works include discussions of the old rule because it remains in effect in some jurisdictions, and cite old British Columbia cases to illustrate the operation of the rule. Counsel in this province should not be misled into thinking they may not take affidavits from their clients.

(c) Safeguards to Follow in Taking an Affidavit

This section includes material from notes on “Solemn Declarations and Affidavits” appearing in the February 1985 *Benchers’ Bulletin*. **This section should be read with the provisions on affidavits and solemn declarations in Appendix A of the BC Code.**

Apart from the technical requirements discussed below, the most important safeguards to follow

when taking an affidavit are to (a) carefully review and proofread the affidavit before you meet with the witness for the swearing or affirming of the affidavit; and (b) ensure that the witness reads the affidavit carefully before swearing or affirming it. In far too many cases, clients will assume that if their lawyer has drafted an affidavit and is putting it in front of them it must be right. Even minor errors in an affidavit can cause significant embarrassment later in a proceeding.

A person who makes, in either an affidavit or a solemn (statutory) declaration, “a false statement under oath or solemn affirmation by affidavit, solemn declaration or deposition or orally, knowing that the assertion is false,” commits an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for 14 years (s. 131 of the *Criminal Code*). Consequently, commissioners who take affidavits should understand clearly the procedures involved, and should impress upon the deponent or declarant the seriousness of the oath.

The leading cases on the procedures to be followed in the taking of affidavits and solemn declarations are: *Re Collins (No. 2)* (1905), 10 C.C.C. 73 (B.C. Co. Ct); *R. v. Phillips* (1908), 9 W.W.R. 634 (B.C. Co. Ct); *R. v. Nier* (1915), 28 D.L.R. 373 (Alta. S.C.T.D.); *R. v. Schultz*, [1922] 2 W.W.R. 582 (Sask. C.A.); *R. v. Rutherford* (1923), 41 C.C.C. 240 (C.A.); *R. v. Whynot* (1954), 110 C.C.C. 35 (N.S.S.C.T.D.); *R. v. Nichols*, [1975] 5 W.W.R. 600 (Alta. S.C.); and *R. v. Chow* (1978), 41 C.C.C. (2d) 143 (Sask. C.A.).

From these authorities the following conclusions can be drawn as to the correct procedure to be followed in the taking of affidavits:

- (i) The deponent must be physically present before the commissioner (unless the deponent cannot attend physically but appears by electronic means, in which case the affidavit must state that the person swearing or affirming the affidavit was not physically present before the other person but was before that person by video conference (see Appendix A of the *BC Code* and SCCR 22-2(6.1)).
- (ii) The commissioner must be satisfied that the deponent understands the contents of the document. This may be done by:
 - the commissioner reading the entire document aloud to the deponent;
 - the deponent reading the entire document aloud to the commissioner; or

- the deponent stating to the commissioner that the deponent understands the contents of the document.

- (iii) The deponent must swear or affirm that the contents are true. Typically, the commissioner asks the deponent, “Do you swear that the contents of this affidavit are true, so help you God?”, or, where the affidavit is being affirmed, “Do you solemnly promise, affirm and declare that the evidence given by you is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?” The deponent responds in the affirmative (see s. 20 of the *Evidence Act* and the Affirmation Regulation, B.C. Reg. 396/89).
- (iv) In case of a solemn (statutory) declaration, the declarant must make their declaration in the language of the statute. Typically, the commissioner asks the declarant, “Do you make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true and knowing that it is of the same legal force and effect as if made under oath?” The declarant responds in the affirmative. These words are found in s. 41 of the *Canada Evidence Act*, s. 69 of the *Evidence Act* (British Columbia), and in Appendix A, paragraph 1(c) of the *BC Code*.
- (v) The commissioner should ensure that the deponent appearing before them is the deponent named in the document. If the commissioner does not know the deponent personally, the commissioner should request identification. A British Columbia Driver’s License, which includes a photograph, is a good form of identification for this purpose. Alternatively, an introduction should be obtained from someone known to both the commissioner and the deponent. Note that Appendix A of the *BC Code* requires that the deponent acknowledge that they are the deponent.
- (vi) The deponent must sign the document, or where permitted by statute, swear that the signature on the document is theirs (*BC Code*, Appendix A, paragraph 1(f)).

11. Alterations, Erasures and Reswearing

SCCR 22-2(11) requires that the person before whom an affidavit is made must initial all alterations in the affidavit, and unless so initialed, the affidavit cannot be used in a proceeding without leave of the court. Although the SCCR do not require it, it is wise for the deponent, as well as the person before whom the affidavit is sworn or affirmed, to initial all

changes. “Alterations” includes interlineations, deletions, and additions. The usual method of making alterations is to place checkmarks at both ends of the alteration and to place initials between the checkmarks or in the margin opposite. Where blanks on a printed affidavit form are filled in, this does not constitute an alteration requiring initials (*Bel-Fran Invests. Ltd. v. Pantuity Holdings Ltd.* (1975), 6 W.W.R. 374 (B.C.S.C.)). Where paragraphs of a printed form are struck out, initials are required (*Colt Invests. Ltd. v. Sansai Securities Ltd.* (1974), 1 W.W.R. 279 (B.C.S.C.)).

If an affidavit is altered after it has been sworn, it cannot be used unless it is resworn. Reswearing can be done by the commissioner initialing the alterations, taking the oath again from the deponent, and then signing the altered affidavit. A second jurat should be added commencing with the word “resworn.”

12. Signing as a Notary or Commissioner

A member of the Law Society of British Columbia is entitled to take affidavits and statutory declarations both as a commissioner for taking affidavits in the province of British Columbia and as a notary public in and for the province of British Columbia. If the document will be used in British Columbia, whether in a court proceeding or otherwise, counsel will usually sign as a commissioner. If there is a statutory requirement that the document be notarized, or if the documents are for use outside British Columbia, whether in another province or elsewhere, counsel will sign the documents as a notary.

When taking a statutory declaration or swearing an affidavit, if counsel signs as a commissioner, all that is necessary is that counsel sign on the line above the words “a commissioner for taking affidavits for British Columbia.”

When counsel is signing as a notary public, counsel will place their signature above the words “a notary public in and for the province of British Columbia.” Over the signature, counsel should then impress their notarial seal.

Some American jurisdictions may require, in addition to the statement that counsel is a notary public in and for the province of British Columbia, a statement as to whether and when the lawyer’s commission to sign as a notary public expires. So long as the lawyer remains a member in good standing of the Law Society of British Columbia, the lawyer’s commission never expires. Counsel may therefore insert the words “my commission never expires.” Alternatively, if being cautious and precise, counsel could insert the date that the current practice certificate expires—normally December 31 of that calendar year.

Whether counsel signs as a commissioner or a notary, it is good practice to stamp their name and address below the signature, to satisfy the requirement for the commissioner’s name to be legibly provided. This is mandatory for an affidavit that is to be used in the Supreme Court of British Columbia (see Practice Direction PD-1—*Affidavits-Identification of Counsel or Commissioner*).

When counsel is asked to swear documents for use outside the province, it is good practice to ask the person who sent the documents whether there are any special requirements in that jurisdiction. If counsel is having documents sworn outside British Columbia for use in British Columbia, review s. 63 of the *Evidence Act* and ensure that there has been compliance by the person taking the statutory declaration or swearing the affidavit.

13. Content and Style

Most applications are decided on the facts, not the law. Therefore, the way in which the facts are presented is all-important. There should be an element of advocacy in the affidavit. This does not mean that the affidavit should be argumentative, misleading or untrue. What it does mean is that your affidavit should be clear, concise and compelling. In short, simply by reading the affidavit, the judge or associate judge should be able to determine what the facts and issues are, and form at least a preliminary opinion that the issues should be resolved in your favour.

How do you accomplish this? You must start with an understanding of the nature of the order you seek and the matters that you must prove to obtain that order. Then you should organize the facts so as to set out, in a clear way, each of the elements necessary to your application. Extraneous or irrelevant matters should not appear in an affidavit—they serve only to distract the judge’s or associate judge’s attention from the issue at hand.

When preparing affidavits, you may find the following checklist helpful:

- (a) Identify the order you seek and the facts you must prove to get that order.
- (b) Identify the witnesses best able to give the evidence to establish those facts.
- (c) For each witness, organize their facts in a logical way (i.e. chronologically or by different topics) in their affidavit.
- (d) Draft the facts in clear, simple sentences. Avoid compound sentences or passive voice.
- (e) Generally, each paragraph in the affidavit should make a single point, or address a single matter.

- (f) Ensure that no extraneous or irrelevant matters appear in the affidavit.

Affidavits tend to be more persuasive when they are written in language that would be used by the witness, rather than in lawyer’s language. (See, in the context of a summary trial application, *Cotton v. Wellsby* (1991), 59 B.C.L.R. (2d) 366 (C.A.) at paras. 31–33.)

14. Cross-Examination on Affidavits

Counsel should keep in mind when preparing affidavits of their own clients, and when reviewing affidavits of opposing parties, that the court has jurisdiction to order cross-examination of a party on an affidavit (SCCR 22-1(4)(a)). Cross-examination may be ordered where there is conflicting evidence on matters that are material to the application for which the affidavits are tendered. See *Brown v. Garrison* (1967), 63 W.W.R. 248 (B.C.C.A.); *Grinnell Co. of Canada Ltd. v. Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, Local 535* (1956), 18 W.W.R. (N.S.) 263 (B.C.C.A.); *Szeto v. Shon Yee Benevolent Association of Canada*, 2019 BCSC 2015; and *1247415 B.C. Ltd. v. 0763974 B.C. Ltd.*, 2020 BCSC 1283.

When deciding whether to seek cross-examination on affidavits, it is important to keep in mind two factors. First, in the case of a cross-examination on affidavits, the entire transcript is put before the court—the examining party is not entitled to pick and choose those questions and answers that are favourable to it. Second, when cross-examination is ordered, it is customary to order that the witnesses from both sides are to be examined. Whether to seek cross-examination is an important strategic decision, not to be taken lightly, and cross-examination on affidavits is rare in British Columbia.

15. Common Errors in Affidavits

The following are common errors in affidavits.

(a) Errors in Form

- (i) Style of proceeding has inadequate information (e.g. missing a plaintiff or defendant, missing file number).
- (ii) Introductory paragraph should say the deponent “swears” or “affirms.”
- (iii) Identifying the deponent’s employer, but not the occupation.
- (iv) Using “that” to start each paragraph (which is unnecessary, even though some statutory forms fail to recognize this).
- (v) Incomplete or inaccurate references to attached or available exhibits, or failing to

complete exhibit stamps properly (SCCR 22-2(8) and (9)).

- (vi) Missing information in the jurat (for example, leaving out wording about the commissioner) (SCCR 22-2(8)).
- (vii) Failing to properly initial altered affidavits or failing to reswear affidavits changed after swearing (SCCR 22-2(11)).

(b) Errors in Procedural Law and Evidence

- (i) If swearing on information and belief (hearsay) is allowed, the general statement at the beginning should say that the deponent has personal knowledge except where stated to be on information and belief.
- (ii) Deposing on information and belief where a final order is sought (SCCR 22-2(12)).
- (iii) Where deposing on information and belief, failing to fully identify the source of the information. At a minimum, give the name.
- (iv) Use of double hearsay (for example, “I am informed by the lawyer’s secretary that X told her . . .”).
- (v) Giving opinion evidence without providing the expertise of the deponent and the basis for the opinion (*Evidence Act*, ss. 10 and 11, and common law).
- (vi) Not using the best evidence (for example, using an administrative assistant to depose based on information and belief when the client could depose based on personal knowledge).
- (vii) Providing a selected a version of the facts, exposing the deponent to loss of credibility on later cross-examination.
- (viii) Making arguments, not stating facts.

(c) Professional Responsibility

- (i) Lawyer swearing own affidavit on matters that could be contentious (if you intend to speak to the matter).
- (ii) Swearing your own affidavit as counsel where you may be exposed to cross-examination. This also goes to the weight to be accorded the information.
- (iii) Swearing an affidavit as counsel as to matters that give rise to a waiver of privilege.
- (iv) Deponent making unnecessary, irrelevant

statements about the conduct of the other party or lawyer or the progress or substance of the litigation.

- (v) Using inflammatory or vexatious statements in the affidavit.
- (vi) Using legalistic language that the deponent could not swear to understand and declare to be true (the affidavit is the deponent's statement, even if the language is yours).
- (vii) Deponent referring to matters arising in the course of settlement discussions, or attaching communications between lawyers as exhibits when some of the contents relate to settlement discussions.
- (viii) Taking everything the client says at face value without making further inquiries. This leads to further problems for both the lawyer and the client.
- (ix) Swearing the affidavit without carefully reviewing it with the client to ensure it is accurate; that is, treating accuracy as the client's problem when in fact the lawyer shares the duty.
- (x) Paraphrasing the language of the client to twist its meaning into something more favourable to the client.
- (xi) Omitting a crucial piece of information from the affidavit that would put the facts in a different light.

(d) Substantive Deficiencies (in Specific Legal Field)

- (i) No evidence provided on key elements of proof required for a successful application.
- (ii) Failure to include evidence to support urgency in applications without notice.
- (iii) Inclusion of material that is not relevant to the specific issue on the application before the court.

[§4.04] Chambers Advocacy³

Effective presentation in Chambers depends upon six key practice points, each of which is discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

- (a) Make a clear introduction.
- (b) Be concise and direct in your opening.

- (c) Organize and prepare (this is critical).
- (d) Focus your oral argument on relevant points.
- (e) Maintain a reasonable position.
- (f) Be candid and professional before the court.

1. Chambers Introductions

Ensure the court understands who you are and who you act for. You are building credibility from the moment you first stand up to introduce yourself.

When the matter is called by the court clerk, each party stands in turn for introductions. Introduce yourself clearly and succinctly. Some counsel state their last name and first initial, while others give their full name—both are acceptable. Either way, spell your last name. It is also important to identify your preferred pronouns and form of address, and say for whom you appear.

A proper introduction goes something like this:

My name is Catherine Green, Articled Student, last name spelled G-R-E-E-N, first initial C. I use she/her pronouns and can be addressed as “Ms. Green” or Counsel. I appear for the applicant in this matter, Mr. Tony Lee, who uses he/him pronouns.

If you are the applicant or plaintiff, after you introduce yourself you stop and wait for your learned friend to identify themselves. You do not speak for your friend.

2. The Opening

When it is your turn to speak to the substance of the application, start by giving a clear and concise introduction to your application or your position. If you are the applicant, you should also briefly describe the nature of the action. For example, a good opening might include something like this:

I am seeking an order under SCCR 7-1(8) for the delivery of an affidavit verifying a list of documents and for the production of documents under SCCR 7-1(13).

This is an action in negligence arising out of a motor vehicle accident. The plaintiff has claimed privilege over documents without listing them. My position is that the plaintiff is not entitled to assert privilege for a number of these documents, and should be ordered to produce them for our inspection.

An opening such as this tells the judge what the key rule is that the judge must be guided by in making the decision, what order the applicant is seeking, and what the case is about.

³ Originally prepared by Mr. Justice Hugh P. Legg for the CLE publication, *Chambers Practice* (February 1989); updated by PLTC and subsequent contributors to this chapter.

It is important to give the judge suitable context. You are not going to start persuading the judge until the judge has a grasp of the key issues and the essential matters that you are going to address.

If there have been previous agreements affecting the relief you are seeking, or if the application is by consent or is unopposed, you should say so at the very beginning. That information focuses the judge's attention on the aspect of your application that is in issue between the parties.

If only one counsel appears, the judge will want to know right at the start why that is: is the application without notice, by consent, or not being opposed; or is it a case where the other side has failed to appear for an unknown reason. In the latter situation, the judge may want to know more: Where is the other lawyer? Should the application be stood down while contact is made with that lawyer? If the matter is contested and the opponent fails to appear, make sure you have particulars as to when and how they were served, in case questions arise.

3. Organization and Preparation

The documents you provide to the court should be carefully prepared and properly tabbed and numbered.

The notice of application should state the rule or the statutory enactment relied upon. This is required by Form 32 but is not always followed in practice. Precision in the notice of application is the result of precision in thinking about the application before it is spoken to. A judge will be grateful to counsel for a precisely drawn notice of application. If the notice of application is defective for not giving a clear and accurate picture of what the application is about, counsel may take their opponent by surprise, and this may lead to an application for an adjournment.

It is important that the notice of application set out the relief claimed. This will be particularly important if you want to take advantage of SCCR 13-1(4) and have the order made by endorsing the notice of application.

Further, all of the relief that you seek should be set out. The court may not give any relief which exceeds that which is requested in the notice of application, especially if a respondent is not present at the hearing although they may have been served. In *Bache Halsey v. Charles, Standfield and Dobell* (1982), 40 B.C.L.R. 103 (S.C.), a chambers judge had allowed an application to strike out a defence and then granted default judgment to the plaintiff although the defendant was not present on the application and the notice of application had not specifically sought judgment. The defendant applied later to set aside the default judgment. Spencer J.

held that the default judgment was a nullity. Judgment had been given without notice to the defendant that judgment was sought. The notice of application sought only to strike out the defence.

(a) Brief of Documents

An application record is required for every application (see §4.02(2)(d), above). If it is necessary to take the court through a number of affidavits or documents, prepare in advance with reference to the proper numbering.

(b) Written Chronology or Calculations

A brief written chronology of facts may be helpful, to avoid taking the court through numerous affidavits. Similarly, a written list of expenses in issue might help focus attention.

If the application is scheduled for two hours or less, the chronology or calculations should be part of the notice of application, not separate documents. SCCR 8-1(16) provides that unless an application is estimated to take more than two hours, a party cannot submit a "written argument" other than what already appeared in the notice of application or application response. A chronology or sheet of calculations may well be considered a "written argument." If the application is scheduled for more than two hours, then argument can be handed up at the hearing.

(c) Written Submission

As noted above, both the notice of application and the application response contain summaries of the facts and law. As well, for an application estimated to take more than two hours, a party may prepare a more detailed written submission.

A written submission (sometimes referred to as a "chambers brief") helps you collect your thoughts, marshal the evidence appropriately, and assemble the key case references in a coherent and logical fashion.

Do not read a written submission. Present it orally by distilling the key points.

(d) Briefs of Law

You should always know, and be prepared to address, the leading case on whatever point you are arguing. Select the most useful cases for your book of authorities, not all cases on point.

If you have a number of authorities on the same point and have a brief of law containing those authorities, an effective presentation is to indicate to the chambers judge that although you are

relying on all of the authorities, you intend to quote from only the leading case on the point.

It is sometimes acceptable to include a headnote instead of a full decision or to cite from an authority cited in another decision. For example, it is not usually necessary to include the full text of cases such as *Donoghue v. Stevenson*.

4. Oral Argument, Relevance and Brevity

Your oral argument should be relevant and as brief as the subject matter will permit. State the facts briefly. Avoid reading affidavits (or anything) verbatim.

You should remember that anyone can read affidavits to the court, but only counsel can make a proper submission. The details, of course, must be in the affidavits, but you are making a point about them. You may refer to a passage or two from the affidavits, or to a document, or an authority, but do not forget that you are drawing a conclusion about them.

In *Mansion House Estates v. Mason*, 2022 BCSC 1364, Mr. Justice Kent reminded counsel of the long-standing principle that it is poor advocacy to shovel disjointed and voluminous documents at the court:

[22] The lack of appropriate time and resource management is a frequent issue in Chambers hearings, not just the matter at hand. In *Main Acquisitions Consultants Inc. v. Yuen*, 2022 BCCA 249, Goepel JA recently repeated observations made by that Court some 30 years earlier that it is “unfair to scoop–shovel volumes of disjointed affidavits and exhibits upon the judge and expect him or her to make an informed judgment” and that “counsel cannot expect to succeed in persuading a judge” if “masses of disorganized fact and paper” are allowed to overwhelm the process (para. 93).

Several paragraphs in *Mansion House Estates v. Mason* (paras. 20–26) discuss poor advocacy. Counsel at all levels of chambers experience could benefit from reading these observations of Mr. Justice Kent. With respect to lengthy affidavits, Mr. Justice Kent commented:

[C]ull, cull, cull and trim, trim, trim. Are 200 exhibits really necessary or will 30 suffice? Only include the material which counsel is prepared to actually review with the judge and eliminate the surplus. Do not expect the judge to read the extra material in their “spare time” because such time does not exist.

(a) Relevance

How much detail is relevant depends upon the matter. Offer no more than is necessary. For example, if you are acting for the plaintiff in an action for wrongful dismissal and your applica-

tion is for the production of documents under SCCR 7-1(17), you can probably give a very brief history of the action and concentrate on the circumstances of the documents being withheld in order to obtain an order for production. If your application is in the same action but is for judgment under SCCR 9-7, you would have to give much more detail of the history and nature of the action and state fully the facts which should be decided in your favour.

(b) Over-Running Time

With the pressure in contested chambers, the length of time estimated for an application is a matter of great significance to the chambers judge. Do not take more time than your estimate.

5. Reasonable Position

Counsel should always appear reasonable. The worst thing you can do is to appear to be unreasonable, even if you are legally correct. For examples of being reasonable, there should be a good reason why you are in court. If your opponent’s application is bound to succeed, why are you opposing it? You should not likely be in court trying to vary an interim order when the trial is two weeks away. Consider carefully whether you should be in court arguing a point when the law is soundly against you. In other words, there should be a real point behind your position.

Judge van der Hoop, at a CLE seminar in February 1982, stated:

The first question you want to ask yourselves is, “Is the application necessary?” There have been a number of comments from the judges about the frequency of applications which do not appear to the judges to be really necessary. Sometimes these are contested. They are an unnecessary consumption of time. A number of these problems can be cleared up by cooperation between counsel. It is not a happy occasion to realize that an application is being brought and contested simply because there is ill-feeling between counsel.

Judge van der Hoop added that counsel should ask themselves, “Do I have a proper basis for the order I am seeking?”

6. Candour and Professionalism

(a) Without Notice Applications

When drawing an affidavit in support of an application to be made without notice, you should remember the requirement that you must lay all material facts before the court. Suppress nothing. If you fail to do this, you run the risk that the order will be set aside *ex debito justitiae*

without regard to the merits; beyond this, you will lose your credibility. The general rule is that when you are applying without notice you must demonstrate the utmost good faith. If there are circumstances of which you are aware which should be brought to the attention of the chambers judge, you are under an obligation to do so, even though the circumstances may not be in your client's favour. See commentary [6] to rule 5.1-1 of the *BC Code*.

(b) Other Ethical Considerations

Chambers applications often arise in haste and under pressure. Counsel might dash off an affidavit without sufficient attention. It is essential to take the time to carefully check it over with the deponent before it is sworn or affirmed. When the deponent swears or affirms it, be sure that the deponent has had sufficient opportunity to read it through and correct any errors. If possible, draft it using the words of the deponent rather than your own. Remember that clients and deponents may be unwilling to correct a lawyer or ask for changes, because they assume that what the lawyer prepared is correct. If a deponent feels an affidavit needs correction, take the time to correct it.

Also remember that before you draft an affidavit you should have a complete understanding of the facts and the law relating to the case. Remember that deponents may be cross-examined either before the hearing in which the affidavit is to be read, or at discovery, or at trial. You should remember not to allow your client, or a witness who is supporting your client, to make an incorrect or incomplete statement of facts or state an inaccurate or false position. Even very sophisticated persons will swear an affidavit on which they are subsequently cross-examined and obliged to admit to gross errors or exaggeration. Is their lawyer to blame for allowing that to occur?

You should avoid the practice of preparing an affidavit for your legal assistant to swear upon information and belief supplied by you, the lawyer. This is bad practice except in purely formal matters such as the mailing or receipt of a letter. Whenever possible the person chosen to swear the affidavit should be the client; see rule 2.1-3(k) of the *BC Code*.

Counsel should not attempt to speak to their own affidavits on matters that are controversial; see rule 5.2-1 of the *BC Code*. Even on matters that are not controversial, counsel should only speak to their own affidavit after discussing the matter with opposing counsel.

You should be reluctant to include something controversial in an affidavit that involves you personally. You should only do this if it is necessary and proper and no other course is open to you, and you should be prepared thereafter to step out of the litigation if necessary (*Rottacker Farms Limited v. C. & M. Farms Limited* (1976), 2 W.W.R. 634 at 655; *Phoenix v. Metcalfe* (1975), 48 D.L.R. (3d) 631 (B.C.C.A.)).

You should think very hard and if possible obtain independent advice before you depose to anything said by another lawyer if the lawyer does not expect to be recorded. What happens in the barrister's room or in a judge's chambers should never appear in an affidavit unless the circumstances indicate that what was said was "on the record."

Personal criticism of a judge, registrar, trial coordinators or court reporters are matters that require much thought. It is probably contempt to attribute unfairly corruption, or conscious or unconscious bias to a judge. If criticism is not made in good faith or exceeds the limits of good courtesy, it amounts to scurrilous abuse. That also may be contempt.

[§4.05] Drafting and Entering Orders

1. Approval of Orders and Clarifying Terms

Following the chambers application, counsel must draw the resulting order. The order must be in Form 35 (SCCR 13-1(3)(c)) and must be approved by all parties in attendance. If a party has appeared in person, the court may dispense with the necessity for approval of the form of the order (SCCR 13-1(1)(b)). A lawyer must, however, ask the court for this direction. Approval of a party may also be dispensed with if that party fails to comply with the process for entering the order (SCCR 13-1(1.4)).

When an oral order or judgment is granted, it is imperative for counsel to make careful notes of the terms. If you are unsure of a term, or if the order sounds ambiguous to you in any way, you should immediately ask the judge or associate judge to clarify the point. If the judge or associate judge has not in your opinion covered all of the relief asked for either in your pleading or in your notice of application, you should draw that to the judge or associate judge's attention so that the notes you have will be clear.

2. Drafting the Order

Orders and judgments must be drafted in accordance with the SCCR and Forms. You should review those forms before drafting your order or judgment, to

lessen the possibility that your drafting will not be accepted at the registry. You should also review Practice Direction PD-26—*Orders*.

Rely on your notes, the clerk’s notes, or the transcript of the reasons for judgment to specify what the court ordered. If your notes are unclear, ask the registry for the clerk’s notes or order a transcript of the order.

To the registry staff who check civil orders and judgments, the clerk’s notes (the court summary sheet) are the most important factor in the entry of an order because they are part of the official record of court proceedings. One of the clerk’s mandates is to provide complete and accurate notes of any order made so that the record is clear, and to make the task of checking large volumes of orders and judgments much easier.

After you have reviewed the clerk’s notes, if you are still unclear as to any point in a decision of the court or if matters have not been dealt with that should have been dealt with, you should arrange with the other counsel to bring the matter on before that judge again to have matters clarified or completed. The form of the order should mirror the clerk’s notes, barring any ambiguities in the notes.

3. Forms and Precedents

Some of the most important sources influencing the form and style of orders and judgments are as follows:

- (a) the SCCR generally;
- (b) forms of order set out in Forms 34, 35 and 48 of the SCCR;
- (c) Supreme Court Practice Directions, PD-26—*Orders* and PD-10—*Garnishing Orders*; and
- (d) court-approved precedents, including some provided by the registry.

Specific publications will help with forms:

- (a) *Supreme Court Chambers Orders—Annotated* (CLEBC); and
- (b) McLachlin & Taylor, *British Columbia Court Forms* (Markham: Butterworths).

4. Format

An order or judgment should follow the guidelines in the SCCR and the Forms, and be governed by two basic principles:

- (a) it must accurately reflect the court’s decision (see PD-26—*Orders*); and
- (b) it should speak for itself, so that any reader (party, counsel, judge, police, interested

public, etc.) can understand its meaning, without referring to other materials.

The construction of orders follows a fairly standard format, incorporating the following components.

(a) File Number and Style of Proceeding

The top right-hand corner reveals the file number and location of the registry. This is followed by the identity of the court, the appropriate enactment or rule (for example, “In the matter of the *Family Law Act...*”), and the names of the parties. The names must be in full (SCCR 22-3(5)). “And others” after the first name, while acceptable for some documents, is improper in an order. Ensure your use of the class of party (plaintiff/petitioner, etc.) is correct by comparing it to your copy of the originating document.

(b) Judge and Date

Supreme Court judges are shown as “Before the Honourable Justice [last name].” Associate judges are shown as “Before Associate Judge [last name].”

By contrast to pleadings in Provincial Court, first names and initials are not used (unless there are two judges with the same last name). The date of the order or judgment must be the date on which the decision was pronounced (SCCR 13-1(8)). If judgment was reserved, both the date and the preamble will reflect this.

If you are not sure how to spell the name of the judge or associate judge, see the list on the Supreme Court website (www.bccourts.ca/supreme_court/) (under “About the Supreme Court”).

(c) The Preamble

This is the introduction to the order or judgment and includes the following information:

- (i) that the application or trial of the action came on for hearing on the date shown (or others if judgment was given later);
- (ii) name(s) of counsel or other representatives and whom they represented;
- (iii) appearances by other parties, such as those acting on their own behalf;
- (iv) who was served, or if the matter proceeded without notice;
- (v) if the matter was brought by consent of the parties; and
- (vi) if judgment was reserved until the date shown above.

(d) The Body of the Order or Judgment

Following the preamble is the body of the order or judgment, which sets out in detail the relief granted by the court. Using available and appropriate resources (counsel's notes, precedents, stylistic preferences), you will be able to prepare this portion with little difficulty.

Do not forget to deal with costs, if appropriate.

(e) Endorsements

An endorsement is the signature of a party or counsel. An order after application will include an endorsement that says: "The following parties approve the form of this order and consent to each of the orders, if any, that are indicated above as being by consent." An endorsement in a consent order will say: "The following parties approve the form of this order and consent to each of the orders noted above." SCCR 13-1(1)(b) governs approval; SCCR 13-1(10) governs consent.

Generally, endorsements are required by all parties who attended an application unless:

- (i) the court waives approval by one or more of the parties pursuant to SCCR 13-1(1)(b);
- (ii) the order is signed or initialed by the presiding judge or associate judge pursuant to SCCR 13-1(2);
- (iii) a party did not attend and was not said to have consented to the order (SCCR 13-1(1)(c)); or
- (iv) an unrepresented party who attended before the judge or associate judge orally consented to a consent order, or gave a written consent (SCCR 13-1(10)(b)).

It is important to understand the difference between consenting to an order and taking no position. If opposing counsel tells you that they consent to an order, then the order should not be entered without first being signed by counsel—whether or not they attended the hearing. If opposing counsel tells you that they are taking no position with respect to your application, and does not attend the hearing, then there is no need for their endorsement on the order. Be clear on the position that any non-attending party is taking and advise the court accordingly.

(f) Points to Observe

SCCR 13-1(1)(b) directs that approval of the order must be in writing. This is generally understood to mean a complete and legible signature, on the line above the identity of the

person signing (for example, counsel for the petitioner). Initials, or a name in quotation marks, are not acceptable. One lawyer signing on behalf of counsel for the party is acceptable. Approval in the name of a law firm is not acceptable (PD-26—*Orders*). There is no objection to pleadings being signed, filed and issued in the name of a law firm.

5. Entering the Order

As described above, generally the order must be approved by all counsel who attended the hearing. After counsel approve, then the order is submitted to the registry for entry.

Typically, the lawyer who succeeded on the application drafts the order and serves it on the opposing lawyer, who has 14 days to sign and return it (SCCR 13-1(1.2)). If that opposing lawyer disagrees or objects, they provide their reasons in writing. If they fail to return the order or a written objection, the successful party can ask the registrar to approve the order (SCCR 13-1(1.4)). In that case the successful party must file a requisition asking that the order be entered, along with proof of service and proof that the opposing lawyer failed to respond.

If counsel, after reviewing the clerk's notes, cannot agree on the form of the order, the procedure is to take out an appointment to settle in accordance with SCCR 13-1(12). Notice of the appointment must be served on all other parties whose approval is required. The order will then be settled at a hearing before the registrar, based on reasons for judgment if available or, if not, based on notes taken by the courtroom clerk and material in the court file. Virtually all proceedings in chambers are taped, so a transcript may be ordered of oral reasons.

In most cases, orders made in chambers need not be inspected or approved by the judge or associate judge. PD-26—*Orders* spells out situations where orders must be approved. For example:

- (a) the order does not correspond with the clerk's notes;
- (b) the order was made after the judge or associate judge had issued written reasons; or
- (c) the order is a desk order in respect of an application of which notice is not required.

If counsel agree on the form of the order, but the registrar, after reviewing the clerk's notes or reasons for judgment, considers the order as drafted does not correspond with the clerk's notes, counsel should arrange with the registry to attend before the judge or associate judge to settle the terms of the order. The procedure for this is set out in PD-18—*Request to Appear Before a Specific Judge, Associate Judge or Registrar*.

If counsel substantially disagree on the content of the order, and the matter is somewhat complex, the registrar may decline to settle the order and suggest it be referred to the original judge.

It is also permissible to have a draft order available at the hearing of an application and to ask the judge or associate judge to sign the order at the conclusion of the hearing. Before you do so, you should first have the order vetted by the registry (AN-17). Best practice is to include a backing sheet with the draft order. Be prepared to explain to the judge or associate judge why the order cannot be entered in the ordinary course. If the judge or associate judge signs the order, the registry staff will generally enter it without further review (SCCR 13-1(2)).

The time required to process and enter an order in the ordinary course varies greatly from registry to registry. You can expect most registries will take a week or two to enter an order, but some take much longer than that. You can normally find out from the registry or from a registry agent what the typical timeline is.

You may ask the registry to enter it on an expedited basis by submitting the order with a covering letter or requisition explaining why expedited entry is necessary. Orders on an expedited basis are entered within a day or two. In the case of an order that must be entered more quickly (such as an urgent injunction), it is advisable to have a draft order signed by the judge, then take it to the registry yourself and explain to the registry staff why it is urgent.

6. Appeals

An order made in chambers can be appealed to the BC Supreme Court. To do so, counsel must file a notice of appeal in Form 121 within 14 days of the application (SCCR 23-6(8.1)). Note that SCCR 23-6(8) has been repealed and replaced by new procedures. If the appeal hearing will take over two hours (“long chambers”), counsel must set the date with Supreme Court Scheduling. If the appeal hearing will take less than two hours, it will be added to the chambers list (SCCR 23-6(8.7)). As with an application, counsel must file their appeal record in the proper format (SCCR 23-6(8.8)) and provide opposing counsel with proper notice (SCCR 23-6(8.2)).

The appeal does not act as a stay on the proceedings. The appellant may seek an order for a stay, however, ordinarily, the action proceeds as if the appealed order remains in force, unless the appeal is successful or the judge or associate judge rules otherwise (SCCR 23-6(11)).

Abermin Corp. v. Granges Explor. Ltd. (1990), 45 B.C.L.R. (2d) 188 (S.C.) sets out the standard of review most often applied on appeals from an associate judge’s order to a Supreme Court judge.

For purely interlocutory matters, an appeal will not succeed unless the associate judge’s order was clearly wrong. A less deferential standard of review applies to final orders or orders “vital to the final issue in the case.” In those cases, a rehearing is the appropriate form of appeal. See *Kondori v. New Country Appliances Inc.* 2017 BCCA 164 at para. 16. Note that the order of the associate judge should be entered before the hearing of the appeal (*Chaud v. ICBC*, 2009 BCCA 559 at para. 41).

7. Amending an Entered Order

In general, once an order has been entered, the presiding judge is *functus* and unable to deal further with any problems that should have been dealt with during the application or the trial, unless the order itself allows for the judge’s further involvement. However, SCCR 13-1(17) does allow for correction of clerical errors and for amendment of an order to provide for relief that should have been adjudicated upon but was not. This is known as the “slip rule.” There is also an inherent jurisdiction to amend an order that reflects an error in expressing the manifest intention of the court (*Buschau v. Rogers Communications Inc.*, 2004 BCCA 142).

Amendments to entered court orders and judgments cannot be made without permission of the court. The current practice is to make an application in chambers, or to the trial judge, to deal with this issue.

The original entered order cannot be amended. In addition, it is improper to tender a revised, backdated order or judgment for entry. A new order, setting out the amendment particulars, must be prepared. The two documents are then used together as the complete order or judgment.

8. Alternatives to Formal Orders

SCCR 13-1(4) permits other material to be endorsed (for example, a notice of application or a petition) in place of a formal order. This has not been a common practice in recent years. It has typically been used only when there is insufficient time or opportunity to draft an order. However, the Form 32 notice of application adopted in 2010 contains a specific section for endorsement of the notice of application, so it may become more common. The document must contain substantially all the relief granted by the court. Similarly, Form 17.1 – *Requisition – Short Notice* provides for an order by endorsement.

In the case of a restraining order application, it is doubtful that a notice of application would serve as a suitable substitute for a formal order. The police would almost certainly not accept the endorsed notice of application for enforcement purposes.

9. Identifying the Sender

In order to ensure that a copy of your entered order or judgment is returned to you, you must attach a backing sheet to the order when it is provided to the registry.

Chapter 5

Disposition of the Action Before Trial¹

[§5.01] Means of Disposition

This chapter discusses several processes for finalizing civil claims without a full trial.

1. For matters before the Supreme Court:
 - (a) default judgment (SCCR 3-8);
 - (b) summary judgment (SCCR 9-6);
 - (c) summary trial (SCCR 9-7);
 - (d) a judgment based on admissions, or proceedings by way of a special case or on a point of law (SCCR 7-7, 9-3, 9-4);
 - (e) an application for dismissal for non-compliance with the SCCR (SCCR 22-7(2) and 22-7(5)); or
 - (f) an application for dismissal for want of prosecution (SCCR 6-2(5) and 22-7(7)).
2. For matters in Small Claims Court:
 - (a) default judgment (Small Claims Rule 6);
 - (b) an order at a settlement conference where no evidence is required (Small Claims Rule 7(14)(b)) or where the claim is obviously without merit (Small Claims Rule 7(14)(i));
 - (c) an application for dismissal for non-compliance with the Small Claims Rules (Small Claims Rules 7(15), 7(17), 10(9), 10(10), and 17(13)); or
 - (d) following failure to pay the fee required to postpone or adjourn a trial (Small Claims Rules 17(5.2 and 5.4)).

3. At either Supreme Court or Small Claims Court:
 - (a) payment being made into court or accepting an offer to settle; or
 - (b) negotiating or mediating a settlement.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address the Civil Resolution Tribunal, which deals with most small claims involving amounts up to \$5,000, as well as many claims for motor vehicle accidents (see §1.10).

[§5.02] Default Judgment

If a defendant fails to file a response to a claim within the requisite time period, the plaintiff may take judgment in default (SCCR 3-8; Small Claims Rule 6).

In the Supreme Court, a plaintiff may apply for default judgment by filing a requisition with the court registry. This is often referred to as a “desk order.” The party obtains an order without a hearing (SCCR 8-4).

The SCCR identify different types of default judgments:

1. Final Money Judgment

When a notice of civil claim sets out a claim that is solely for recovery of money in a specified or ascertainable amount, judgment may be entered for the amount claimed, interest and costs (SCCR 3-8(3)).
2. Judgment for Damages to be Assessed

When the amount claimed is for damages in an amount that is neither specified nor ascertainable (for example, damages for breach of contract), the court will order judgment for damages to be assessed (SCCR 3-8(5)).
3. Judgment for Detention of Goods

When the claim is solely for detention of goods, the plaintiff may apply for judgment for either the delivery of the goods or for the value of the goods to be assessed (SCCR 3-8(6)).
4. Other Claims

When the claim does not fall into one of the above categories, a plaintiff can apply for judgment under SCCR 3-8(10) (SCCR 3-8(9)).

The difference between the first two types of judgment is identified in *Pacific Blasting Demolition & Shoring Ltd. v. Skeena Cellulose Inc.* (1992), 68 B.C.L.R. (2d) 101 (S.C.), concerning a prejudgment garnishing order:

When the amount to which the plaintiff is entitled can be ascertained by calculation, or fixed by any scale of charges or other positive *data*, it is said to be “liquidated” or made clear ... But when the amount to be recovered depends upon the circumstances of the case and is fixed by opinion or by assessment or by what might be judged reasonable, the claim is generally unliquidated.

¹ Margot Liechti and Larissa Doerr of Carfra Lawton LLP kindly revised this chapter in December 2024. It was previously revised by Margot Liechti (2022 and 2023), Gurminder Sandhu and Adrienne Staley (2021); Gurminder Sandhu and Shahhin Asiaee (2019); H. William Veenstra (2010 and 2017); Adrienne G. Atherton (2004–2006 and 2008); Michelle Tribe-Soiseth (2003); Margaret M. MacKinnon and David R. MacKenzie (2001); PLTC (1998); Leonard M. Cohen (1996); and Mark M. Skorah (1995). Comments about proceedings involving Aboriginal claims were contributed in June 2002 by F. Matthew Kirchner.

A party cannot convert an unliquidated claim into a liquidated claim by simply picking an amount. The claim must be such that, by its nature, an amount can be objectively ascertained or calculated.

A plaintiff who obtains a judgment for damages or value to be assessed may set the assessment down for trial. This assessment will be tried at the same time as the trial of the action, or of any issues against any other defendant who is not in default (SCCR 3-8(12)). Alternatively, the plaintiff may apply to have the damages or value assessed in a summary fashion, typically based on affidavit evidence (SCCR 3-8(13)).

In Small Claims Court, Small Claims Rule 6 governs default proceedings. If a claim is for debt, the registrar may grant the default order (Small Claims Rule 6(4)). If a claim is not for debt, there must be a hearing before a judge (Small Claims Rule 6(5)). No default judgment can be taken in respect of a counterclaim or third party proceeding unless ordered by a judge pursuant to Small Claims Rule 16(6)(c) (Small Claims Rule 6(2)).

If a party obtains default judgment, the other party may apply to set the entered judgment aside (SCCR 3-8(11) and Small Claims Rule 16(6)(j)). *Miracle Feeds v. D. & H. Enterprises Ltd.* (1979), 10 B.C.L.R. 58 (Co. Ct.) lists three factors that the court will consider in an application to set aside a default judgment. To succeed on the application, the defendant must be able to satisfy the court that the defendant:

- did not deliberately fail to file a response to civil claim;
- made the application to set aside the default judgment as soon as they became aware of it; and
- has a meritorious defence or one that is at least worthy of investigation.

Although this test has been affirmed by the Court of Appeal, it is not to be rigidly applied (*BCI Bulkhaul Carriers Inc. v. Aujla Trucking Inc.*, 2015 BCCA 411).

For further discussion of default judgments, including ethical concerns, see Chapter 9.

[§5.03] Summary Judgment

SCCR 9-6 allows the court to grant summary judgment on an application in chambers, on the ground that there is “no genuine issue for trial.”

The purpose of the summary judgment procedure was described as follows in *Papaschase Indian Band No. 136 v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2008 SCC 14:

The summary judgment rule serves an important purpose in the civil litigation system. It prevents claims or defences that have no chance of success from proceeding to trial. Trying unmeritorious claims imposes a heavy price in terms of time and cost on the parties to

the litigation and on the justice system. It is essential to the proper operation of the justice system and beneficial to the parties that claims that have no chance of success be weeded out at an early stage. Conversely, it is essential to justice that claims disclosing real issues that may be successful proceed to trial.

An application for summary judgment may be brought very early in the proceedings. Any party can apply for summary judgment after a responding pleading has been filed (SCCR 9-6(2) and (4)).

By way of example, in an application by the plaintiff under SCCR 9-6(2), the affidavit must set out all the facts necessary to prove the plaintiff’s claim. The defendant may respond in one of two ways: by alleging that the plaintiff’s pleading does not raise a cause of action against that defendant, or by filing an affidavit or other evidence that shows that, contrary to the plaintiff’s claim, there is a genuine issue for trial (that is, a defence raised by the defendant that should be tried in court) (SCCR 9-6(3)). Note that SCCR 9-6(2) would also apply to a party claiming on a counterclaim or third party notice.

A defendant (or other party responding to a pleading) may also apply for a summary judgment dismissing the claim (SCCR 9-6(4)). The applicant bears the evidentiary burden of showing there is “no genuine issue for trial.” If the applicant proves this, the onus shifts to the respondent to either refute or counter the evidence (*Canada (Attorney General) v. Lameman*, 2008 SCC 14 at paras. 10 and 11).

If the court finds there is no genuine issue for trial with respect to a claim or defence, then it must grant judgment or dismiss the claim accordingly (SCCR 9-6(5)(a)).

On hearing an application for summary judgment, the court also has the power to grant judgment on all issues other than damages; determine a question of law and pronounce judgment, if satisfied the only genuine issue is a question of law; or “make any other order it considers will further the object of these Supreme Court Civil Rules” (SCCR 9-6(5)).

Since an application for summary judgment is in the nature of a final order, the affidavits cannot be on information and belief (SCCR 22-2(12) and (13)). As with any other application, the applicant may seek an order requiring the person who swore or affirmed an affidavit to attend for cross-examination (SCCR 22-1(4)).

An associate judge has the jurisdiction to hear an application for summary judgment (see PD-50— *Associate Judges’ Jurisdiction and Esteban Management Corporation v. Edelweiss International Holdings Corp.* (1990), 43 B.C.L.R. (2d) 335 (B.C.S.C.)).

Under the summary judgment rule in the former Rules of Court, case law established that a court would not weigh the evidence or decide matters of credibility on a

summary judgment application (*Hughes v. Sharp* (1969), 68 W.W.R. 706 (B.C.C.A.)). Thus, where there was conflicting evidence, the court would not resolve issues of fact, and if the opposing party filed an affidavit that directly took issue with the affidavit filed in support of the application, the summary judgment application would be dismissed. While the test under SCCR 9-6 is worded slightly differently, the approach taken has been similar (*Haghdust v. BC Lottery Corporation*, 2011 BCSC 1627; *L.D. (Guardian ad litem of) v. Provincial Health Services Authority*, 2012 BCCA 491 at para. 12).

As the court stated in *Sharrock v. Moneyflow Capital Corp.*, 2010 BCSC 1219 at para. 5, in practice the rule is used infrequently:

The summary judgment rule is not used very often because it creates such a difficult threshold to meet: the applicant needs to establish there is no triable issue of fact.

Even if a party loses an application for summary judgment, the effort is not necessarily wasted. The opposing party will have been forced to deal squarely with the real issue in the case and to concede that which is not in issue. As well, the opposing party's affidavit often provides an effective tool for cross-examination at trial. However, the application should not be brought solely for tactical reasons; that is, its purpose should not be to see the other side's material. If the court concludes that the application has been brought in bad faith, it may award special costs (SCCR 9-6(9)).

[§5.04] Summary Trial

SCCR 9-7 permits a party to apply for judgment either upon an issue or generally, based on written evidence.

SCCR 9-7(15)(a) states that the court may grant judgment unless:

- (i) the court is unable, on the whole of the evidence before the court on the application, to find the facts necessary to decide the issues of fact or law, or
- (ii) the court is of the opinion that it would be unjust to decide the issues on the application.

In other words, there are two conditions to satisfy. Can the court determine the issue in question on the material placed before the court? If yes, then, would it be just to enter a judgment by summary trial in the circumstances? The case must satisfy both of these conditions for a judge to find it suitable for summary trial.

In *Inspiration Management Ltd. v. McDermid St. Lawrence Ltd.* (1989), 36 B.C.L.R. (2d) 202 (S.C.), the court identified factors to consider in determining whether it would be unjust to proceed summarily. (This case was decided under former Rule 18A, the predecessor to SCCR 9-7.) Subsequent case law has

added to these factors (see e.g. *Gichuru v. Pallai*, 2013 BCCA 60 at para. 31). Factors to consider include:

- the amount involved;
- the urgency of the matter;
- any prejudice by delaying a full trial;
- the cost of a full trial given the amount involved;
- whether credibility is a critical factor in the dispute;
- whether a summary trial would result in “litigating in slices” (i.e. unhelpful fracturing, where a party seeks to resolve some but not all of the issues);
- the complexity of the matter, and whether a summary trial would create more complexity;
- the course of the proceedings; and
- any other matters that arise.

In a summary trial, the onus of proof is on the parties to prove the matters they assert on a balance of probabilities—just as in a conventional trial. The onus of proof does not shift simply because it is the defendant who moves for dismissal of an action under the rule: *Miura v. Miura* (1992), 66 B.C.L.R. (2d) 345 (C.A.); *Hamilton v. Sutherland* (1992), 68 B.C.L.R. (2d) 115 (C.A.).

A summary trial will often result in a final order, which would *not* be within the jurisdiction of an associate judge (see Supreme Court Practice Direction PD-50—*Associate Judges' Jurisdiction*).

When an application is brought at an early stage and there is a real possibility that the defendant can bolster its defence through discovery to support a triable issue claimed, then a court may conclude that it is unjust to decide the issues at that stage (*Bank of BC v. Anglo-American Cedar Products Ltd.* (1984), 54 B.C.L.R. 350 (S.C.)). However, if the defendant has not taken the steps necessary to obtain that evidence in a timely manner, then the application may go ahead (*Anglo Canadian Shipping Co. v. Pulp, Paper & Woodworkers of Canada* (1988), 27 B.C.L.R. (2d) 378 (C.A.); *Wendeb Properties Inc. v. Elite Insurance Management Ltd.* (1991), 53 B.C.L.R. (2d) 246 (C.A.)). Therefore, if an opposing party gives notice that it will apply for a summary trial, counsel should be diligent in gathering evidence.

When confronted with conflicting evidence, the judge may find facts by weighing the evidence, by referring to the contents of documents, and by referring to the conduct of the parties. The court is entitled to look at *all of the evidence* and to resolve conflicts in the evidence. By comparison with SCCR 9-6, SCCR 9-7 is concerned with the resolution of issues rather than testing the validity of the claims and defences. SCCR 9-7 provides the chambers judge with much wider discretion to make

findings of facts that can resolve disputed issues of facts and law.

When there is a credibility conflict on an essential issue, the case may still proceed summarily if that conflict can be resolved another way. A summary trial will likely be inappropriate when credibility findings are *required* to resolve conflicts in the evidence in order for the trial judge to find the essential facts (*Jutt v. Doehring*, 1993 CanLII 560 (B.C.C.A.) at para. 13). However, to assist the judge in deciding a credibility conflict, the judge can order cross-examination on the affidavits (SCCR 9-7(12)). If the judge believes that the unresolved facts are narrow enough to be resolved by a limited cross-examination, *and* the judge believes that the summary trial issues can be determined once the credibility conflict has been resolved, then the judge may order cross-examination (*Inspiration Management Ltd. v. McDermid St. Lawrence Ltd.* (1989), 36 B.C.L.R. (2d) 202 (S.C.), under former Rule 18A).

The courts have commented on whether SCCR 9-7 is appropriate in cases involving allegations made by the defendant that the case had been settled, or pleas by the plaintiff of duress (see e.g. Gibb J.A.'s dissenting judgment in *Smyth v. Szep* (1992), 63 B.C.L.R. (2d) 52 (C.A.); *Lavoie v. Musey*, (1993) 77 B.C.L.R. (2d) 152 (C.A.)). Certain issues involving what might be called “emotional issues” are hard to decide on affidavits, even with cross-examination. Actions based on fraud, deceit, conspiracy, libel and slander are difficult to resolve on affidavit evidence and often (but not always) inappropriate for summary resolution.

Questions concerning the existence of Aboriginal rights and title are likely unsuitable for summary trial disposition (*Kelly Lake Cree Nation v. Ministry of Energy and Mines*, [1998] B.C.J. No. 3207; *Taku River Tlingit First Nation v. Tulsequah Chief Mine Project*, [1999] B.C.J. No. 984, aff'd [1999] B.C.J. No. 1665 (C.A. Chambers), further aff'd [1999] B.C.J. No. 2204 (C.A.); *British Columbia (Minister of Forests) v. Westbank First Nation*, [2000] B.C.J. No. 888). The Supreme Court of Canada held that “oral evidence of [A]boriginal values, customs and practices is necessary and relevant” in Aboriginal rights cases (*Kitkatla Band v. British Columbia (Minister of Small Business, Tourism and Culture)*, 2002 SCC 31). This finding suggests that summary disposition of such claims is unlikely.

SCCR 9-7(11) allows a party to raise the appropriateness of a matter for resolution on a summary trial either by preliminary application or at the hearing of the summary trial application itself. Depending on the circumstances, however, bringing a preliminary application may result in having the full merits explored twice, and such applications rarely succeed (*Western Delta Lands Partnership v. 3557537 Canada Inc.*, 2000 BCSC 54).

The summary trial rule may be invoked either generally with respect to an entire claim or only with respect to one issue in the claim. However, problems may arise when a party seeks to resolve some but not all of the issues in a case, and a court may conclude that determining one issue is not a suitable use of SCCR 9-7 (*Greater Vancouver Water District v. Bilfinger Berger AG*, 2015 BCSC 485).

Similarly, in multi-party litigation, a court may determine that a summary trial application is not suitable if there are issues in dispute on the summary trial application that may overlap with issues that will be determined at trial in respect of the remaining defendants in the action (*The Owners, Strata Plan LMS 2262 v. Stoneman Developments Ltd. et al.*, 2005 BCSC 410).

SCCR 9-7(3) provides that a summary trial application must be heard at least 42 days before the scheduled trial date. If an issue is likely to be appealed, and the application is brought with insufficient time before trial to have an appeal heard, a court may find that a matter is not suitable for summary trial (*Coast Foundation Society (1974) v. John Currie Architect Inc.*, 2003 BCSC 1781).

Under SCCR 9-7(5), evidence in a summary trial proceeding may be given by way of:

- (a) affidavit;
- (b) an answer, or part of an answer, to interrogatories;
- (c) any part of an examination for discovery;
- (d) an admission under SCCR 7-7 (reply to notice to admit);
- (e) a report setting out the opinion of an expert if:
 - (i) the report conforms with SCCR 11-6(1); or
 - (ii) the court orders that the report is admissible despite not conforming with SCCR 11-6(1).

Counsel should prepare their affidavits carefully so that no fact is concealed and the court is not misled. The parties must give advance notice of all evidence on which they intend to rely at the hearing of the summary trial (SCCR 9-7(8)–(10)). Because a summary trial is an application for a final order, the rule against hearsay evidence applies (SCCR 22-2(12)). Therefore, affidavit evidence on information and belief cannot be used as evidence in a summary trial, although it may be used for the purpose of attempting to convince the judge that the case is not appropriate for disposition by summary trial.

In terms of practice, in *Civil Litigation: Judges Series* (CLE, Fall 1992), Mr. Justice Finch (as he then was) recommended that counsel at the hearing of a summary trial should:

- (a) tell the court, at the very outset, whether or not both parties agree that the case is appropriate for

disposition by way of summary trial, and if not, why not;

- (b) tell the court what the issues are, both fact and law (there should be an outline of the issues in the brief, with reference to the pleadings that raise those issues, if appropriate);
- (c) explain, if there are contradictory affidavits, how the court can properly resolve issues of disputed facts on affidavit material, for example:
 - (i) there are admissions on discovery;
 - (ii) there is documentary evidence in the affidavit material; or
 - (iii) there are internal conflicts in the other party's affidavit material; and
- (d) relate the affidavit or other evidence to the issues identified in the pleadings or brief.

When the court is unable to grant judgment under SCCR 9-7, it may nevertheless impose terms to expedite the proceeding (SCCR 9-7(17)).

The applicant who does not get judgment is precluded from applying further under SCCR 9-7 without leave (SCCR 9-7(16)).

[§5.05] Summary Trial and Simplified Trial in Small Claims Court

The Small Claims Rules do not have equivalents to SCCR 9-6 or 9-7. However, both at a settlement conference (Rule 7(14)) and at a trial conference (Rule 7.5(14)), a judge has the power to:

- decide on any issues that do not require evidence; and
- dismiss a claim, counterclaim, reply or third party notice if, after discussion with the parties and reviewing the filed documents, a judge determines that it is without reasonable grounds, discloses no triable issue, or is frivolous or an abuse of the court's process.

As well, a Small Claims judge has general discretion on an application to dismiss a claim pursuant to Small Claims Rule 16(6)(o).

Depending on the type of claim and the location of the case, a form of simplified trial or summary trial may be available. These are described below.

1. Simplified Trial—Small Claims Rule 9.1

Robson Square and Richmond Small Claims registries have a simplified trial process for claims with a value of between \$5,001 and \$10,000, pursuant to Small Claims Rule 9.1. The court will hear a claim

for under \$5,001 only if the claim is outside of the jurisdiction of the Civil Resolution Tribunal or if a notice of objection to the decision of the Civil Resolution Tribunal has been filed. A simplified one-hour trial is scheduled before an experienced lawyer who acts as a justice of the peace and is called a justice of the peace adjudicator.

At Robson Square this simplified trial procedure does not apply to financial debt claims or personal injury claims. Simplified trials at Robson Square are scheduled during evening hours.

At Richmond, the procedure does not apply to personal injury claims, and trials are scheduled during normal business hours.

2. Summary Trial—Small Claims Rule 9.2

A summary trial process applies to financial debt claims in the Robson Square Registry only. When the claimant is “in the business of lending money or extending credit,” the claim is for financial debt, and the claim is filed at Robson Square, a 30-minute summary trial is scheduled (Small Claims Rule 9.2).

[§5.06] Non-Compliance with Rules

Some rules aim at forcing compliance with the rules or specifying consequences for non-compliance.

When a party has failed to comply with the SCCR, and the person in default is the plaintiff or petitioner, the court may dismiss the proceeding (SCCR 22-7(2) and (5)). An application under SCCR 22-7(5) is within the jurisdiction of an associate judge (see Supreme Court Practice Direction PD-50—*Associate Judges' Jurisdiction*). If the party in default is the defendant, respondent, or third party, the court may order that the proceeding continue as if no response to civil claim had been filed. In that case, the plaintiff would be free to take default judgment.

If the party in default is the plaintiff, and the non-compliance relates to the plaintiff's prosecution of the action (for instance, failure to take any substantive steps whatsoever in the action), the defendant may want to consider bringing both an application for dismissal for non-compliance with the SCCR as well as an application for dismissal for want of prosecution, as these applications, when heard together, may improve chances for an order for dismissal. The test for dismissal for want of prosecution was recently revised to be less onerous in *Giacomini Consulting Canada Inc. v. The Owners, Strata Plan EPS 3173*, 2023 BCCA 473.

In Small Claims Court, under Small Claims Rule 17(13), a judge of that court may make any order or give any direction the judge thinks is fair. Other provisions in the

Small Claims Rules set out consequences for failure to obey rules or orders made. For example, see Small Claims Rule 7(15) (settlement conference) and 9.1(19) (simplified trials).

In most cases, unless the other party has suffered serious prejudice as a result of non-compliance, the court will give the non-compliant party a “second chance”—putting them on notice that an order to strike the claim or defence will likely follow if they fail to comply. The court is usually open to considering whether a lesser remedy would both cure the default and encourage respect for court rules and orders in the future.

[§5.07] Negotiation and Settlement

Almost every action should begin with the view that settlement is a desirable outcome. Section 3.2-4 of the *BC Code* states: “a lawyer must advise and encourage a client to compromise or settle a dispute whenever it is possible to do so on a reasonable basis and must discourage the client from commencing or continuing useless legal proceedings.” This section will provide some guidance as to the techniques of settlement negotiation with reference to the applicable Supreme Court Civil Rules.

The issue of the authority of a lawyer to settle for the client is discussed in the *Practice Material: Professionalism: Ethics*.

1. Why Settle?

From the start, the client must be advised of the costs and risks inherent in litigation as well as the merits of the case.

In most cases, it is desirable to reach settlement, as litigation is usually more expensive, time-consuming, and stressful for those involved. A fair settlement can save costs for all parties. Moreover, litigation usually involves considerable delay and there often is an advantage to an early payment.

Further, the outcome of a trial depends on contingencies. While it is possible to predict a *probable* outcome, *certainty* is rarely, if ever, attainable.

Finally, the parties maintain control over the outcome when a case is settled, but if it goes to trial, then the court determines the outcome.

2. Preparation for Settlement

Preparation is critical to fair settlement. Counsel must know all the relevant facts (both those that support counsel’s case and those that damage it) to aim for a reasonable settlement. Counsel also need to keep an eye on the costs of investigation, keeping costs in line with the value of that knowledge.

3. Settlement Conferences

SCCR 9-2(1) provides:

If, at any stage of an action, a judge or associate judge directs that the parties attend a settlement conference, the parties must attend before a judge or associate judge who must, in private and without hearing witnesses, explore all possibilities of settlement of the issues that are outstanding.

A judge or associate judge may order a settlement conference at a pre-trial conference (SCCR 5-3(1)(o)).

All proceedings at a settlement conference are without prejudice, and the judge or associate judge conducting the settlement conference will not hear the trial, unless all parties agree (SCCR 9-2(3)). Typically, only judges and associate judges interested in settlement techniques conduct settlement conferences. Counsel may agree on a judge or associate judge from the list and request that person. If they do not agree, the Chief Justice will appoint the judge or associate judge.

The conference’s format and procedure are flexible. The parties should attend and present their respective positions. After hearing the submissions of counsel and the opinion of the judge or associate judge, the parties may be able to resolve their problems without further litigation and expense. As a general rule, conferences held early in the litigation are more likely to be successful, if the lawyers have all the necessary information and understand their clients’ concerns and goals.

At least four days before the settlement conference, counsel should file a concise brief setting out the nature of the case, the issues, a summary of the evidence they expect to call, and the legal principles.

Counsel should attend prepared to advise the court and the client of the following matters:

- (a) the costs to the client if successful, and if not;
- (b) how long the case will likely take; and
- (c) the ability of the parties to pay a judgment.

Settlement conferences in Supreme Court are used occasionally, but are not as popular as private mediation using experienced mediators. As well, when the Supreme Court is operating with less than a full judicial complement, there may be insufficient judges available to hear settlement conferences.

In Small Claims Court, settlement conferences are usually set as a matter of course (Small Claims Rule 7(1)–7(2.2)). Parties attending a settlement conference must bring all relevant documents and reports. The settlement conference judge will canvas settle-

ment, and if it appears unlikely, will consider any orders to ensure the matter is ready for trial. Consider asking for an order for document production or particulars returnable by a particular date. (If the other party fails to comply, you may apply to dismiss the claim or strike the defence for non-compliance. See §5.06.)

Small Claims Rule 7(14) lists what a judge may do at a settlement conference, including deciding any issues that do not require evidence, dismissing a claim or counterclaim, and setting up a trial date if necessary.

4. When to Settle

Opportunities for settlement arise at key points:

- (a) before litigation commences;
- (b) before or after examinations for discovery;
- (c) shortly before trial; and
- (d) during trial.

At each of these stages, there are advantages to settlement. Before the litigation starts, minimal expenses have been incurred. After seeing the pleadings but before discovery, the parties better understand the case, and better anticipate the costs. Following the examination for discovery, each lawyer has had an opportunity to assess the credibility of witnesses and understand the totality of the evidence. Before trial, the parties are weighing the costs of trial preparation and risks of going ahead.

Try to settle as early as possible. By making an informed offer early in the proceedings, you establish a strong position. As well, the legal and other costs that each party will save as a result of an early settlement represent greater savings early on than later in the proceedings, and those potential savings might bridge the gap between the parties' positions.

5. Confirmation and Release Letters

The lawyer must have clear authority from the client before a case can be settled. Once the settlement has been agreed to orally, it should be confirmed in writing with the other lawyer.

Defence counsel should also obtain an executed release from the plaintiff and a consent dismissal order that can be filed pursuant to SCCR 8-3. (If the notice of trial has *not* yet been filed, a notice of discontinuance can be filed instead (SCCR 9-8(1)), and costs less.) Defence counsel usually prepares the release and consent dismissal order, and forwards them to the plaintiff's counsel. Note that consent dismissal orders must be signed by all counsel of record, and can also dismiss counter-

claims and third party claims at the same time as the plaintiff's claims.

The lawyer must also have approval for the settlement from any persons or entities that must approve of the settlement: for example, the Minister of Health pursuant to the *Health Care Costs Recovery Act*, S.B.C. 2008, c. 27 (for some personal injury claims involving BC residents; an equivalent exists in other provinces for their residents), and the Public Guardian and Trustee pursuant to the *Public Guardian and Trustee Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 383 (for claims by minors or persons under a disability). SCCR 20-2(17) also requires court approval of any settlement of claims of persons under a disability.

Plaintiff's counsel must review releases very carefully to ensure that they are not too broadly drafted and release too much. Even though the lawyer may be keen to conclude a file and to collect and disburse the settlement funds to the client, the lawyer should not allow a client to sign a release without thoroughly considering its implications.

Poorly drawn confirmation letters and releases may give rise to difficulties. For example:

- If a confirmation letter contains new terms, they may be interpreted as a counter-offer.
- The recipient of a confirmation letter may subsequently deny there was any agreement.
- If no deadline is set for the plaintiff to receive the funds, the defendant or insurer may delay payment.
- Additional releasees may be missing (for example, additional insureds on the responding insurance policy).

[§5.08] Formal Offers to Settle

A party may make a without prejudice offer to settle a case at any time. In most cases, there is no consequence to failing to accept an offer, other than the missed opportunity. However, a party may also use a formal offer to settle to give additional incentive to an opposing party to act reasonably or face costs consequences after trial.

1. Offers to Settle in Supreme Court—SCCR 9-1

SCCR 9-1 provides a procedure by which a party may pay more in costs if a formal offer to settle is made but not accepted. In order to fall within SCCR 9-1, an offer to settle must be made in writing by a party, served on *all* parties of record, and must contain the following sentence (SCCR 9-1(1)(c)):

The...[*name of party making the offer*]...reserves the right to bring this offer to the attention of the court for consideration in relation to costs after the

court has pronounced judgment on all other issues in this proceeding.

As with most offers to settle, an offer made under SCCR 9-1 is without prejudice, and the fact that an offer to settle under the rule has been made must not be disclosed to the court until all issues in the proceeding, other than costs, have been determined (SCCR 9-1(2)).

The court may consider an offer to settle when exercising its discretion as to costs (SCCR 9-1(4) and (5)). The court may do one or more of the following:

- deprive a party of some or all costs or disbursements for steps taken in the proceeding after the date of service of the offer;
- award double costs of all or some of the steps in the proceeding after the offer was served;
- award costs that a party would have been entitled to for steps taken after the offer was served had the offer not been made; or
- if the plaintiff receives judgment that is no more than what the defendant had offered in settlement, award costs to the defendant for all or some of the steps taken after the offer.

When making an order under SCCR 9-1(5), the court may consider any factor the court thinks appropriate, including whether the offer ought reasonably to have been accepted and the relative financial circumstances of the parties (SCCR 9-1(6)).

Note that a plaintiff who accepts an offer to settle for a sum within the jurisdiction of Small Claims Court is entitled only to disbursements, not costs, unless the court finds there was sufficient reason for bringing the proceeding in the Supreme Court (SCCR 9-1(7)).

A plaintiff who accepts an offer to settle for a sum under fast track limits may be entitled only to costs under SCCR 15-1(15).

Nothing in SCCR 9-1 provides that an offer expires at the commencement of trial. If counsel wants to ensure that their opponent cannot accept an offer in the event that the trial starts going poorly for the opponent, counsel should include an expiry date. As well, in order to provide certainty, it would be wise for counsel to include a term that any acceptance must be in writing.

Settlements with persons who are under a disability require approval of the court, unless an enactment otherwise provides (SCCR 20-2(17)). This can be done by way of a consent order and affidavit evidence.

2. Offers to Settle in Small Claims—Small Claims Rule 10.1

Under Small Claims Rule 10.1(1) a party may offer to settle one or more claims by completing an offer to settle (Form 18) and serving the party to whom the offer is made. The offer must be served within 30 days after the conclusion of the settlement conference, the conclusion of a mediation session held under Small Claims Rule 7.2 or 7.4, or the conclusion of a trial conference (whichever happens first), or at a later time, if permitted by a judge (Small Claims Rule 10.1(2)).

If a party wants to accept an offer, that party must complete an acceptance of offer (Form 19), and within 28 days after being served with the offer, serve the party who made the offer with the completed acceptance (Small Claims Rule 10.1(3)).

If a claimant rejects an offer and at trial is awarded an equal or lesser amount (including interest and expenses), the trial judge may order that claimant to pay the defendant an additional penalty of up to 20% of the amount of the offer. Conversely, if a defendant rejects an offer and the claimant is awarded an equal or greater amount at trial (including interest and expenses), the trial judge may order that defendant to pay the claimant an additional penalty of up to 20% of the amount of the offer (Small Claims Rule 10.1(5)-(7)).

[§5.09] Mediation

Mediation is a process of assisted negotiation where a neutral third party assists the parties to reach a consensus. Mediation may be used in almost any dispute and at almost any stage. It is common for parties to agree to mediate voluntarily. The discussion below focuses on how and when mediation may be mandated.

1. Notice to Mediate

The notice to mediate process allows any party to a Supreme Court action to initiate mediation in that action by serving a notice to mediate in a specified form on every other party to the action.

There are three regulations that provide for a notice to mediate process, depending on the nature of the proceeding. The Notice to Mediate Regulation, B.C. Reg. 127/98, applies to motor vehicle actions (as defined therein). The Notice to Mediate (Residential Construction) Regulation, B.C. Reg. 152/99, applies to residential construction actions (as defined therein). The Notice to Mediate (General) Regulation, B.C. Reg. 4/2001, applies to all other actions (not including matters commenced by peti-

tion) other than family law proceedings or claims for physical or sexual abuse.

While the regulations differ, particularly with respect to timelines, they have many common features. Timelines under the Notice to Mediate (General) Regulation are as follows:

- (a) The notice to mediate, unless the court otherwise orders, must be served no earlier than 60 days after the filing of the first response to civil claim in the action and no later than 120 days before the trial (Regulation, s. 5).
- (b) Within either 14 days (for four or fewer parties) or 21 days (for five or more parties) after the notice to mediate has been served on all parties, the participants must jointly appoint a mutually acceptable mediator (Regulation, s. 6). If they cannot agree, a party may ask a “roster organization” designated by the Attorney General to appoint one (Regulation, ss. 7 and 8).
- (c) The mediation process may include a pre-mediation conference (Regulation, ss. 12–22).
- (d) A mediation session must occur within 60 days after the mediator has been appointed (Regulation, s. 24). Participants must exchange information before that session (Regulation, s. 26).

The Notice to Mediate (General) Regulation also prescribes when a mediation session can be postponed (s. 25), how the mediator may conduct a mediation (s. 32), and the consequences for default (ss. 33–35), among other things.

Review the applicable regulation carefully for timelines, such as those related to agreeing on a mediator, holding a pre-mediation conference, and commencing the mediation.

Following the guidelines set out in the regulations is not the only way to mediate. Many commercial contracts, and most standard form construction contracts, contain a contractual term requiring mediation in the event of a dispute. As well, the parties will often agree to mediate even without the service of a formal notice. This is called a “voluntary” mediation.

party initiates mediation by filing and delivering a notice to mediate (Form 29, Small Claims Rule 7.3(5)) after a reply has been filed (Small Claims Rule 7.3(6)).

If a mediation is initiated pursuant to Rule 7.3, attendance by the parties is mandatory. If a claimant fails to attend, a defendant may apply to dismiss the claim (Rules 7.3(37) and (38)). If a defendant fails to attend, a claimant may take default proceedings (Rules 7.3(39) and (40)).

2. Small Claims—Mediation

As noted above, the Small Claims Rules make a settlement conference mandatory in most actions. One of the major purposes of a settlement conference is to mediate the dispute (Rule 7(14)(a)).

The Small Claims Rules also permit any party to a case to initiate mediation pursuant to Rule 7.3 for certain claims between \$10,000 and \$35,000. The

Chapter 6

Preparation for Trial¹

[§6.01] Investigation and Planning

This chapter covers how to prepare and organize for trial in the Supreme Court. It starts with long-term planning when the file is opened, and ends with steps closer to trial. The focus is on plaintiff’s counsel, or the side bringing the action, but the preparation is generally the same for each side.

Pacing is a key consideration in building a practice as a litigator. Since most claims settle before trial, you want to be realistic about how much time you spend on trial preparation (and how much time your client pays for). It may be that you start taking steps as soon as you open the file and develop a theory of the case, but the preparation likely does not start in earnest until the months before the scheduled trial.

Another key consideration is handling documents: taking good notes, gathering evidence, and compiling documents in an organized fashion. Counsel should have good practice management habits and a reliable document management system.

In the sections that follow we describe preparation as having four key steps:

1. clarifying what you must prove;
2. identifying evidence to use;
3. organizing documents; and
4. meeting procedural requirements and deadlines in the lead up to trial.

In considering the importance of organizing documents, these materials cover using a trial book to prepare for trial. For an example of the contents that might be in a trial book, see Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

¹ **Timothy H. Pettit**, Pettit and Company, kindly revised this chapter in December 2024 and also in 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023. It was previously revised by Nicholas Peterson (2016); Tannis D. Braithwaite (2010 and 2011); David A. Goult (2001 and 2003–2006); David P. Church (1997); Leonard Cohen (1996); and Mark M. Skorah (1995). Part of this chapter was originally prepared by Mr. Justice John C. Bouck and has been adapted and updated for PLTC.

[§6.02] Clarifying What You Must Prove

1. The Claim and the Pleadings

Preparation for trial begins when you open the file. Before you draft the pleadings, you need to be clear on the cause of action.

Once the file is open, you should take an initial look at the law and list the elements of that cause of action, or the facts that you must prove in order to succeed. You should also consider what the other side must do to substantiate or defend their case, or what research is necessary to understand the strength of the claim.

It is imperative that you know the strength of your case at the outset and can advise your client accordingly.

2. Theory of the Case

At the beginning of the matter, you might actually be planning the closing argument, which should encapsulate your theory of the case and describe how the evidence supports that theory.

Preparation starts with learning the evidence thoroughly and applying it to the law. When you know all the evidence that you are going to put in as part of your case and, therefore, the facts that may be extracted from that evidence by the court, you are in a position to prepare the law that applies to those facts. In applying the law, you develop a theory.

Harold A. Feder, in “Effective Trial Preparation,” *Trial Magazine* (July 1992) and Stephen Lubet, in “The Trial as a Persuasive Story,” 14:1 *American Journal of Trial Advocacy*, both suggest developing a theory by starting with a story or a narrative with a theme for your case. It must be flexible enough to accommodate unforeseen events that invariably develop during the course of a trial. The theme should be based on the strongest part of your case. It may be about the wrongful treatment of your client, as shown in a culminating event. Your theme, and the theory of what and why it happened, will form the foundation of your argument, and emerge in your opening and closing.

Stephen Lubet recommends finding a short narrative with moral force that can be presented in one or two sentences. It is used to give persuasive force to a legal argument. For example: “The defendant fired my client without cause and turned her out on the street at age 65 after 30 years of service.” Or, “The plaintiff had many opportunities to get another job, but chose to do nothing.”

To develop a theory, you should ask yourself three questions: What happened? Why did it happen?

Why does that mean the client should win? For example: “The plaintiff was a trusted and valued employee before she was dismissed without cause. She is entitled to damages for wrongful dismissal in the range of 15 months’ notice.” Or, “The plaintiff had many opportunities to mitigate her damages but she failed to do so. In the circumstances, she is only entitled to damages by way of six months’ notice.”

3. Elements You Must Prove

For each point that you must prove, make a list of the evidence required to prove those points. As the file progresses, you will list where the evidence on each of those points will come from. You will find that your list changes as the case progresses toward trial.

[§6.03] Identifying Evidence to Use

The next step is identifying the methods to prove those facts before the court. This might include interviewing witnesses and gathering expert reports and key documents. It might also include preparing physical evidence, such as video or audio tapes, and diarizing when it must be disclosed. In all cases, familiarize yourself with the relevant laws of evidence.

1. Lay Witnesses

One of the most important tasks in the pre-trial process is to prepare the witnesses to give testimony. Lay witnesses testify regarding matters of fact. For a lay witness, your preparation starts with the initial interview.

Either at the conclusion of the interview, or shortly thereafter, reduce the witness’s evidence to a written statement. Witness statements should be typed up in narrative form and given to the witness well before the trial. It is preferable but not essential that the statement be signed by the witness. Place a copy of the statement in the trial book and keep the original statement in your file. You may need it if the witness changes their testimony at trial.

Note that it is common practice to provide the other parties with a short summary of the evidence you intend to lead from the witness at trial, usually referred to as a “will say” statement. A will say statement is generally provided to other parties two or three weeks before the date a witness is expected to begin testifying, and may be required by the court. Unlike a witness statement, a will say statement is confined to admissible evidence.

If the witness may be required at the trial, inform the witness in writing of the trial date. If there is any doubt in your mind that the witness will coop-

erate in attending at trial, serve the witness with a subpoena in Form 25, together with the witness fees specified in Schedule 3 of Appendix C. When you subpoena a witness, consider if the witness has documents that you need them to bring to trial. If so, identify the required documents in the subpoena (SCCR 12-5(36)).

Before a witness gives evidence, you should conduct a further interview. You should explain the type of questions that you will be asking and ensure you know what the witness’s answers will be. You should also indicate the type of questions that will be asked in cross-examination. It is not appropriate to advise the witness as to what the answers should be. Counsel should appreciate the difference between open-ended questions and leading questions, the latter forming the basis for cross-examination.

Many witnesses are extremely nervous about appearing in court. Make an effort to put them at ease. What a lawyer takes for granted is entirely new to most witnesses. You should explain the functions of the various people in the courtroom, including the judge, the clerk and counsel. Also explain that the witness will be giving evidence from the witness box and will be required either to swear or to affirm. You must find out in advance whether each of your witnesses wishes to swear or affirm, and you need to inform the clerk before the witness enters the witness box. You must also find out in advance how a witness prefers to be addressed (see PD-64—*Form of Address*). Explain to each witness how to address the court. Instruct the witness to speak clearly, so that everyone may hear the evidence.

While preparing witnesses, go over the key points and the overall theme of their testimony. Prepare them to authenticate documentary evidence or to speak to particular documents at trial. Also prepare them for cross-examination.

Note that the intended witnesses must be listed in the trial brief, as discussed in §6.06(2).

One final caution with respect to preparing the lay witnesses—keep in mind that on cross-examination the witness can be asked any question relevant to the matters in issue as well as any question relating to the credibility or reliability of that witness. Opposing counsel is not confined to cross-examination of the matters covered on direct examination. Therefore, find out if the witness has any traits or history that could compromise the witness’s credibility or reliability. You might decide not to call a witness if there is a risk that, overall, that witness’s evidence could be more harmful to your case than helpful.

Adverse witnesses are discussed in §6.06(7).

2. Expert Witnesses

SCCR 11 governs expert opinion evidence in BC Supreme Court civil trials. SCCR 11 allows the parties to jointly appoint an expert (SCCR 11-3), for each party to appoint its own independent expert (SCCR 11-4), or for the court to appoint an expert on its own initiative (SCCR 11-5). Of these, independent experts constitute the vast majority of expert witnesses in civil trials, while joint and court-appointed experts are rare. There are variations in the procedural steps and requirements relating to joint and court-appointed experts which are beyond the scope of this chapter.

The *Evidence Act* places limitations on the number of experts that may be called in a “vehicle injury proceeding” (*Evidence Act*, s. 12.1). Parties are limited to three expert witnesses per party at trial in a vehicle injury proceeding (and one expert witness per party if the matter proceeds as a fast track action). However, a party can apply to court to seek relief against that limitation, or get the consent of all the other parties to introduce additional experts. *Vespaziani v. Lau*, 2021 BCSC 1224 and *Raniga v. Kang*, 2021 BCSC 2340 discuss the principles for permitting additional experts.

An expert witness cannot testify in court unless the expert’s direct evidence has been included in a report that has been prepared and served in accordance with SCCR 11-6 (SCCR 11-7(1)). Expert reports are discussed in §6.06(1).

3. Evidentiary Documents

You must keep documents you want to rely on as evidence in an organized fashion; otherwise, even the simplest case can get out of hand. As you receive documents, ensure that they are entered into your document management software accurately and so that they are easily searchable. Your document management software should allow for different searches (perhaps by keyword, date created, etc.). Searching by document title is not sufficient, particularly for large, complicated matters.

At all stages of trial preparation, counsel should use technology to streamline work and improve how the case is presented to the court. Early on, counsel (with opposing counsel) should consider how to use e-filing and document discovery to assist the court (see SCCR 23-3).

Keep the original documents separate and do not mark them up or write on them. Have a working copy of key documents that can be marked up (particularly expert reports). You must update your list of documents as new documents are received.

Reasonableness is the governing principle for how often your list of documents must be updated (*Kopp v. White*, 2016 BCSC 1953). Remember the duty of disclosure, as well as SCCR 7-1(21), which prohibits parties from using documents that they fail to disclose. Recognize as well that counsel has a duty to ensure proper documentary disclosure on the part of their client (*Boxer v. Reesor*, 1983 CarswellBC 63).

For documentary evidence, determine how you are going to prove the evidence in court. If you anticipate that opposing counsel will challenge the admissibility of a document, or if you plan to challenge the admissibility of a document you expect that opposing counsel wants to admit, do your research before the trial. Prepare an argument and have copies of your authorities on hand.

Before the trial starts, try to obtain the approval of opposing counsel as to the admissibility of your exhibits. Generally, this is done by way of a document agreement. Indeed, the trial brief, discussed later in this chapter, requires the parties to address this issue specifically. Counsel can ensure that the trial process proceeds more efficiently if a document agreement is reached which permits the entering of a common book of documents at the outset of the trial.

[§6.04] Organizing Documents

Counsel who are venturing into the field of civil litigation need to develop habits that allow them to plan and organize effectively. It follows that counsel should have good habits in dealing with all documents, not only documents used as evidence.

Efficient use of documents can streamline practice, and swift and accurate retrieval of relevant documents builds your own confidence in your practice. Because of the complexity of the law and litigation practice, good document organization is essential. In particular, it can make these tasks run smoothly:

- (a) keeping a current checklist of tasks done and pending;
- (b) clarifying the weaknesses and strengths of your case and the relevant legal principles;
- (c) delegating tasks if counsel becomes ill or unavailable, as another counsel can assume the file when everything is written down;
- (d) communicating effectively with the client, because you can provide copies of documents (witness statements, schedules, etc.) to the client, so the client will see the work you have done on their behalf and can see if there is something

essential that they may have forgotten to tell you; and

- (e) making the trial itself run much more smoothly, as trial preparation is significantly about gathering and identifying documents to be retrieved and presented for trial.

Good document management software and practice management software can assist with the above.

[§6.05] Trial Book

A “trial book” refers to either a single binder or a set of binders used to facilitate advocacy at trial. A small matter may have a single binder; a large matter will have many binders. Generally, most trials will require a number of trial books. Trial books are organized into different sections. These can vary but one organization scheme could be as follows:

- (1) Trial Plan or Calendar;
- (2) Opening Statement;
- (3) Pleadings;
- (4) Lists of Documents and Documentary Evidence;
- (5) Witness Evidence: Lay and Expert;
- (6) Admissions;
- (7) Authorities of Law; and
- (8) Closing Submission.

In most cases, the “trial book” may be many binders, including separate binders for a common book of documents, a binder relating to lay witnesses, a binder for each expert, and a book of authorities. The trial plan, opening statement, pleadings, lists of documents, admissions and closing submissions may be contained in a further binder unto themselves.

1. Trial Plan

The first document in your trial book could be a trial plan. It would be a calendar mapping out each day of the trial and indicating what trial events are occurring when, including when specific witnesses are scheduled, and the names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers of all the witnesses you propose to call.

Recognize that your trial plan will change as the trial evolves. Some witnesses may take longer than others. Admissibility submissions may occur unexpectedly and disrupt a trial plan. Be prepared to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances of a trial.

2. Opening Statement

As discussed, these comments are with trial by judge in mind: an opening to a jury is a different matter.

Prepare opening remarks carefully. Remember, the judge may not have seen the pleadings before entering the courtroom that morning. If the judge has seen them, it was likely only the night before.

In a trial by judge, the opening should be brief and business-like: identify the parties, the general nature of the dispute, and the remedy you are seeking. Then give a brief background. Next, set out the issues and the parties’ positions on the issues. Finally, list the witnesses you will be tendering. Keep in mind that at this point you are not arguing the case. You are simply giving the court a road map of what the case is about.

Counsel’s opening can be oral or in writing. Preferably, it should be in writing, supplemented by oral submissions. Here are the headings to matters that it should cover:

- (i) **Cause of Action.** Describe the cause of action: This is a claim for damages arising out of a motor vehicle accident that occurred at Sidney, BC on the 26th of May 2018. Liability and damages are both in issue (etc.).
- (ii) **Witnesses.** List the names of the witnesses and briefly describe the evidence they will give. State when each witness will be called and in what order. Try to call them in an order that follows your theme and the story you are trying to tell.
- (iii) **Length of Trial.** State how long the trial will take. For example, “My part of the trial should take three days depending on the length of my friend’s cross-examination. I understand my friend estimates the evidence in her case will take about two days. We both will take about one hour in our closing arguments. So, we should be finished within six days.”
- (iv) **Facts.** From the evidence, counsel should articulate the facts the judge should find from the evidence in chronological order. For example:
 - the defendant was totally at fault for the accident;
 - there was no contributory fault on the part of the plaintiff or if there was it was no more than 20%;
 - the plaintiff suffered the following injuries as a result of the accident;

- the plaintiff partly recovered from the effects of the accident on the applicable dates;
- the plaintiff suffered damages by way of pain, injury and suffering and loss of enjoyment of life in that she used to be a professional figure skater, etc.

(v) **Remedy.** From these facts, argue that the court should find the plaintiff suffered certain damages, such as:

- Non-pecuniary damages: \$100,000
- Past loss of income: \$200,000

3. Pleadings Section

In every civil case, you should start by compiling the pleadings and orders made in the matter, with a table of contents. Affidavits should not be contained in this section: they are either evidence, or a document to be used to cross-examine a witness, or not relevant. For a sample table of contents for the pleadings binder, see Appendix 2.

4. Documentary Evidence

In preparing for trial, you should determine which documents you want to put into evidence. Consider the admissibility of each of the documents.

As stated above, try to work with opposing counsel to put together a common book of documents subject to a document agreement. That common book of documents can be reproduced so that there are copies for counsel, the court, and the clerk/witness.

When entering into an agreement as to a common book of documents, counsel should be mindful of the direction in *Samuel v. Chrysler Credit Canada Ltd.*, 2007 BCCA 431, in which the court cautioned against filing binders of documents as exhibits without clearly specifying the purposes for which the documents are tendered.

For exhibits that are not admitted by consent, modern practice is to prepare binders with tabs and provide them to the court, to be filled with exhibits as they are tendered and marked during the trial.

Keeping documents organized will be appreciated by the trial judge.

5. Witnesses Section

The trial book will eventually contain minutes of evidence, witness statements, transcripts from examinations for discovery, expert reports, and so on. As noted above, in most cases, there will be multiple trial books, often including one trial book for

lay witnesses and a separate trial book for each expert witness.

A trial book is a useful basis for preparing the direct examination of your witnesses and the cross-examination of your opponent's witnesses. It is also helpful to prepare a one-page checklist for each witness summarizing the points that you want to establish through that witness. You should have this at hand when the witness is examined. Having a point-form list will help you check that the necessary points have been covered.

For expert witnesses, make a separate section in your trial book (or perhaps use a separate binder) for each expert. Include such things as working copies of the expert's reports, the expert's curriculum vitae, the expert's file, and your notes of points on which to examine or cross-examine the expert.

Prepare one binder for a group of lay witnesses, divided by tabs. For each witness, prepare notes or a script to examine or cross-examine the witness. If you anticipate cross-examining a witness on a prior statement, include that statement in the binder. In this binder include the copies of subpoenas and affidavits of service.

Ensure that you have copies of all relevant discovery transcripts. Provide your client with a copy of their discovery transcript and ask them to review it. You only need copies of your client's transcript for yourself and your client, but you will need multiple copies of all transcripts of the discovery of opposing parties: for the judge, for the clerk/witness (a shared copy), for yourself, and, where appropriate, for other counsel.

Review the discoveries of opposing parties. Identify any admissions that have been made such that you do not need to prove facts using your own witnesses. Consider what parts (if any) of an opposing party's discovery transcript you want to read into evidence. Prepare a summary for the court of the questions that you wish to read into the record at trial.

The discovery transcripts should be summarized in a form that provides a summary of the transcript in the order in which the questions have been asked and answered. It is also often useful to organize the summary into areas based on subject matter, and to index the questions according to subject.

Remember, you need to know the evidence given on discovery. You might need to access particular questions quickly if you hear something different from that witness at the trial and you want to impeach that witness or restore their credibility.

6. Admissions

If you have either secured admissions or given admissions through the notice to admit process, then the notices to admit and the resulting admissions should be copied to the trial book.

The court at the trial management conference may encourage the parties to prepare an agreed statement of facts. Where the parties prepare an agreed statement of facts, it could be copied to this section. You will likely want any agreed statement of fact to be made part of a common book of documents, if any.

7. Authorities

From the authorities you have gathered in your trial book, select the ones you intend to rely on and prepare your book of authorities.

For authorities on the main point, select the leading case from the highest court, preferably from a British Columbia court or the Supreme Court of Canada. Do not cite a whole line of cases from a lower court that say the same thing if there is one case from a higher court that states the principle adequately.

If the cases can be photocopied, bound and tabbed, so much the better. If the case has many pages and you only wish to refer to one or two pages, photocopy the portion of the case with the heading and the headnote as well as the two pages that you are relying upon. However, you should bring one complete copy of the case to court in case opposing counsel or the judge wish to review it.

A copy of the brief of authorities should be given to counsel for the defendant as well as to the court.

Prepare one book for the court, one for opposing counsel, one for yourself, and one (where appropriate) for other counsel. The court convention has been to copy the documents one-sided. Nothing should ever be given to the judge that is not first tendered to opposing counsel.

8. Closing Submission

The best way to prepare for trial is to write your closing submission. This will force you to review the elements of the causes of action in the case, the evidence required to prove these causes of action, and the evidence that you have. Ensure that your theory of the case is clear and is well-supported. Check that you have plans to prove everything you need to prove.

A good closing submission addresses each issue; sets forth the correct legal test for resolving that is-

sue, citing the legal authorities for that test; and sets forth the relevant facts that assist the court in resolving that issue, while citing the admissible evidence that proves those facts.

Your closing submission should be treated as a dynamic document: it will need to evolve as the trial proceeds and evidence is admitted. For example, a witness may not frame evidence on a key point as expected or may change their evidence on cross-examination. Your closing submission should not be treated as final until the evidence is all in. Prior to this point, your closing submission is a work in progress not to be shared.

Where there are secondary issues in a trial, for example, admissibility issues in relation to an expert report, you are well advised to write those submissions as well.

[§6.06] Meeting Procedural Requirements and Deadlines in Preparing for Trial

In preparing for trial, there are many timeframes you need to be alert to. Procedural steps usually have deadlines associated with each step. Counsel must create some form of reminder system alerting counsel as to the pending deadlines of each procedural step moving towards trial. Central to this is a document containing a schedule of these deadline, saved into the file.

Note that most of the procedural rules in question are subject to judicial discretion. This section focuses on the requirements of the procedural rules and will not necessarily stipulate that a given rule is subject to judicial discretion.

This section assumes that the matter has already been set for trial in Supreme Court in accordance with SCCR 12-1, a notice of trial has been filed and served on all parties of record, and the requirements under SCCR 12-6 have been met to arrange a trial by judge and jury, if applicable. (See §2.08 for details on those processes.)

1. Expert Reports

A critical deadline in trial preparation is the service of expert reports. As noted earlier, an expert witness cannot testify in court unless the expert's direct evidence has been included in a report that has been prepared and served in accordance with SCCR 11-6 (SCCR 11-7(1)). SCCR 11-6 governs the content and admissibility of expert reports.

An initial or primary expert report must be served on every other party of record at least 84 days before the scheduled trial date (SCCR 11-6(3)).

An expert report must comply with SCCR 11-6(1): for example, it must be signed by the expert, set out

the expert's name, area of expertise, qualifications, instructions received, nature of the opinion sought, opinion on the issues in question, and reasons for that opinion. An expert must certify that they understand their duty as an expert witness and the report must include this certification (SCCR 11-2 and SCCR 11-6(1)).

An expert report must also comply with the law of evidence. This includes being based on reliable science (*R. v. J.-L.J.*, 2000 SCC 51; *Bialkowski v. Banfield*, 2011 BCSC 1045; *Anderson v. Pieters*, 2016 BCSC 1243; *Gutfriend v. Case*, 2022 BCSC 2055).

If, after an expert's primary report has been served, the expert's opinion changes in a material way, the party must serve a supplementary report as soon as practicable (SCCR 11-6(6)). The supplementary report must conform to the general requirements of an expert report under SCCR 11-6(1), but also further requirements under SCCR 11-6(7), specifically, it must be identified as a supplementary report and set out the change in the expert's opinion and the reason for it.

A party who seeks to rely upon either a primary or supplementary expert report must inform the expert of the trial date promptly after retaining the expert (SCCR 11-6(9)).

A party on whom an expert report is served must serve on every party of record a notice of any objection to the admissibility of the expert's evidence that the receiving party intends to rely upon at trial (SCCR 11-6(10)). This must be done by the earlier of the date of a trial management conference (if held) or 21 days before the scheduled trial date (SCCR 11-6(10)).

A party who wishes to serve expert evidence in reply to an opponent's primary expert report must serve a responding report at least 42 days before the scheduled trial date (SCCR 11-6(4)). The requirements of a responding report are the same as a primary report under SCCR 11-6(1), but also include requirements that the report be identified as a responding report (SCCR 11-6(4)(b)). A responding report does not have the broad scope permitted for an original report under SCCR 11-6(3) and is confined to responding to an original report (*Cambie Surgeries Corporation v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, 2018 BCSC 748).

The SCCR do not address the circumstance of a report that replies to a responding report.

A party on whom an expert report is served may require the expert to attend trial for the purposes of cross-examination. To do so, the party must issue a

demand under SCCR 11-7(3) within 21 days after service of the report (SCCR 11-7(2)(a)).

A party who serves an expert report must provide the documents that underlie that opinion. A party must promptly upon request by any party of record provide any written statements or statements of fact on which the expert's opinion is based, a record of any independent observations made by the expert in relation to the report, any data compiled by the expert in relation to the report, and the results of any test or inspection conducted by the expert if the expert relied on them in forming the expert's opinion (SCCR 11-6(8)(a)).

As well, on request, a party serving an expert report must provide a copy of the expert's file at least 14 days before the trial or, if the request is made within that period, promptly (SCCR 11-6(8)(b)). For an interpretation of this rule see *Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia (Education)*, 2014 BCSC 741.

Note that the Disbursement and Expert Evidence Regulation ("DEER") limits the recovery of disbursements for expert reports in vehicle injury proceedings to up to three reports served (or one report in a fast track proceeding). DEER permits a party to apply to the court to seek to exclude disbursements from these limitations. Importantly, DEER states that all applications for relief against these limitations must be brought at the same time and before the incurring of any disbursement subject to the applications (s. 5(7)(8)(a)). Generally speaking, DEER applications are therefore brought well in advance of trial and well in advance of the service of expert reports.

2. Trial Brief

A trial brief is a standardized court document that facilitates the orderly preparation of matters for trial. The plaintiff must file and serve a trial brief in Form 41 at least 56 days before the scheduled **trial date** (SCCR 12-1.1(1)). Other parties must file and serve a trial brief at least 49 days before the scheduled **trial date** (SCCR 12-1.1(2)). Despite the deadlines for filing a trial brief before the scheduled trial date and unless the court otherwise orders, the plaintiff must file a trial brief and serve a copy on all parties of record at least 28 days before the date set for the **trial management conference**, and all other parties of record must file their trial briefs and serve a copy on all other parties of record at least 21 days before the date set for the **trial management conference** (SCCR 12-1.1(2.1)).

The trial brief must set out the issues, positions of the parties, witnesses to be called and cross-

examined, documents (including expert reports) that will be put into evidence, admissions, and other matters set out in Form 41.

If a party becomes aware that the list of witnesses is either inaccurate or incomplete, the party must file and served an amended witness list promptly (SCCR 12-1.1(6)). A party is not compelled to call witnesses appearing on witness lists at trial (SCCR 12-1.1(7)).

A trial brief is a substantive document containing significant information and requiring due care to prepare: counsel are cautioned to allow themselves sufficient time to prepare a trial brief.

Costs may be awarded at a trial management conference (if held) against a party that fails to comply with the deadline requirements of filing a trial brief (SCCR 12-1.1(4)). If no party complies with these deadlines, the matter is removed from the trial list (SCCR 12-1.1(5)).

3. Trial Management Conference

A trial management conference is a judicial conference that has the purpose of ensuring matters are ready to proceed to trial in an orderly manner. It is no longer mandatory in all civil actions. A trial management conference is mandatory where it is ordered by the court (SCCR 12-2(1)(a)). It is also mandatory where the matter is set for more than 15 days, a party is self-represented or will be at trial, the trial is to be trial by jury, or a party files a requisition requesting a trial management conference not less than 42 days before the trial (SCCR 12-2(1)(b)).

Absent a court order, the trial management conference must take place at least 28 days before the scheduled trial date: (SCCR 12-2(1.1)).

Where the parties are represented, counsel must attend the trial management conference (SCCR 12-2(4)). Parties must attend a trial management conference but may be excused if they are represented and either the party or an authorized representative is available for instructions (SCCR 12-2(5)). Failure of a required person to attend at a trial management conference can lead to the trial management conference proceeding in their absence, being adjourned, or an order for costs (SCCR 12-2(7)).

The powers of the court at a trial management conference are set out under SCCR 12-2(9) and include amending pleadings, adjourning the trial, and directing parties to provide summaries of evidence. Although some of the powers of the court at a trial management conference permit orders affecting conduct of the trial, generally speaking, the court at

the trial management conference is cautious not to intrude upon the role of the trial judge. The court at a trial management conference is not permitted to make orders requiring evidence or final orders, unless by consent (SCCR 12-2(11)).

The court at a trial management conference will usually issue a number of relatively standardized directions regarding pre-trial matters, such as deadlines for service of updated lists of documents, finalized witness lists, and summaries of witness evidence. These directions should be diarized and followed in the lead up to trial.

4. Affidavit Evidence

The general rule is that witness evidence at trial is given orally. However, a party may seek to lead affidavit evidence at trial. To do, the party requires leave of the court (SCCR 12-5(59)) and must serve the affidavit evidence at least 28 days before the trial (SCCR 12-5(60)).

Where a party is served with affidavit evidence, the receiving party may require that the deponent be called as a witness at trial for the purposes of cross-examination (SCCR 12-5(61)). This requirement must be communicated within 14 days after receiving the affidavit (SCCR 12-5(61)).

The use of affidavit evidence at trial is further addressed in Chapter 7.

5. Trial Record and Trial Certificate

The trial record is a book provided to the court that summarizes the case in terms of pleadings, particulars and orders.

A trial certificate is a document filed with the court by a party signifying that that party is ready to proceed to trial.

The party who filed the notice of trial must file the trial record (SCCR 12-3(1)). The trial record must contain the pleadings, any particulars provided further to a demand along with the demand (if any), a case plan order (if any), any order bearing on the conduct of the trial, the trial briefs of the parties, any amended witness list prepared or served on the party under SCCR 12.1-1(6), and any document ordered for inclusion by the registrar pursuant to SCCR 12-3(2) (SCCR 12-3(1)).

A trial record must be filed at least 14 days but not more than 28 days before the scheduled trial date (SCCR 12-3(3)). It must be served on the other parties promptly after filing.

Each party must file a trial certificate in Form 42 at least 14 days but not more than 28 days before the

scheduled trial date (SCCR 12-4(2)). Trial certificates must be served promptly following filing.

A trial certificate signifies to the court that a party is ready to proceed with the trial. There are significant penalties for failure to file trial certificates. Any party that fails to file a trial certificate is not, without leave of the court, permitted to make further applications (SCCR 12-4(6)). If no party files a trial certificate, the action is removed from the trial list (SCCR 12-4(5)).

6. Inspection of Physical Exhibits

Generally, most exhibits are documents, for example, business records, clinical records, wills or contracts. A party wishing to tender a physical exhibit into evidence, such as a plan, photograph or other object must give the other parties an opportunity to inspect the physical exhibit at least seven days before the start of the trial (SCCR 12-5(10)).

7. Adverse Witnesses

Generally, a party gives evidence in their portion of the case and calls non-party witnesses to support their case. However, sometimes a party calls the opposing party in their portion of their case in order to give evidence.

Where a party wishes to call an opposing party as a witness, that party must serve the opposing party with a notice of intention to call adverse party as a witness in Form 45 and proper witness fees at least seven days before the opposing party is required to testify (SCCR 12-5(21)). Adverse witnesses are a special category of witness and unique rules apply to such witnesses (SCCR 12-5(23)–(26)).

8. Notice to Produce

A party may require an opposing party to bring to trial any document listed on the opposing party's list of documents or any physical object in the opposing party's possession (SCCR 12-5(8)). To create the requirement, the party serves a notice to produce in Form 43 at least two days before the trial (SCCR 12-5(8)), although in practice this notice is usually served with the list of documents much earlier in the proceeding.

9. Discovery of Documents

A party who fails to make discovery of or produce for inspection or copying a document as required by SCCR 7-1 may not use that document at trial (SCCR 7-1(21)). Counsel should therefore ensure that they update their lists of documents prior to trial.

Chapter 7

Trial¹

[§7.01] Resources on Trials and Evidence

Much has been written about the trial process. It is an art, not a science. In these materials, we seek only to set out the framework provided by the Supreme Court Civil Rules, B.C. Reg. 168/2009 (the “SCCR”). For further reading, we suggest the following texts:

- J. Kenneth McEwan, *Sopinka on the Trial of an Action*, 4th ed. (LexisNexis, 2020);
- Steven Lubet, et al., *Modern Trial Advocacy*, 4th Canadian ed. (Aspen, 2019);
- Lee Steusser, *An Advocacy Primer*, 4th ed. (Carswell, 2015); and
- *British Columbia Civil Trial Handbook*, 6th ed. (CLEBC, 2021).

Trials are about proving facts. These are excellent resources to assist litigators in using evidence at trial:

- John Sopinka, Sidney Lederman and Alan Bryant, *The Law of Evidence in Canada*, 6th ed. (LexisNexis, 2022);
- *Introducing Evidence at Trial: A British Columbia Handbook*, 4th ed. (CLEBC, 2020); and
- *Expert Evidence in British Columbia Civil Proceedings*, 6th ed. (CLEBC, 2021).

[§7.02] Jury Trial—Selecting the Jury

Jury trials are much less common than trials before a judge alone (see SCCR 12-6 regarding the availability of a jury trial in a civil claim). However, they are a difficult test for counsel’s skills because the rules of evidence must be applied strictly. When dealing with a jury for the first time, the rule should be the same as for your first appeal—have senior counsel. If you cannot have senior counsel present at trial, have access to senior counsel for advice. Minimally, review *Civil Jury Instructions* (Vancouver: CLEBC).

¹ **Timothy H. Pettit**, Pettit and Company, kindly revised this chapter in December 2024 and also in 2016, 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023. It was previously revised by Tannis D. Braithwaite (2010 and 2011); David A. Goult (2001 and annually from 2003–2006); David P. Church (1997); Mark M. Skorah (1995) and Leonard M. Cohen (1996). Parts were created by Frank Kraemer for PLTC.

When your trial is before a jury, the first step in the trial will be the selection of the jury members. The method of selection is outlined in the *Jury Act*. Eight jurors are chosen from a panel of sixteen. Each party has the right to four peremptory challenges without cause.

The plaintiff speaks first with respect to the first juror called. If content, plaintiff’s counsel simply says “content.” Defence counsel will then say either “content” or “challenge.” For the second person, the defence counsel will speak first, either indicating challenge or contentment with that juror. The process continues until the jury selection is complete.

When you are involved in a jury trial, you will not get the list of prospective members of the panel until immediately prior to jury selection. Therefore, there will be no meaningful way to conduct research on the members of the jury pool. Furthermore, the information provided on the list is extremely limited: name, address, and occupation. Where a potential juror’s occupation has not been provided, request that the judge ask the prospective juror. Potential jurors sometimes share further information voluntarily to raise the issue themselves as to whether they should be empanelled. Regardless, there is a definite information shortfall and you will generally be exercising your challenges with a fair bit of intuition.

[§7.03] Commencing a Trial

1. Decorum

If you come well prepared, a trial becomes an enjoyable experience. If you are ill prepared, you will probably find yourself scrambling, which may not help either your reputation or your client’s cause.

Counsel dress formally for trial: a black gown and vest; white shirt with collar and tabs; black shoes; black or black-striped pants or skirt. Formal dress reflects the importance of the occasion and respect for the court.

Do not be late. If you are late, this not only starts you off badly with the judge, but also does not give you the opportunity to collect your thoughts and adjust to the atmosphere of the courtroom.

Be prepared to maintain your composure throughout the trial, and avoid moving around unnecessarily. Do not walk around the courtroom when you are asking questions or presenting argument. It is distracting to the court and makes it more difficult to focus on your message. Stay in one place.

2. Introductions

Give the judge time to write down the name of the case in the judge's bench book. Counsel then introduce themselves. Spell out your last name and your first initial, and provide the court with your title (e.g. Ms., Mr., Mx., Counsel) and pronouns to be used in the proceeding. In Supreme Court, address judges as "Justice," "Madam Justice" or "Mr. Justice" as the context requires (PD-64—*Form of Address*).

3. Housekeeping Matters

It is standard practice for counsel to request and be granted an order excluding witnesses from being present in the courtroom until they have testified. There is no provision within the SCCR that governs this. Rather, it is part of the court's inherent jurisdiction and serves to promote the court's truth finding process. As a general rule, it does not apply to the parties themselves except in special circumstances. A good summary of the law relating to exclusion orders is found in *He v. Yeung*, 2010 BCSC 557.

It is good practice for counsel at the start of the trial to discuss with the court any special circumstances in relation to witness evidence: testimony by video conference or video deposition, interpreter needs, potential witness non-attendance issues, etc.

Counsel should also discuss with the court how they anticipate documentary evidence to be presented to the court, how much will go in by a consent document agreement, and any anticipated applications in relation to admissibility of documents.

Counsel should check in with the court at the start and end of each trial day to keep the court apprised as to how the trial schedule is unfolding, whether the parties are on track with time estimates, and any anticipated problems or unexpected time savings.

[§7.04] Opening

1. When to Make the Opening Statement

After the jury has been selected (or, in the case of a trial by judge alone, after the case has been called) the plaintiff opens their case. Under SCCR 12-5(72), the plaintiff, or the party on whom the onus of proof lies, is permitted to make an opening statement before calling evidence.

SCCR 12-5(72) stipulates that, where the defence is leading evidence, the defence's opening statement must follow the close of the plaintiff's case. This

rule is strictly applied in jury trials but not so in trials by judge alone, where the trial judge may ask defence counsel for an opening statement immediately after the plaintiff's opening. This practice often helps to place the issues in perspective at the outset of the case.

2. Purpose of the Opening Statement

In a judge-only trial, in almost every case you should make an opening statement, have the statement in writing, and give the judge a copy.

In a jury trial, there is nothing wrong with giving a jury a written copy of each counsel's opening, provided the judge sees it first and rules on any objections.

The purpose of the opening statement is to introduce the trier of fact to your case. Outline the basic framework of your case, leaving the details to be filled in by the witnesses. It helps to explain what the issues in the case are and what witnesses you will be calling to address those issues.

One rule of opening statements is to be careful not to overstate your position. If the evidence falls short of what you say, you can rely on opposing counsel to draw that to the judge's attention in the closing argument.

3. Differences With an Opening in a Jury Trial

An opening to a jury should be less formal than an opening to a trial judge sitting alone. Informality does not mean talking down to the jurors. They are the judges of the facts in the case and should be treated as judges. Counsel should not use the opening as an opportunity to present argument. Nor should they tell the jury they will prove a fact unless they will call evidence for that purpose.

Counsel should cover all items mentioned in a judge alone trial opening, with some exceptions. For example, do not say the jury will have before them expert opinions, unless those expert reports have been ruled admissible.

Do not suggest an amount to the jury for what they should award for non-pecuniary damages. This will result in a mistrial. In modern personal injury practice, plaintiffs do not typically set out specific amounts of damages they are seeking. Rather, this is left to closing argument once all the evidence is in. However, in other areas of law, counsel may be well advised to set out in the opening statement the specific remedies they seek.

In seeking to develop advocacy skills, be aware that there is a significant body of literature from the United States on jury tactics. Be cautious in relation to such literature. British Columbia jury practice is far more restrictive than American jury practice. Careless application of American jury practice to a BC jury trial will likely result in a mistrial.

[§7.05] Direct Examination

Contrary to popular opinion, direct examination is usually more difficult to conduct than cross-examination. Part of the pressure is that this is *your* client's case—it should go smoothly. When examining someone in chief, you are not permitted to ask leading questions about contentious matters; however, leading questions are permitted in limited circumstances, such as when getting non-contentious introductory information from a witness. A leading question is a question that suggests the answer, for example: “You were not given sufficient time to read the disclosure statement, were you, Mr. Smith?” The non-leading form of this question would be: “Please tell the court how much time you were given to read the disclosure statement, Mr. Smith.” Accordingly, your questions must be carefully and precisely framed so as to elicit the appropriate testimony and avoid objections.

Because of the requirement that your questions in chief must be neutral, it is important to prepare the witness thoroughly. Otherwise, the witness may become confused and even nervous. By contrast, the witness will be put at ease by hearing a question for which the witness has already been prepared.

Also, do not hide unfavourable evidence—deal with it. Otherwise, it *will* emerge on cross-examination and do far more harm.

1. Order of Witnesses

There are different approaches to organizing a direct exam. These include a chronological and a thematic or topical approach. A chronological approach to direct exam is organized to move from earliest events to most recent, so it develops the narrative chronologically. A thematic approach deals with different issues as separate topics. Counsel should choose the approach that seems most effective for the case and the witness.

There is a great degree of flexibility in the order in which you call witnesses. In calling your witnesses, try to call them in a way that furthers your theory of your case. Sometimes, you have to call them out of order to accommodate their schedules. If so, your opening will be important so that the judge or the

judge and jury can see where this witness fits in the scheme of your case.

Avoid interrupting the testimony of one witness to insert the evidence of another, as it can disturb the flow of a narrative. However, interrupting some witnesses to accommodate scheduling others can maximize effective use of court time.

It may be that you are unable to call a particular witness during your portion of the case but that opposing counsel will agree to interrupt their case so that you may call that witness then. Explore these possibilities with opposing counsel before the case so as to deal with matters effectively and expeditiously. This is in fact the norm, particularly with expert witnesses, even in jury trials. That said, in cases where one witness's evidence forms a foundation for the evidence of other witnesses, it is necessary to call the foundational witness before the others. This is so because a change in the first witness's evidence may render the evidence of subsequent witnesses irrelevant and, therefore, inadmissible. Therefore, in personal injury cases for example, you should call the plaintiff before any experts who are providing opinions based upon the plaintiff's evidence.

With all of this said, counsel may find that the order of witnesses is determined simply by the availability of the witnesses. This is particularly so in shorter cases. The efficient conduct of litigation in terms of court time must take priority over developing a narrative through order of witnesses.

2. Re-Examination

After your witness has been cross-examined, you may want to re-examine that witness. There are strict procedural rules that govern re-examination of witnesses. The general rule is that you must ask all of your questions on direct examination. A question that could have (and therefore should have) been asked on direct examination may not be asked on re-examination. The main exception is where cross-examination raised a matter that could not have been foreseen on direct examination.

It may be that at the close of cross-examination you realize that you have overlooked a portion or piece of evidence during the direct examination. If it is important, do not simply let the witness be excused, but raise it with the judge and ask leave of the court to bring that evidence out. Opposing counsel will, of course, have a right to make submissions concerning that, and, should the question be allowed, will have a right to cross-examine.

3. Objections

If you object to the form of question a witness is being asked or the evidence given, you should rise and state, “I object to [this evidence/this form of question] because....” For example, if the witness is asked to identify a letter written by a non-party and counsel seeks to place the letter in evidence for the truth of its contents, you would say, “I object to this evidence because the letter is hearsay and is being tendered for the truth of its contents.”

If you can anticipate objectionable evidence being tendered, prepare brief submissions in advance and have case authority to support your objection.

If it is trial by jury and the objection and related argument is of a nature that should not be heard by the jury, then, the proper procedure would be: “I object to this evidence. The matter involves a technical matter and perhaps the jury could be excused.”

[§7.06] Cross-Examination

Perhaps each lawyer has a vision of conducting a television-style cross-examination that will be so effective that the witness will be forced to admit all the lies they previously told and will be reduced to tears, and the case will end on a triumphant note.

It is rare that you will cause a witness to break down. The witness (certainly if a party to the action) will not be telling their story for the first time when they give evidence. The witness will be well versed in it and, even if the story is not true, will probably firmly believe it to be true. Rarely will you be able to achieve an effective result simply by going head to head with that witness.

There are more styles of cross-examination than can possibly be described. It is important not only to develop at least one style that comes most comfortably to you, but also to be able to adjust that style to the demeanor of a particular witness. You may have to be more artful or even forceful with a witness who simply refuses to answer your question. With another witness, you may have to be perpetually patient even though an answer is not forthcoming. Whatever approach you decide to use in cross-examining a particular witness, remember that you have to establish control. Do not engage in a dialogue with the witness. Do not ask your questions tentatively, even if you are attempting to be gentle in your cross-examination.

Prepare thoroughly for cross-examination. Research the witness using the internet or social media. If the witness is an expert, research their previous court experience or

scholarly research as appropriate. As well, research the substantive content of the expert’s field as material to the case. This includes reviewing academic papers on issues arising out of the expert’s report. Prepare a detailed cross-examination script with notations to yourself referencing information in the various transcripts, documents and other evidence. Ensure that you have all of the documents you may need to put to the witness available and well-organized at trial. This will permit you to put contradictory evidence to a witness in an effective and efficient manner.

Think about your various lines of attack against a given witness and write them into your cross-examination script. However, be prepared to go off script as necessary.

Observe the witness, observe the judge’s or jury’s reaction to the witness, and always be ready to change the flow of your questioning as the situation dictates.

The scope of cross-examination includes all issues that are at issue in the proceedings in addition to the credibility and reliability of the witness being cross-examined. Therefore, if the plaintiff calls a witness to testify on liability in a motor vehicle case, you are permitted to cross-examine that witness on other issues they may not have testified to, such as damages. Be mindful of such opportunities: a witness who is thoroughly prepared on the issue of liability may not be at all prepared on the issue of damages.

It is often said that you should not ask a question in cross-examination to which you do not know the answer. You will not always be able to adhere to that rule. However, you can adhere to another rule—keep your cross-examination as brief as possible. This is particularly true in jury trials. Another thing to remember is that it is disastrous to ask a question and then attempt to cut off the witness when you see that the answer is a bad one. Instead, particularly with juries, as soon as the witness has finished answering the question with the bad answer, immediately move the witness into an unrelated area of examination. This will hopefully mitigate the harm of the bad answer. In each case, be sure that the witness is allowed to answer fully. Do not fear the witness whose answers are perpetually qualified in order to be helpful to their own cause. That kind of lengthy answer does nothing to enhance the witness’s credibility.

[§7.07] Common Methods of Proof at Trial

Once you have determined what facts must be proven in order to succeed at trial, you must decide on the appropriate method of proving each fact. “Proof” refers to the process by which evidence is tendered in court to be

used to persuade the trier of fact of the existence or non-existence of a fact.

There are a number of different methods of proof and often it is possible to prove a particular fact in more than one way. In such a situation, consider your options and decide the best method of proving each fact. If the fact is controversial, it may be more effective to prove it in more than one way using a variety of evidence, such as through a document or video as well as oral witness testimony. This can make for a more compelling case.

To use some methods of proof under the SCCR, you must take some steps before the trial. For example, see SCCR 7-2 (examination for discovery), SCCR 7-3 (interrogatories), SCCR 7-5 (pre-trial examination of witnesses), SCCR 7-6 (physical examination and inspection), SCCR 7-7 (admissions), SCCR 7-8 (depositions), and SCCR 12-5 (evidence and procedure at trial). Read all of these rules and keep the requirements in mind. Many of these are described in Chapter 3.

Litigators must be familiar with each method of proof and able to use each of them effectively. If you use the law of evidence and the SCCR effectively you will improve your client's chances of success at trial and, very importantly, you can sometimes substantially reduce the length, and thus the expense, of the trial.

The following sections cover the most common methods of proof.

1. Oral Testimony in Court

(a) Importance of Oral Testimony

This is the most common method of proof. Under SCCR 12-5(27), a witness at trial must testify orally in open court unless otherwise agreed by the parties.

While there are alternative methods of proof available which can potentially render the trial process more efficient, the most compelling evidence remains that of oral testimony from an in-person witness.

The advantage of oral testimony is that the trier of fact has the best opportunity to assess the credibility of the witness through that witness's demeanor and performance on cross-examination. However, this is not a particularly advantageous method if you have a witness who will not present the evidence well.

You can usually tell whether the evidence of a witness is getting the attention of the judge by watching the judge's pen. If the judge stops taking notes, you can infer that the judge does not find the evidence persuasive.

(b) Who Can You Call

Unless the court otherwise orders, a witness must not testify unless that witness is listed in a witness list set out in a party's trial brief (SCCR 12-5(28); *Kirilenko v. Bowie*, 2017 BCSC 3137; *685946 B.C. Ltd. v. Nijjar*, 2023 BCSC 1037).

Where your case requires testimony from the opposing party and there is a possibility that opposing counsel will not call the opposing party to testify at trial, you can use Form 45 to require the opposing party to attend trial to testify in your case (SCCR 12-5(21)). Note that calling an opposing party at trial requires specific compliance with the provisions of SCCR 12-5(19)-(26) on adverse witnesses.

2. Real Evidence

An object (such as an outboard engine or a knife) can be marked as an exhibit at trial to form part of the evidence of the case. Sometimes it is the *condition* of the object that is a fact in issue (for example, the object is defective or has been damaged).

A party may require any other party, by a notice served at least two days before trial, to bring to trial any specific object which the party contemplates tendering at trial as an exhibit (SCCR 12-5(8)). Under SCCR 12-5(36), a party can subpoena any person who is not a party or a representative of a party to bring to trial any specific object that the party contemplates tendering as an exhibit.

Unless all parties consent or the court otherwise orders, no plan, photograph or object can be put into evidence at trial unless all parties have been given an opportunity to inspect the photograph, plan or object at least seven days before the start of trial (SCCR 12-5(10)).

3. Documentary Evidence

A document may be introduced into evidence as real evidence to prove its existence or to prove that it was in someone's possession. For example, in a criminal trial in which it is alleged that the accused stole a share certificate, the certificate could be tendered as an exhibit because it has the fingerprints of the accused on it.

Alternatively, a document may be introduced into evidence as testimonial evidence to prove the truth of its contents. In this case, the document is hearsay, and is only admissible under an exception to the hearsay rule. For example, a letter written by a

party to a lawsuit might be put into evidence through the testimony of the letter's author or its recipient.

Some documentary evidence that would otherwise constitute hearsay may be admissible if the hearsay evidence is reliable and necessary and, of course, relevant. The Supreme Court of Canada outlined how and when this is acceptable in two criminal cases: *R. v. Khan* (1990), 59 C.C.C. (3d) 92 (S.C.C.) and *R. v. Smith* (1992), 94 D.L.R. (4th) 590 (S.C.C.). For an application of the *Khan* and *Smith* reasoning to evidence in a civil trial, see *Wepruck (Guardian ad litem of) v. McMillan Estate* (1993), 77 B.C.L.R. (2d) 273 (C.A.).

Business records are a particular category of documentary evidence. Special rules apply to them. Under the *Evidence Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 124, s. 42, a business record is admissible if made or kept contemporaneous with the event recorded and in the ordinary course of business (i.e. not in contemplation of litigation). The circumstances surrounding the making of the record, including lack of personal knowledge by the maker, may affect its weight but not its admissibility. The maker or the keeper of the record is called for the purpose of tendering the record into evidence. Under the *Hospital Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 200, s. 51(2), a hospital record certified true by a hospital administrator is admissible without proof of the administrator's signature.

SCCR 12-5(8) (notice to produce), SCCR 12-5(10) (seven days' notice before trial), and SCCR 12-5(36) (subpoena of documents and objects), all of which were discussed under "Real Evidence," also apply to documentary evidence. Refer to SCCR 12-5(9) regarding the requirements when a copy of a document is to be introduced as an exhibit, including numbering each page of the exhibit sequentially.

Make sure you have at least four copies of each exhibit, one to be marked as the official exhibit (preferably the original of the document), one for counsel who files the exhibit, one for opposing counsel, and one for the judge.

More and more, photocopies of originals are being put into evidence rather than the originals themselves. This is usually done by consent. Before counsel consents to the introduction in evidence of a photocopy, counsel should first examine the original. The original might have other notes on it that do not show up on a photocopy. These notes may be on the front or on the back of the original.

They may affect the meaning of the document. Similarly, if the original is handwritten, some parts may have been written at a different time. This can be seen by comparing the kind of writing implement used (i.e. a pen or a pencil), but both may look the same on the photocopy.

4. Examination for Discovery Evidence

The examination for discovery process is described in §3.04.

SCCR 12-5(46) governs the use of discovery evidence at trial. Under this rule, the evidence given on an examination for discovery by a party or by a person examined pursuant to SCCR 7-2(5) to (10) may be tendered in evidence at trial by any party adverse in interest, provided it is otherwise admissible. However, discovery evidence is admissible only against the adverse party who was examined, or against specified other parties, such as against a company whose director was required to be examined (SCCR 12-5(46)).

The procedure is for the plaintiff to read in discovery evidence of the defendant after all the evidence of the plaintiff has been given. The plaintiff first gives the judge and the defence a list of the questions taken from the transcript of the defendant's discovery. The plaintiff then provides the judge with the transcript and reads the questions and their respective answers aloud for the record.

Some judges only want a list of the discovery question numbers to read over. Others will ask you to read in the actual questions and answers. Best practice is to read the questions and answers into the record. The answers then form part of the trial record. If opposing counsel thinks one or more of the answers has been taken out of context, opposing counsel may ask the judge to require other portions of the transcript to be read into evidence to explain matters. Alternatively, counsel can correct the context in cross-examination or re-examination (*Smith v. B.C.T.V. Broadcasting Ltd. and Langley Riders Soc.* (1988), 32 B.C.L.R. (2d) 18 (C.A.)).

The mere fact that answers were given on discovery does not make them admissible at trial. The rules of evidence at trial must be complied with. Hearsay is perfectly permissible on an examination for discovery but, depending upon the use to which it is being put, hearsay may not be admissible at trial.

Reading in discovery evidence is primarily useful to the plaintiff, especially when the defendant has admitted relevant facts in discovery that assist the

plaintiff. Sometimes, reading in evidence from the discovery transcript will be the only way, or the most convenient way, for the plaintiff to prove an essential element of their case.

That said, it is permissible for a plaintiff to call a defendant in the plaintiff's case. See SCCR 12-5(19) to (22).

The discovery evidence that is read in should consist of admissions made by the defendant at discovery and be of a nature that fills in the gaps of the plaintiff's case where the plaintiff is required to prove a particular fact (e.g. that the defendant was the person involved in the accident at the time in question, and was the driver of the car, etc.).

If the facts have already been proved by admissions in the pleadings or in a notice to admit, the additional admission from the discovery is redundant.

Where the discovery testimony of the defendant relates to an issue where the onus of proof rests on the defendant, or where the defendant's testimony harms the plaintiff's case, plaintiff's counsel should avoid reading it in. Since the onus of proof is on the defendant, the defendant must lead evidence to prove that issue. For example, if the defence alleges that the plaintiff was contributorily negligent, do not read in discovery evidence where the defendant makes that claim. That is for the defence to prove.

For the defendant, while they may use a discovery transcript in the same manner as a plaintiff as set out above, defendants primarily use discovery transcripts to contradict ("impeach") a plaintiff's witness in cross-examination. If the evidence of a witness at trial varies from their discovery evidence, the witness is given a copy of the transcript, the question and answer are read to the witness, and the witness is then asked, "Do you recall being asked that question? Do you recall giving that answer? Is that answer true?" This can also be done for a series of questions.

Generally speaking, a defendant may not read in discovery evidence unless they have confronted the plaintiff with that evidence and allowed the plaintiff an opportunity to respond. This is the rule in *Brown v. Dunn* (1893), 6 R. 67 (H.L.). Note that this rule is not restricted solely to the use of discovery evidence.

5. Deposition

SCCR 7-8 governs the procedure for arranging and conducting the taking of deposition evidence. Depositions may be permitted where it is difficult or

impossible to have the witness at trial. Full direct and cross-examination of the witness is conducted before a court reporter, and the transcript or video recording of the deposition is tendered at trial.

SCCR 12-5(40) to (45) govern the use of deposition evidence at trial. Under SCCR 12-5(40), a transcript or video recording of a deposition may be given in evidence at trial. Unless otherwise ordered or agreed, the whole deposition must be given in evidence (SCCR 12-5(45)), subject to objections to the admissibility of particular portions that might be raised at trial under SCCR 12-5(56).

Where there is an issue as to the admissibility of deposition evidence, a *voir dire* may be required to determine admissibility, particularly in jury trials.

Deposition evidence can be a great convenience in terms of trial scheduling, as it is easy to play a deposition video to fill a time during the trial where there are otherwise no *viva voce* witnesses available to give evidence. However, there are also significant disadvantages to deposition evidence:

- objections are not ruled on during the deposition;
- the deposition generally occurs prior to the commencement of the trial and, thus, counsel cannot adapt questions during the deposition to changes in the case; and
- generally, credibility issues are less pronounced when the witness appears on video than when the witness is live in court.

6. Pre-Trial Examination of a Witness

The procedure for conducting a pre-trial examination of a non-party witness under SCCR 7-5 is described in §3.07. A pre-trial examination of a witness is similar to an examination for discovery in that there is only cross-examination of the witness, not full direct and cross-examination.

SCCR 12-5(52) governs the use at trial of a pre-trial examination of a witness. If a non-party witness has been examined before trial, the testimony recorded in the transcript may be used to contradict or impeach the testimony of the witness at trial (SCCR 12-5(52)(a)).

Only when the witness's attendance at trial cannot be secured will the court allow the evidence of the witness obtained under SCCR 7-5 to be read in as direct evidence (SCCR 12-5(52)(b)).

If you are allowed under SCCR 12-5(52)(b) to read in a portion of the transcript, the court may look at

the whole of the transcript and rule that related parts also be put into evidence (SCCR 12-5(53)). This would normally occur as a result of submissions by opposing counsel.

7. Interrogatories

Interrogatories under SCCR 7-3 are described in §3.05. Note that this procedure is available only by consent of the party to be examined or with leave of the court. SCCR 12-5(58) governs the use of interrogatories at trial. It provides that a party may tender into evidence an answer or part of an answer given to an interrogatory. Again, the court may compel other answers that are connected to that answer to be put into evidence.

8. Affidavits

Under SCCR 12-5(59), part or all of the evidence at a trial may be given by affidavit with leave of the court. However, any opposing party may require the person who swore or affirmed the affidavit to attend trial for cross-examination by providing notice of the requirement within 14 days of receiving the affidavit (SCCR 12-5(61)). Such cross-examination is not limited to matters contained in the affidavit (SCCR 12-5(64)). If the cross-examination does not add materially to the evidence, the person requiring the deponent's attendance for cross-examination may be penalized in costs (SCCR 12-5(65)).

Only evidence that might have been given orally at trial (personal knowledge) may be included in the affidavit (SCCR 12-5(63)).

Counsel may find that it is much more efficient to simply subpoena witnesses to attend trial than to negotiate with opposing counsel for the admission of affidavit evidence at trial.

9. Transcripts of Previous Proceedings

Under SCCR 12-5(54), a transcript of sworn evidence from a previous proceeding can be put into evidence, with permission of the court, when the witness is unable to attend or cannot be compelled to attend by subpoena. Reasonable notice of the intention to use such a transcript must be given.

Though the previous proceeding need not have involved the same parties, there is substantial jurisprudence surrounding the use of transcripts of previous proceedings, which counsel for a party should refer to before choosing to use this method of proof (see e.g. *Seelig v. Schulli Estate* (1992), 73 B.C.L.R. (2d) 279 at 283-4; *Marszalek Estate v.*

Bishop, 2007 BCSC 324; *Malik Estate v. State Petroleum Corp.*, 2007 BCSC 934).

10. Admissions in Pleadings

Once a fact is admitted in a pleading (most commonly in the response to civil claim), it is no longer in issue, and therefore it is not necessary for the party relying on the fact to prove it by other means.

Admissions made in pleadings must be expressly made. An allegation in a pleading not expressly admitted or denied is deemed to be outside the knowledge of the responding party (SCCR 3-3(8)).

Once an admission has been made in a pleading, it can *only* be withdrawn by consent or with leave of the court (SCCR 7-7(5)). The provision in SCCR 6-1(1)(a), which permits a party to amend a pleading once without leave of the court before the earlier of the date of service of the notice of trial or the date the case planning conference is held, does not apply in this instance.

11. Notice to Admit

The important process under SCCR 7-7 for obtaining admissions relating to facts and documents before trial is discussed in §3.08.

Be cautious in making admissions. This is true both with respect to notices to admit but also for agreed statements of facts. Do not make admissions that permit opposing counsel to avoid having to call a witness who would otherwise have other useful evidence. As well, avoid making admissions on points which your opponent cannot otherwise prove. Admissions, once made, can be difficult to withdraw later on (*Davie v. Wilson*, 2007 BCSC 1876; *Rumsey v. Carros Group Services Inc.*, 2023 BCSC 887).

12. Court's Discretion to Allow Proof of Facts

A court may order that evidence of a fact or a document may be presented at trial "in any manner," including evidence on information and belief (hearsay), documents or entries in books, copies of documents or entries in books, or by a publication which contains a statement of fact (SCCR 12-5(71)). SCCR 12-5(71) is designed to give the court considerable scope in admitting evidence; however, the court will read the SCCR subject to the laws of evidence.

SCCR 12-5(71) is particularly useful if counsel wants to use copies of documents. Counsel may want to use a copy if the original is unavailable or

where it is inconvenient to use the original. If you want to use a copy of the document rather than the original, the best practice is to obtain the consent of all parties, in order to avoid the necessity of formally applying for an order.

When the parties consent, you should ask the court, out of courtesy, to approve the use of copies. Approval of the court will almost certainly be granted unless the copy is of poor quality. Use of copies of documents is particularly common in cases involving a large number of documents. In such cases, copies of documents are usually placed in three-ring binders and the entire binder or the individual documents in the binder are marked as exhibits.

When making an application under SCCR 12-5(71), it can be useful to refer the court to SCCR 1-3(1): “The object of these Supreme Court Civil Rules is to secure the just, speedy and inexpensive determination of every proceeding on its merits.”

13. Expert Reports

Handling expert reports is addressed in Chapter 6 on trial preparation.

Expert reports present problems at trial. Too often counsel put books of documents together without considering their admissibility. Some reports may not be admissible if they do not pass the tests laid down by the leading cases. Clinical records of doctors often are included in counsel’s proposed exhibits, even though they do not qualify as expert reports under SCCR 11. Before a document goes to the jury, the judge should rule on it.

As a general rule, be careful about tendering clinical records to a jury, as a jury will have difficulty understanding them. Best practice is to call the practitioner who prepared the records and have the admissible evidence go in through oral testimony.

Again, be mindful of the limits on the number of experts and expert reports that you may tender in motor vehicle cases: s. 12.1 of the *Evidence Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 124.

14. Telephone and Video Conferencing

SCCR 23-5(4) allows a party to apply, or the court to direct, that an application be heard by way of telephone or video conference.

Telephone or video conferencing can be used whenever appropriate, to reduce or avoid movement of witnesses and to speed the progress of cases. Telephone or video conferencing might be used

when you have tendered an expert report and counsel for the opposing party wants to cross-examine your expert. It might be used also to examine and cross-examine a lay witness whose evidence is not particularly controversial.

In any given case, the cost advantage of not having the witness travel to the community in which the proceeding is taking place will need to be weighed against any prejudice suffered as a result of not having the witness present in the courtroom for the judge to view live while the witness is being cross-examined, and against any costs associated with video conferencing.

The technological limitations that once surrounded video conferencing are much reduced in recent years. Admittedly, a shortcoming of video conferencing is that one cannot hand an exhibit to the witness. However, as a general rule, counsel can serve digital copies of the exhibits on the witness prior to the trial such that the witness can view the same exhibit as the court during testimony.

Telephone and video conferencing is set up through Supreme Court Scheduling, provided a judge has approved the use in the particular proceeding. See Supreme Court Administrative Notice—*Video Conferencing* (AN-6). Requesting parties must complete a Court Videoconference Request Form. The parties must also agree to pay the charges for using the equipment and are responsible for paying any charges associated with booking a private facility. Most courthouses have video conferencing equipment. Many correctional centres in BC also have equipment.

15. *Voir Dire*

A *voir dire* is a separate hearing within the trial, generally on the admissibility of evidence. For example, an expert witness may be subject to cross-examination during a *voir dire* on the admissibility of a part or all of their report. In jury trials, a *voir dire* occurs in the absence of the jury.

[§7.08] Exhibits

When a proper evidentiary foundation has been laid, a document or object may be marked as an exhibit at trial. After the document or object has been shown to opposing counsel, the procedure that counsel follows is to say, “I tender this as the next exhibit” or “I ask that this be marked as an exhibit.” Any objection to its admission into evidence must be made at that time.

Modern trial practice is to provide the court and other parties with a binder containing numbered tabs to hold exhibits that are expected to be included in the binder. As exhibits are tendered to the court and marked, they are then placed in the binder at the numbered tab corresponding to their exhibit number.

Have sufficient exhibits for the record, the judge, opposing counsel, and one for each two jurors (there are a total of eight jurors in a civil case).

If the proper evidentiary foundation cannot be laid through the witness, but you want to have the witness comment on the document or object and have it entered through another witness at a later time, you may ask to have the exhibit marked for identification only.

The court practice is to use a number to identify exhibits and a letter to identify exhibits marked for identification only. An example of an exhibit marked for identification is a written statement taken by a witness who will be called later to testify, but which requires comment by the present witness. Exhibits on the *voir dire* are marked differently from exhibits marked in the trial proper.

Counsel may wish to cross-examine the opposing party's witnesses with documents that will not become evidence at trial. In such circumstances, the documents are marked as exhibits for identification. To facilitate cross-examination, counsel may wish to place such documents in a binder and tender the binder collectively as a single exhibit for identification.

During the trial, keep a list of the exhibits, though the clerk will generally distribute their list from time to time. As well, physically mark your documents with the exhibit numbers (or letters, as the case may be).

If you give jurors written material expecting them to read it, do not be surprised if they fail to do so. Jurors are not required to do homework. You must always read to the jury the significant parts of any written exhibit. You can do this when it is presented as an exhibit or as part of your closing.

[§7.09] Reply

At the end of the defendant's case, the plaintiff may have the right to call reply evidence. The rule governing permissible reply evidence is quite restrictive and generally excludes any evidence that a plaintiff should have led in their case. Exceptions include evidence on matters that could not have been reasonably anticipated or evidence in response on issues where the defendant bears the onus of proof. See *McPhee v. British Columbia*, 2005 BCCA 139.

If a plaintiff is permitted to lead reply evidence, a defendant may then be permitted to lead surreply evidence. As with reply evidence, the rule is quite restrictive.

[§7.10] Closing

Likely when you first opened the file and drafted the pleadings you had a clear idea of where you were heading with the case, what you needed to prove, and how you were going to persuade the judge or jury of your client's position. Throughout the intervening stages you will have been adding to that.

Modern practice in judge-alone trials involves detailed written closing submissions with proper citations of evidence and law. Generally speaking, counsel hand up the written submission along with a digital copy on a USB stick and then present their closing submission orally. When presenting orally, counsel are able to summarize their written submissions and hit the highlights.

Closing submissions to a jury are generally not in writing and are often limited to one hour or less. You do not refer to case authority when doing a closing submission with a jury. Counsel may seek to support their oral submissions with bullet points, either on poster boards or PowerPoint. In making a closing submission to a jury, make your best points and do so as if talking to your neighbour.

Modern jury practice encourages plain talk over flowery oratory in closing submissions to a jury. A modern jury will be more persuaded by reasonable counsel making common sense points to them in a measured tone than passionate, over-the-top oration.

[§7.11] Charge to the Jury

During the trial (or even in preparing before the trial), draft a list of questions to be left with the jury at the conclusion of the trial. For suggested forms, see CIVJI—Appendix C—Sample Forms of Questions for the Jury.

If counsel have concerns about the judge's charge to the jury, they should raise those concerns promptly. If they do not complain and suggest a solution when the instructions are given, it is unlikely they will later succeed in an appeal alleging faulty instructions.

To do this consult CIVJI, Appendix B—Checklist of Instructions Usually Delivered in Civil Jury Trials. Prepare any amendments that may be necessary to suit the case you are trying. Present your list of CIVJI instructions and proposed amendments to the trial judge at the beginning of the trial. Do not assume that CIVJI is perfect or that a CIVJI-based jury instruction is appropriate

(see *Knauf v. Chao*, 2009 BCCA 605; *McCliggot v. Elliott*, 2022 BCCA 315).

[§7.12] Judgments and Orders

Generally, a “judgment” is a decision that finally determines the questions in issue between the parties, while an “order” may or may not have this effect. Judgments and orders, however, are treated identically in the SCCR.

Procedures for drafting and entering orders are described in §4.05. See also *Supreme Court Chambers Orders—Annotated* (Vancouver: CLEBC, loose-leaf).

[§7.13] Appeal

The topic of civil appeals is beyond the scope of these materials, but trial counsel should keep in mind four basic principles about appeals.

First, an appeal is not an opportunity to re-hear and re-weigh all the trial evidence presented in the Supreme Court. The evidence on an appeal is the trial record. It is possible that, in limited circumstances, fresh evidence might be uncovered after trial, where that fresh evidence might be a basis to seek leave to appeal. Rule 59 of the Court of Appeal Rules addresses the procedure in seeking leave to appeal based on fresh evidence.

Second, most but not all trial decisions of the Supreme Court may be appealed to the Court of Appeal. Leave to appeal is required if the order is a “limited appeal order” set out in Rule 11 of the Court of Appeal Rules.

Third, there is a time limit for bringing an appeal. Generally, counsel must file and serve the documents required to seek an appeal within 30 days of when judgment was pronounced (Court of Appeal Rule 6(2)).

Fourth, an appeal will not automatically postpone enforcement of the trial court’s order. Depending on what act the trial order was made under, the process for seeking a stay of proceedings will differ. For example, to stay an order made under the *Family Law Act*, you need an order of a judge of the Supreme Court (*Family Law Act*, s. 234). To stay other orders, you may need to apply to the Court of Appeal in chambers, depending on the type of order you are seeking to postpone.

Counsel planning to appeal must carefully review the practice directives prepared by the Court of Appeal and updated from time to time. In 2022 many forms and practice directives were updated as part of a transition to a new *Court of Appeal Act*, S.B.C. 2021, c. 6, and Rules. See the Court of Appeal’s website at www.bccourts.ca/Court_of_Appeal/practice_and_procedure/Civil_Rules_Forms.aspx.

Chapter 8

Costs and Interest¹

This chapter discusses orders for costs and for court-ordered interest in the Supreme Court, and refers throughout to the Supreme Court Civil Rules, B.C. Reg. 168/2009 (the “SCCR”). A rule under the former Rules of Court, B.C. Reg. 221/90, which were in effect until July 1, 2010, is referred to as a “former Rule.”

For a review of costs issues under the SCCR, see Christopher J. Hope and Kathryn S. Sainty, KC, *Plus TC&D: The Assessment of Costs and Disbursements in Motor Vehicle Injury Litigation*, 6th ed. (Vancouver: Continuing Legal Education Society of BC, 2022).

[§8.01] Costs

An award of costs is meant to partly compensate the party who succeeded in an action for the legal fees, time, and out-of-pocket expenses incurred in pursuing or defending that action. There is both a *legal fees* and a *disbursements* component to “costs” as it is used here.

Clients need to understand early in the litigation that an award of costs will not reimburse them for all legal fees.

The rules governing costs are set out in SCCR 14-1 (for most actions), SCCR 15-1(15) to (17) (for fast track actions), and Appendix B of the SCCR.

1. Entitlement to Costs

The court’s decision to award costs and to decide the level at which they must be paid is discretionary. However, in some circumstances a statute guides the court. One such statute is the *Negligence Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c.333, particularly s.3(1), which provides the parties’ respective liability for costs is in the same proportion as their respective liability to make good the damage or loss, unless the court otherwise directs.

Another general (default) principle is that “costs follow the event” (SCCR 14-1(9) and s. 44 of the *Court of Appeal Act*). In other words, the unsuccessful party pays the costs of the successful party, unless the court otherwise orders. The “event” is a

matter before the court, be it an application, a trial or an appeal.

The general rule that “costs follow the event” was considered in *McLeod Engines Ltd. v. Canadian Diesel Engines Co. Ltd. (No. 2)*, [1951] 1 W.W.R. 803. The “event” must be construed distributively (rather than collectively) and the determination of any separate issue may be an “event.” This interpretation is consistent with SCCR 14-1(15), which provides:

The court may award costs

- (a) of a proceeding,
- (b) that relate to some particular application, step or matter in or related to the proceeding, or
- (c) except so far as they relate to some particular application, step or matter in or related to the proceeding

and in awarding those costs the court may fix the amount of costs, including the amount of disbursements.

For further clarification, see *Chaster (Litigation Guardian of) v. LeBlanc*, 2008 BCSC 47, where the court said that in assessing whether to award costs under former Rule 57(9) (now SCCR 14-1(9)), the court should follow a four-step inquiry:

- (i) consider the “matters in dispute,” not just pleaded issues;
- (ii) assess the weight and importance to the parties of the matters in dispute;
- (iii) determine the overall winner by reference to the matters in issue; and
- (iv) decide whether there is any reason to deprive the winner of their costs.

If an entitlement to costs arises during a proceeding, costs are payable once the proceeding concludes, unless the court otherwise orders (SCCR 14-1(13)).

2. Costs in Specific Cases

(a) Costs When a Party is Represented by an Employee

A party is not disentitled to costs solely because their lawyer is an employee of that party (SCCR 14-1(11)).

(b) Costs in Pre-Trial Applications

Costs that may be awarded in connection with bringing or defending pre-trial applications for non-final orders (known as “interlocutory orders”) are set out in SCCR 14-1(12). Unless the court hearing the application otherwise orders:

¹ Nicholas Peterson of Collins Peterson LLP kindly revised this chapter in November 2024 and also in 2016, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023. Parts of it were previously revised by Kuldip S. Johal (2013); Joseph Wong (2002–2011); Ian D. Aikenhead, KC, and Joseph Wong (2000); Ian D. Aikenhead, KC (1997); and Gordon Turrieff (1997).

- If the application is granted, then the party who brought the application is entitled to the costs of the application if that party is awarded costs at trial. The party opposing the application is not entitled to costs even if that party is awarded costs at trial.
- If the application is refused, the party who brought the application is not entitled to the costs of the application even if that party is awarded costs at trial. The party who opposed that application is entitled to costs if that party is awarded costs at trial.

(c) Costs to Encourage Settlement

Costs are awarded as indemnity for expenses incurred but also to encourage settlement and to promote sensible conduct in court proceedings. In particular, see SCCR 9-1 regarding the potential cost options that the Supreme Court may consider when one party fails to accept an offer to settle made under SCCR 9-1 that *ought to have been reasonably accepted*.

Terms of settlement can provide for various costs terms, including payment of costs to one party, or each party bearing their own costs. Clients should be told before settlement about costs and what the terms of settlement may or may not provide for.

For example, the Disbursements and Expert Evidence Regulation, BC Reg 210/2020, ss. 4(1) and (2) limits recovery of disbursements for expert reports in vehicle injury proceedings to up to three reports served (or one report in a fast track proceeding). Though the court has the power to allow additional expert reports, the registrar assessing disbursements does not have the powers of the court (see *Lee v. Rockhill*, 2023 BCSC 1820 at para. 28 on this point). Therefore, unless there is an agreement or a court order to the contrary, a party on settlement who had expenses associated with more than the allowable maximum number of expert reports can be limited in disbursement recovery before a registrar, and should consider this before settlement.

(d) Costs for Self-Represented Litigants

A party need not have incurred an obligation to a lawyer before claiming costs. Since *Skidmore v. Blackmore* (1995), 2 B.C.L.R. (3d) 201 (C.A.), self-represented litigants have been entitled to claim costs that are not limited to disbursements. Self-represented parties are also not entitled to lower costs than parties represented by a lawyer (*Harrison v. British*

Columbia (Information and Privacy Commissioner), 2008 BCSC 979).

A self-represented litigant's entitlement to costs also includes special costs (described later in this chapter); special costs may also be awarded *against* self-represented litigants: see *K.L.M. v. L.K.M.*, 2023 BCSC 1414 at para. 39.

(e) Costs for Witnesses

Rules relating to costs payable to non-party witnesses and other non-litigants include SCCR 7-5 (pre-trial examination of a witness) and SCCR 7-1(18) and (19) (production of documents from a non-party).

(f) Costs for Matters in Small Claims Jurisdiction

Under SCCR 14-1(10), a plaintiff who recovers an amount within the jurisdiction of the Small Claims Court is not entitled to costs (other than disbursements) “unless the court finds that there was sufficient reason for bringing the proceeding in the Supreme Court and so orders.”

In deciding whether there was “sufficient reason” the court should consider all of the factors leading to the plaintiff's decision to commence the action in Supreme Court. Whether there was “sufficient reason” is based on the circumstances at the time the action was commenced; a plaintiff does not have an ongoing obligation to assess the value of the claim (*Reimann v. Aziz*, 2007 BCCA 448, decided under former Rule 57(10), now SCCR 14-1(10)).

In *Gradek v. DaimlerChrysler Financial Services Canada Inc.*, 2011 BCCA 136, the Court of Appeal confirmed that “sufficient reason” for commencing an action in Supreme Court instead of Small Claims Court is not limited merely to the value of the claim, even if it is clear at the start that the claim will not exceed the Small Claim Court's monetary jurisdiction. However, in *Gehlen v. Rana*, 2011 BCCA 219, the court stated that while quantum is not the only factor, it is perhaps the most important one in determining sufficient reason. The court also affirmed in *Gehlen* that “the burden is on the plaintiff to establish eligible circumstances that are persuasive and compelling to justify ‘sufficient reason.’”

A plaintiff who is unable to satisfy the court that there was “sufficient reason” is still entitled to all reasonable disbursements, and not merely those disbursements that would have been incurred had the proceeding been in the

Small Claims Court. See *Grenier v. Williams*, 2020 BCSC 462 at para. 99.

(g) Costs in Fast Track Proceedings

Subject to SCCR 14-1(10), costs in proceedings under SCCR 15-1 (the fast track litigation rule) are determined in accordance with SCCR 15-1(15), unless the court otherwise orders or the parties consent.

When exercising its discretion under SCCR 15-1(15), the court may consider a settlement offer made under SCCR 9-1. For a useful discussion of the interplay between SCCR 15-1(15) costs and SCCR 9-1 offers, see *Johal v. Radek*, 2016 BCSC 1170.

Under SCCR 15-1(15) a party is entitled to \$8,000, excluding disbursements, if the trial required one day or less; \$9,500 if it required more than one day but less than two days; and \$11,000 if it required more than two days. According to *Mann v. Klassen*, 2001 BCSC 1275, these amounts are intended to be the costs of the action, not just the trial. SCCR 15-1(15) also permits the court to “otherwise order” a different amount, where special circumstances warrant a departure from the stated costs limits (see *Peacock v. Battel*, 2013 BCSC 1902). Generally, a party to a fast track matter is awarded \$6,500 in pre-trial costs and \$1,500 for each day of trial (*Johal v. Radek*, 2016 BCSC 1170 at para. 26).

For a case awarding two equal sets of costs for two fast track actions ordered to be tried together, see *Wang v. Dhaliwal*, 2014 BCSC 1662. The court has discretion to apportion costs between two actions pursuant to SCCR 14-1(15). In *Gill v. Fowler*, 2016 BCSC 1163, the court made a deduction to the global combined fast track costs for multiple matters being heard together on account of certain efficiencies gained by having the matters heard together, with certain trial preparations also probably avoided.

Taxes are payable on costs awarded under SCCR 15-1(15) (SCCR 15-1(17)).

Note that under the SCCR, if “the only relief granted in the action is one or more of money, real property, a builder’s lien and personal property” and the plaintiff recovers a judgment of \$100,000 or less (not including interest or costs), or the trial of the action was completed in three days or less, costs will be assessed under SCCR 15-1(15) to (17) (even if a notice of fast track action was not filed), unless otherwise ordered by the court (SCCR 14-1(1)(f)).

3. Orders

Some of the typical orders relating to costs, and their effects, are set out below:

(a) Judgment with costs

The party in whose favour judgment is given will have the assessed costs of the proceeding.

(b) No order as to costs

Neither party receives any costs (each party bears their own costs).

(c) Costs thrown away

When one party has forced another party to take steps or pay amounts that should not have been necessary, the court may grant an application for costs unnecessarily incurred (or “thrown away”).

(d) Costs in the cause

The costs of an application are recoverable by the party who succeeds in the action. Note, a party who succeeded on a pre-trial application and won costs “in the cause” would not get those costs if that party is not ultimately successful in the action.

(e) Costs in any event

Costs in any event is sometimes called “costs in any event of the cause.” On a pre-trial application, the party awarded such costs will have them no matter who succeeds in the action. However, costs awarded on this basis typically are assessed when the entire proceeding has concluded.

While a discretionary order, “that discretion must be exercised judicially, not arbitrarily or capriciously. ‘Special circumstances’ are required” (*Schrader v. Qin*, 2024 BCSC 1956).

(f) Costs payable forthwith

In limited circumstances, the party awarded pre-trial costs may have those costs assessed immediately (i.e. before the final outcome of the matter). Unless a pre-trial order states that costs are payable forthwith, they are usually assessed at the end of the entire proceeding (SCCR 14-1(13)). For a discussion of the court’s discretion to depart from costs payable at the end of the matter, see *Uber Canada Inc. v. Surrey (City)*, 2020 BCSC 342 at paras. 5–6.

4. Practice as to Costs

When costs are awarded, they are usually awarded as “ordinary costs” (also called “party and party

costs”). Under SCCR 14-1(1), costs are payable as ordinary costs unless the circumstances in SCCR 14-1(1)(a) to (f) exist.

Ordinary costs are assessed under Appendix B of the SCCR, and do not fully compensate for, or match, actual legal fees. By contrast, “special costs” closely resemble actual legal fees, but are awarded only when there has been “reprehensible” conduct by a party or lawyer (discussed later in this chapter).

The court may fix a lump sum for the costs of part or an entire proceeding (SCCR 14-1(15)). The court may also fix a lump sum for the costs on an application either inclusive or exclusive of disbursements (SCCR 14-1(15)).

If anything is done or omitted improperly or unnecessarily by a party, the judge or registrar may disallow any costs in connection with that act or omission, and may order costs to the other party arising from that act or omission (SCCR 14-1(14)). See e.g. *Garayt v. Deneumoustier*, 2018 BCSC 295.

By SCCR 14-1(33), where the court considers that the lawyer for a party has caused costs to be incurred without reasonable cause or through delay, neglect or some other fault, the court has the power to make any of the following orders:

- disallow any fees and disbursements between the lawyer and the client;
- order the lawyer to indemnify the client for any costs ordered against that client in favour of another party;
- order that the lawyer is personally liable for all or any part of the costs that their client was ordered to pay to another party; or
- make any other order that “will further the object of these Supreme Court Civil Rules.”

Before the court makes such an order, the lawyer is entitled to be present or to have notice of the order (SCCR 14-1(35)).

Orders of this kind address costs that were unnecessary and aim to compensate the client, not punish the lawyer. That said, SCCR 14-1(33) has a punitive function that supports the court’s power to control its processes. Special costs may be ordered under this section against the lawyer personally if the lawyer’s conduct in the process has been reprehensible (see *Sandhu v. Sidhu*, 2023 BCSC 1860, citing *Nazmdeh v. Spraggs*, 2010 BCCA 131).

Note that the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed in *Young v. Young*, [1993] 4 S.C.R. 3 that courts must be “extremely cautious” about awarding costs

personally against lawyers because of the lawyers’ duties “to guard confidentiality of instructions and to bring forward with courage even unpopular causes.”

When the court makes an order under SCCR 14-1(33), the court may direct the registrar to conduct an inquiry and file a report recommending the amount of costs (SCCR 14-1(34)(a)). The court may also fix the costs “with or without reference to the tariff in Appendix B” (SCCR 14-1(34)(b)); but that amount is limited to \$1,000 for the costs of an application (SCCR 14-1(37)).

It is important that the question of costs be dealt with at the trial or hearing, or time be specifically reserved for speaking to it later. As well, the judgment of the court about costs must be included in the final order that is entered. If costs are not referred to in the final order, the proceeding will be treated as if the court had expressly made no order as to costs. See *Chernoff v. ICBC* (1992), 12 C.P.C. (3d) 220, and *Maurice v. Maurice* (1994), 100 B.C.L.R. (2d) 291.

A party may apply to the court for an order for costs before the court’s formal order is entered. But after that order is entered, a party may only apply under SCCR 13-1(17) for an order to vary an entered order on the ground that costs should have been, but were not, adjudicated upon.

When the court makes an order that provides for costs, but does not fix the scale of costs, and the order is entered, the court is *functus officio* with respect to the scale of costs, and costs must be assessed under Scale B (*Maharaj v. ICBC* (1991), 48 C.P.C. (2d) 53 (B.C.S.C.)).

At any time before the registrar issues the certificate under SCCR 14-1(27), any party may apply under SCCR 14-1(7) to the judge who made the order for costs for a direction that any item of costs, charges or disbursements be allowed or disallowed and the registrar must follow that direction.

CLEBC’s manual *Practice Before the Registrar* addresses most issues that arise on an assessment of costs. See also the *Registrars’ Newsletter* on the Supreme Court website.

For cases, see the annual article entitled “Costs” in CLEBC’s *Annual Review of Law and Practice*.

[§8.02] Types of Costs

Costs are typically awarded as ordinary costs, but “uplift costs” or “special costs” may be ordered.

1. Ordinary Costs

Determining ordinary costs is a two-step procedure: the court fixes the “scale” to be applied, then the registrar assesses the bill of costs drawn up by the party who was awarded costs.

Appendix B contains the provisions about scales of costs. It also contains a tariff which assigns a number of “units” that can be claimed in the bill of costs for different steps in litigation.

(a) Scale of Costs

Scales A, B and C each fix a dollar value per unit: A is \$60 per unit, B is \$110 per unit and C is \$170 per unit.

Scale A is for matters of “little or less than ordinary difficulty” and Scale C is for matters of “more than ordinary” difficulty. In the absence of a court order or agreement otherwise, Scale B applies. Scale B is for matters of ordinary difficulty.

When fixing the scale, the court may take into account the following:

- the difficulty of the issue of law or fact;
- the importance of the question to a class or body of persons; and
- whether the decision effectively determines the issue between the parties (beyond the relief actually granted or denied).

See *SWS Marketing Inc. v. Zavier*, 2022 BCSC 1818 at paras. 24–26 for a consideration of various factors used to determine the “difficulty” of a matter as referred to in s. 2 of Appendix B.

The Court of Appeal in *Gichuru v. Purewal*, 2018 BCCA 267 at para. 17 reiterated that increased costs at Scale C cannot be used to punish a party for improper conduct.

(b) Assessment by the Registrar

The second step in determining ordinary costs is the registrar’s assessment of the bill of costs. Counsel must satisfy the registrar that the work for which the costs are claimed was necessary or proper (SCCR 14-1(2)) and that the expenses and disbursements were necessary or proper. If counsel satisfies those requirements, the registrar must allow a reasonable amount for those expenses and disbursements (SCCR 14-1(5)).

A bill for ordinary costs must be drawn up in Form 62–Bill of Costs. The bill should set out the scale of costs awarded or agreed and an itemized list of the applicable items from the

tariff in Appendix B and the number of units claimed for each of them. The bill should include taxes on fees and should also include a list of claimed disbursements (and taxes on these). For guidance in drawing and issuing bills of costs, see *Practice Before the Registrar*.

Send a draft bill to the lawyer for the party against whom costs are to be assessed, with a request for consent. If the amount claimed in the bill is accepted, the bill may be filed in the registry, with a copy of the order authorizing the assessment of costs and a requisition requesting a registrar’s certificate to be issued without a formal assessment. The registrar may then issue a certificate in Form 64–Certificate of Costs without an appointment (SCCR 14-1(27)).

If there is no consent, the party seeking a costs assessment must obtain an appointment from the registrar in Form 49, and serve a copy of the appointment, together with the bill of costs and any affidavit in support, to the party against whom the costs are to be assessed and to every other person whose interest may be affected (SCCR 14-1(25)). The lawyer must give at least five days’ notice (SCCR 14-1(21)(c)).

The lawyer seeking the assessment must attach a copy of the bill to be assessed to the appointment and on the face of the appointment should refer to the order or rule (of the SCCR) on which the lawyer is relying. It is preferable to attach a copy of the order, but counsel should be ready to produce the order at the hearing whether the assessment is contested or not.

An assessment may be conducted by telephone, video conference, or “other communication medium” in case of urgency (SCCR 23-5(3)).

Either party may make an offer to settle a bill of costs, for a specified amount, in Form 123–Offer to Settle Costs (Appendix B, s. 8).

A party who is dissatisfied with the decision of the registrar on an assessment may apply to the court for a review within 14 days after the registrar has certified the costs (SCCR 14-1(29)).

(i) Registrar’s Assessment of Legal Costs

Many items in the tariff have *fixed* units. For example, under item 40, “Process for setting down proceeding for trial,” counsel is allowed one unit. Many of the fixed

unit values allow a certain number of units per day.

Several items of the tariff have minimum and maximum units. In such cases, the number of units allowed will be based on how much time a reasonably competent lawyer should have spent on the work (see *Elder v. Stewart*, 2007 BCSC 73). The registrar must also consider the relative complexity and difficulty of the case (see *Laxton v. Coglon*, 2009 BCSC 1544).

Appendix B also sets fixed amounts as costs, including on default of appearance or pleading, and for execution and garnishment.

An item will be reduced by half under s. 4 of Appendix B if the lawyer spent less than two and a half hours during a day on the item, or increased by half if the lawyer spent more than five hours during the day on the item.

Section 4(4) of Appendix B also provides that for any tariff items for which preparation for an activity may be claimed, the registrar may allow units (up to the maximum allowable for one day) for preparing even if the activity does not take place or is adjourned.

The units for each item are totalled and then multiplied by the rate of the applicable scale (i.e. Scale A, B or C). After calculating those tariff items, disbursements are assessed. Disbursements reasonably incurred and reasonable in amount will be allowed.

(ii) Registrar’s Assessment of Disbursements

The test for assessing the propriety of a disbursement is whether it was proper “in the sense of not being extravagant, negligent, mistaken or a result of excessive caution or excessive zeal, judged by the situation at the time when the disbursement or expense was incurred” (*Van Daele v. Van Daele*, [1983] B.C.J. No. 14 (C.A.)). “A ‘necessary’ disbursement is one which is essential to conduct the litigation. A ‘proper’ disbursement is one which is not ‘necessary’ but is reasonably incurred for the purposes of the proceeding” (*McKenzie v. Darke*, 2003 BCSC 138).

In *MacKenzie v. Rogalasky*, 2014 BCCA 446 at para. 80, the Court of Appeal confirmed the connection required between the expense and the litigation: “To be recoverable a disbursement must arise directly from the exigencies of the proceeding and relate directly to the management and proof of allegations, facts and issues in litigation, not from other sources.” See also *Emond v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, 2024 BCSC 582 at para. 56 for the legal principles applicable to the court’s assessment of disbursements.

A regulation under the *Evidence Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 124 attempting to limit disbursements in motor vehicle injury litigation with total recoverable disbursements limited to 6% of the judgment or settlement amount was previously found unconstitutional and struck down (*Le v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, 2022 BCSC 1146, appeal dismissed 2023 BCCA 200). In response, the provincial government amended s. 5 of the Disbursements and Expert Evidence Regulation, BC Reg 210/2020, specifically adding s. 5(6) which permits a party to apply to court for an order that a disbursement be excluded from the 6% cap. The criteria to exclude such disbursements is strict. As of the 2024 update of this chapter, a constitutional challenge of the new 6% cap was argued in July 2024, with the court’s decision currently under reserve (see *Shrieves v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, Action No. S241786, Vancouver Registry).

(iii) Evidence on Costs

The onus rests with the party presenting a bill of costs to the registrar for assessment to prove entitlement to all the items and disbursements listed on the bill (*Holzappel v. Matheusik* (1987), 14 B.C.L.R. (2d) 135). That decision should be read in the context of SCCR 14-1(2) and (5). These rules give the registrar a broad discretion to allow costs, but unless the party presenting the bill (and, if necessary, the party or parties objecting to it) leads this evidence, the registrar has no basis for exercising discretion.

Often there is no evidence to support items or disbursements. In the absence of evidence, and where there is a dispute, the registrar—applying *Holzapfel*—disallows the costs claimed.

The form and degree of proof will depend on the nature of the objections by the paying party, but unless the facts can be agreed, affidavit or oral evidence will be required from the lawyer responsible for the work done and the outlays made. What is sufficient evidence is a matter for the registrar, but an affidavit of justification is indispensable where a disbursement is at issue (see *Wheeldon v. Magee*, 2010 BCSC 491).

In the interests of justice, a lawyer can be granted leave to speak to the lawyer's own affidavit of justification (see *Antulov v. Emery*, 2018 BCSC 898 at para. 5).

The costs assessed against the unsuccessful party will be the total of the fees and disbursements, including applicable taxes (SCCR 14-1(8)). This amount should be set out in a certificate of costs to be signed by the registrar on the conclusion of the assessment. The certificate may be endorsed on the original bill of costs, or may be a separate certificate in Form 64. The party assessing costs is under an obligation to file the certificate after the conclusion of the assessment (SCCR 14-1(27)).

2. Uplift Costs

Until July 1, 2002, a court had the power to order “increased costs” if an award of ordinary costs would produce an unjust result. The mechanism by which the court could make such an order was repealed on July 1, 2002.

However, as of January 1, 2007, the court may order an increased unit value under s. 2(5) of Appendix B (often called “uplift costs” or “costs with the uplift”). Section 2(5) allows a court to order that the value of units be set at 1.5 times the value that would otherwise apply. The court might do this after fixing the scale of costs applicable to a proceeding if the court finds there were “unusual circumstances” such that an award of costs on that scale would be “grossly inadequate or unjust.” An award of costs is not grossly inadequate or unjust merely because the actual legal expenses exceeded the costs that would be fixed under Scales A, B or C (s. 2(6) of Appendix B).

This type of award was made in *Johnson v. Heer*, 2020 BCSC 1751, where the court found a defendant had forced the plaintiff to trial, as the defendant's quantum submission at trial was higher than the plaintiff's pre-trial offer to settle. For a discussion of such costs see *Shen v. West Continent Development Inc.* (BC0844848), 2022 BCSC 462 at paras. 29–37.

3. Special Costs

“Special costs” are awarded for reprehensible conduct in the course of the action. Special costs used to be called “solicitor and client costs” and they are closer to actual legal fees than ordinary costs.

In *Garcia v. Crestbrook Forest Industries* (1994), 9 B.C.L.R. (3d) 242 (C.A.), Lambert J.A. said, “the single standard for the awarding of special costs is that the conduct in question properly be categorized as ‘reprehensible.’” As Chief Justice Esson said in *Leung v. Leung* (1993), 77 B.C.L.R. (2d) 314, “‘reprehensible’ is a word of wide meaning” that encompasses scandalous or outrageous conduct but also milder forms of misconduct.

Mayer v. Osborne Contracting Ltd., 2011 BCSC 914 at para. 11, listed possible situations where a party's behaviour might warrant special costs:

- pursuing a meritless claim and being reckless with regard to the truth;
- making improper allegations of fraud, conspiracy, fraudulent misrepresentation, or breach of fiduciary duty;
- displaying “reckless indifference” by pursuing a claim that is manifestly deficient;
- making resolving an issue far more difficult than it should have been;
- bringing proceedings primarily to impose a financial burden on the opposing party; or
- bringing a proceeding for an improper motive.

The SCCR offer no authority for awarding *double* special costs (*Wang v. Shao*, 2018 BCSC 790 at para. 24).

In the contingency fee context, see *Norris v. Burgess*, 2016 BCSC 1451 where the court ordered ICBC, on behalf of the defendant, to pay the plaintiff the entire contingency fee payable to her counsel (rather than units for special costs) on account of late disclosure of video surveillance, contrary to an earlier court order and disclosure obligations.

A bill for special costs is presented in the same form as a bill between a lawyer and the lawyer's own client under the *Legal Profession Act*.

The registrar's assessment of special costs is similar to a registrar's review of a bill under the *Legal Profession Act*. A court order may require the assessment of a party's special or "reasonable" costs.

SCCR 14-1(3) provides that special costs are those fees that the registrar considers were proper or reasonably necessary, judged objectively, to conduct the proceeding. Expert opinion is sometimes needed on the issue of reasonableness. *Bradshaw Construction Ltd. v. Bank of Nova Scotia* (1991), 54 B.C.L.R. (2d) 309 (S.C.), aff'd [1992] B.C.J. No. 1657 (C.A.), is a leading authority on the objective approach to assessing special costs.

When exercising discretion, the registrar must consider "all of the circumstances," including those listed in SCCR 14-1(3)(b)(i) to (viii). For a thorough discussion of the rules pertaining to special costs, see *Gichuru v. Smith*, 2014 BCCA 414.

A bill for special costs may be rendered as a lump sum, provided that the bill describes the services so that, in the opinion of the registrar, any lawyer should have sufficient information to advise a client on whether the charge was reasonable.

4. Costs for Default Judgment

A different procedure applies to default judgments, for which the registrar may fix costs without an appointment (SCCR 14-1(26)). A bill for costs following default judgment under SCCR 3-8 is drawn up using Form 63 (SCCR 14-1(20)).

[§8.03] Court Order Interest

1. Entitlement to Interest

The governing principle of the *Court Order Interest Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 79 is that interest on pecuniary judgments is awarded to the successful litigant as compensation for the loss of the use of the money. This basic principle is easier to state than to apply, which has resulted in inconsistent decisions.

Under the *Court Order Interest Act*, only simple interest is provided for. Compound interest, or interest on interest, is expressly prohibited (s. 2(c)). The Supreme Court of Canada has noted (*British Columbia (Forests) v. Teal Cedar Products Ltd.*, 2013 SCC 51 at paras. 8–10):

There is no doubt that compound interest is a more accurate way of compensating parties for the time-value of money. ... However, the legislature has

not yet amended the [Act] to remove the prohibition of interest on interest, so simple interest, despite its flaws, remains the rule in British Columbia courts.

In addition to applying to the BC Provincial Court and Supreme Court, the *Court Order Interest Act* applies to the Civil Resolution Tribunal as if it were a court (s. 48(3) of the *Civil Resolution Tribunal Act*, S.B.C. 2012, c. 25).

2. Prejudgment Interest

Section 1(1) of the *Court Order Interest Act* requires a court to add prejudgment interest to a pecuniary judgment from the date when the cause of action arose to the date of the order.

While a court has discretion as to the rate for prejudgment interest, courts generally award it "at the Registrar's rates as varied from time to time." District Registrars set the rates, which are available on the BC Supreme Court website.

The *Court Order Interest Act* distinguishes between non-pecuniary (or general) damages and special damages in calculating prejudgment interest. Special damages include "out-of-pocket" expenses, whereas general damages encompass all other damages. Interest on special damages is calculated at the conclusion of each six-month interval in which the loss was incurred (s. 1(2)). On the other hand, under s. 1(1), general damages attract interest from the date the cause of action arose. Despite s. 1(1), no prejudgment interest is awarded on parts of an order that represent nonpecuniary damages arising from personal injury or death (s. 2(e)).

It can sometimes be difficult to determine whether a particular item of damages should be classified as general or special. Pain and suffering attracts general damages and fees for medical therapies are special damages. Other types of damages, however, such as wage loss prior to the date of trial, may not be so easily classified.

Most decisions treat past loss of income as special damages (see e.g. *Baart v. Kumar* (1985), 66 B.C.L.R. 61 (C.A.)). An alternative approach treats past income loss as general damages and reduces the interest rate, if not all lost income accrued from the date of the accident (*Andrews v. Farrell Estates*, [1984] B.C.D. Civ. 3375-01 (C.A.)).

Section 2(a) of the *Court Order Interest Act* provides that no interest is to be awarded on future losses (on that part of an order that represents pecuniary loss arising after the date of the order).

The court cannot order interest if the parties have already agreed on interest or if the judgment

creditor has waived the right to interest (ss. 2(b) and 2(d)). No prejudgment interest is awarded on costs (s. 2(c)). In addition, interest is awarded only on the sum that the defendant must pay to the plaintiff after taking into account all proper discounts, such as the payment of no-fault benefits in a motor vehicle accident claim (*Ammerlaan v. Drummond* (1982), 36 B.C.L.R. 155 (S.C.)).

A defendant may make interim payments to a plaintiff on account of damages and will often do so where liability is not seriously contested. If such voluntary payments are made, prejudgment interest is calculated on the declining balance of the liability as subsequently determined by the court.

The Court of Appeal has ruled that interest paid to finance disbursements incurred in the course of litigation is not recoverable as a disbursement under SCCR 14-1(5) (*MacKenzie v. Rogalasky*, 2014 BCCA 446, leave to appeal refused, [2015] S.C.C.A. No. 24).

3. Postjudgment Interest

Section 7 of the *Court Order Interest Act* provides that pecuniary judgments will bear interest at an annual rate that is equal to the prime lending rate of the banker to the government of Canada. The governing rates will be set on January 1 and July 1 of each year, and those rates will prevail for the ensuing six months.

Under s. 8 of the *Court Order Interest Act*, the court has the power to vary the rate of interest or fix a different date from which interest is calculated.

4. Default Judgment

Under s. 3 of the *Court Order Interest Act*, where judgment is obtained by default, the registrar is entitled to add prejudgment interest to the award.

5. Interest on Costs and Disbursements

Unless ordered otherwise, postjudgment interest is payable on the costs from the date of the judgment in which the costs were awarded and not from the date of the registrar's assessment (*Syed v. Randhawa* (1996), 24 B.C.L.R. (3d) 164 (S.C.)).

Prejudgment interest is prohibited on costs (*Court Order Interest Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, s. 2(c)). However, in *Gill v. Fowler*, where the earlier mediated settlement between the parties included settlement of damages "plus costs," the court ordered *postjudgment* interest on costs and disbursements from the date of *mediated settlement* up to the date of the costs' assessment hearing. Interest akin to postjudgment interest was also awarded on settlement damages not paid promptly, promptness of payment being an implied term of settlement: see *McCloskey v. Lymn*, [1996] B.C.J. No. 1537 (S.C.).

Chapter 9

Collections¹

[§9.01] Law and Practice

This chapter provides a brief outline of collections practice in British Columbia. The chapter aims to cover matters chronologically. It starts with meeting a client, proceeds through litigation steps, and closes with a discussion of post-judgment execution.

The emphasis here is on the remedies of the unsecured creditor, but acting for debtors is also covered. Civil procedure generally is discussed in more detail in earlier chapters of the *Practice Material: Civil*. The rights of secured creditors are considered in this chapter mainly in the context of priority rights between secured and unsecured creditors. For further discussion of secured creditors, see the *Practice Material: Business: Commercial*.

This chapter discusses collections practices involving real property, but builders liens are covered in the *Practice Material: Real Estate*. For collections remedies in family law, see the *Practice Material: Family*. Bankruptcy law is beyond the scope of the *Practice Material*.

The Continuing Legal Education Society of British Columbia publishes *British Columbia Creditors' Remedies—An Annotated Guide*. Consult the CLE website for other recent publications. The following texts are also recommended for further reading:

- Lyman R. Robinson, KC's *British Columbia Debtor-Creditor Law and Precedents* (Toronto: Carswell, loose-leaf); and
- William D. Holder and John C. Fiddick's *Annotated British Columbia Court Order Enforcement Act* (Toronto: Canada Law Book).

¹ **Iman Hosseini** of Alexander Holburn Beaudin + Lang LLP kindly revised this chapter in December 2024 and 2023. It was previously revised by Iman Hosseini and Sarah Richmond (2022); Kent Wiebe and Iman Hosseini (2017, 2018, 2020); Tanveer Siddiqui (2014); Robert A. Finlay (2010, 2012 and 2013); John C. Fiddick (2004–2008); Stella D. Frame (1997, 1998, 2000, 2002 and 2003); Cynthia Callison (2002, with commentary on the impact of the *Indian Act*); Kenneth M. Duke (2001); and Peter J. Reardon (1996). Prepared for PLTC by Allan A. Parker, KC, in 1988 and revised annually by the author to 1996.

1. Main Statutes and Rules

Collections law has been codified to a great extent by legislatures across Canada to ensure harmonization of the legal recovery process. This allows creditors to have uniform lending and recovery processes across Canada, and ensures that there are reciprocal enforcement procedures should debtors move assets to other jurisdictions.

The *Court Order Enforcement Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 78 is currently the governing statute for enforcing judgments and for many other creditor remedies in British Columbia. In keeping with initiatives to modernize and harmonize practices between jurisdictions, a new statute called the *Money Judgment Enforcement Act*, S.B.C. 2023, c. 29 (the “MJE”) received Royal Assent on October 26, 2023, and is expected to replace certain aspects of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* when it comes into force (though originally this was expected to be in 2025, at the time of printing this material in April 2026, the MJE was not yet in force). On November 1, 2023, the BC Legislative Assembly introduced Bill 43, the *Money Judgment Enforcement Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions Act*, S.B.C. 2023, c. 42, which, once in force, will make necessary amendments to other legislation so that the MJE can be effectively enforced.

The MJE is modeled on a uniform act that is the basis for current laws in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Bringing this new act into force in BC will create a more uniform collection regime for businesses operating throughout western Canada. It will make it easier for individuals who are awarded judgments in BC to collect the money owing to them. It will also reduce some of the harsher consequences debtors can currently face. Some of these anticipated changes are as follows:

- Judgment creditors will be able to register money judgments in a new (searchable) Money Judgment Registry, and this registration will create an “enforcement charge” over all of a judgment debtor’s present and after-acquired personal property (ss. 10–11).
- Creditors will need to register within two years of being awarded a money judgment (unless a court extends the time or the judgment debtor acknowledges the debt in writing to reset the two-year period). In respect of an extraprovincial judgment, the lesser of two years or the limitation period in the extraprovincial jurisdiction will apply (s. 12).
- A creditor who registers will have, at least in regards to priority, the equivalent of a

security interest under the *Personal Property Security Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 359 in the debtor's personal property, perfected at the time of registration (ss. 13 and 36).

- Creditors will be able to require debtors to provide documents or be examined under oath (before a civil enforcement officer or the creditor's counsel) as to their assets (ss. 53–54).
- Creditors will be able to enforce by issuing a single instruction specifying all the collection options the creditor wants a civil enforcement officer to pursue (ss. 45–50).
- Creditors may enforce against a wider range of personal property, including against negotiable instruments, fixtures, growing crops, securities, licences, trade secrets, and intellectual property, as well as property the debtor acquires after the judgment is registered (Part 9).
- Creditors will be able to garnish wages and employment benefits payable in the future by serving a single notice on the debtor's employer that will remain valid until the debt is paid (instead of having to seek an order for each pay period) (ss. 94, 96, 99–104).
- Creditors will be able to enforce against jointly held assets where only one owner is a debtor (Part 11).
- A creditor with an enforcement charge, where the debtor holds real property in joint tenancy, will retain that enforcement charge over the real property even if the debtor dies (in other words, the surviving joint tenant does not receive the real property unencumbered) (s. 146).
- Debtors will no longer be at risk of imprisonment for default of payment of a money judgment (s. 6).
- Debtors will have more exemptions from seizure, including exemptions for individuals impacted by collection processes against corporate debtors, and exemptions for persons earning income that falls below minimum levels (to be set by regulation) (Part 13).

As the *MJEA* has not yet been brought into force by regulation, this chapter will outline some of the most important changes it will bring about with respect to the topics discussed below, to the extent presently known, as many of the details of the changes will be prescribed by regulation, once published. This chapter will generally begin by setting

out the current law and then summarizing the anticipated changes.

Currently, the *Court Order Enforcement Act* and the Supreme Court Civil Rules (the “SCCR”) govern the vast majority of recovery efforts.

Practice in Small Claims Court is governed by the Small Claims Rules.

Both the SCCR and the Small Claims Rules contain extensive procedural processes for recovery of judgments, which supplement the *Court Order Enforcement Act*.

2. Other Statutes

The following statutes address discrete issues in the debtor-creditor relationship:

- (a) *Court Jurisdiction and Proceedings Transfer Act*, S.B.C. 2003, c. 28—provides for enforcement of foreign judgments and arbitral awards.
- (b) *Court Order Interest Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 79—provides for prejudgment and postjudgment interest on most creditor claims.
- (c) *Creditor Assistance Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 83—modifies the common law to provide for equal sharing of execution proceeds among some judgment creditors.
- (d) *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act*, S.B.C. 2004, c. 2—provides for licensing collection agents and bailiffs. It limits debt collection tactics by creditors, and regulates the use of consumer credit information.
- (e) *Enforcement of Canadian Judgments and Decrees Act*, S.B.C. 2003, c. 29—allows most judgments of a court or tribunal of a Canadian province or territory to be registered simply by paying a fee, filing a certified copy of the judgment, and providing material required by the SCCR (SCCR 19-2). The Act is not limited to monetary judgments. (See §9.07 for more.)
- (f) *Foreign Money Claims Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 155—provides for conversion dates of claims in foreign money amounts.
- (g) *Fraudulent Conveyance Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 163—provides a remedy for creditors if a debtor disposes of property in order to frustrate judgment execution.
- (h) *Fraudulent Preference Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 164—gives a remedy to creditors of an insolvent debtor who has preferred one creditor over another by transferring property to the preferred creditor to prejudice the other creditor.

- (i) *Indian Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. I-5—under s. 89(1), on-reserve real or personal property of an Indian or Indian Band (within the meaning of the *Indian Act*) is not subject to charges, pledges, mortgages, attachments, levies, seizures, distress or execution when the creditor is not an Indian or Indian Band. This is subject to some limitations. For instance, a creditor who has rights in a chattel under a conditional sales agreement may execute against the chattel even if it is on reserve (s. 89(2)). Other creditors may be able to pursue assets or chattels off reserve.

An Indian Band can enforce a debt or seize the on-reserve property of an Indian, including the on-reserve property of its own members, and an Indian may enforce a debt, commence garnishment proceedings, obtain execution against assets, or seize the on-reserve property of another Indian. The creditor must be a registered Indian or status Indian (entitled to be registered), but does not have to be a member of the same Band as the debtor (*Campbell v. Sandy*, [1956] 4 D.L.R. (2d) 754 (Ont. Co. Ct.)).

- (j) *Law and Equity Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 253—says that all English law in effect before November 19, 1858 is the law in British Columbia (except where modified by the legislature) (s. 2). It establishes that rules of equity prevail over the common law (s. 44). It contains several substantive rules relevant to collections law, including relief from forfeiture (s. 24), relief from acceleration (s. 25), conditions under which writs of execution do not attach to property (s. 35), assigning debts (s. 36), appointing receivers (s. 39), proceedings against jointly and severally liable parties (s. 53), recovering property other than land (s. 57), and contracts that must be in writing to be enforceable (s. 59).

When acting for a creditor be aware, at all times, of the value of the claim in relation to the cost of the legal services. If the cost of legal services exceeds what the client can recover, they will be unhappy. Also, there may be other creditors pursuing the same debtor, and the debtor might have few assets. Unsecured creditors might recover nothing if the debtor is petitioned into bankruptcy or receivership, so that other (secured) creditors recover first. Advising clients of those risks and keeping them aware of the costs throughout the legal process ensures that they are not surprised with the outcome.

When acting for a debtor, it is important to obtain a retainer (so as not to become the next creditor) and to communicate with the debtor regarding the merits (or lack of merits) of any defence, as soon as possible.

Note that lawyers must not counsel debtors on how to defeat lawful execution against their assets. *BC Code* rule 3.2-7 says that a lawyer must not engage in any activity that the lawyer knows or ought to know assists in or encourages any dishonesty, crime or fraud.

It is vital that clients understand the process and that they be given a realistic assessment of their situation. Clients who face paying an unexpected legal bill for unsuccessful collection efforts will be unsatisfied. Cost-effectiveness, efficiency and practicality are key to a successful collections practice.

2. Gathering Information

The lawyer needs to obtain complete information about the creditor-client, the other side, and the cause of action, as soon as possible. The lawyer needs to question the client thoroughly for details and to obtain copies of all relevant client documents (for example, credit applications, debt instruments, account ledgers, and correspondence). The lawyer should be satisfied that credit agreement documentation is consistent with account records, and there is a legally enforceable contract.

Sophisticated clients may be told how to carry out some or all of these preliminary investigations in order to minimize costs. With high-volume clients, standardized instruction forms are often used to ensure that all relevant information is provided in written form.

Where the client or debtor are corporations, the lawyer should always obtain searches of both the debtor and the client to ensure they are active and valid companies, and to determine whether there are other secured creditors that could assert a priority interest in the assets.

[§9.02] Opening a New File

1. Managing Client Expectations

The principles governing client relations covered in the *Practice Material: Professionalism* apply to collections clients, whether creditors or debtors. At the outset, clarify client objectives, conflicts, fees, and any retainer conditions. See “Collections Procedure” in the *Practice Checklists Manual on the Law Society website* (www.lawsociety.bc.ca).

Creditors generally want to collect as much of their debt as possible, as quickly as possible, for the minimum legal cost. The reality of collections is that these goals may not be achieved easily.

If a creditor has taken a secured interest in the debtor's assets, the lawyer should obtain a current search of the Personal Property Registry immediately on accepting the retainer, to verify that the security is valid and enforceable.

Where the creditor is claiming an interest in land, a preliminary search of the legal title from the Land Title Office will be necessary to obtain the legal information necessary to assert the claim and determine legal ownership.

Records from credit bureaus or reporting agencies pertaining to the debtor might be available, although under the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act*, s. 107, a creditor must have the debtor's consent (in the credit application or elsewhere) to obtain the debtor's credit file.

Following judgment against a debtor, a creditor may obtain motor vehicle registration information from the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia pertaining to that debtor. Skip-tracing services may be used to locate debtors whose whereabouts are unknown.

If a creditor has reason to suspect that the debtor is insolvent or has declared bankruptcy, a search may be conducted of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Records Search database maintained by the Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy Canada.

When the *MJEA* comes into force there will be new avenues available for gathering information once a creditor has obtained a judgment against a debtor. Under the *MJEA*, a creditor who has registered a money judgment in the Money Judgment Registry may request that a judgment debtor provide identification documents (s. 52) and a disclosure statement (s. 53) that sets out information useful for collections purposes, including all income sources, properties, and relevant obligations of the judgment debtor. Upon receiving notice of this request, the judgment debtor has 14 days to comply.

3. Assessing the Action

(a) Debts With Guarantees

A guarantee is a contractual commitment a person makes to pay a debtor's debt if that debtor is unable or unwilling to pay. The person who makes that commitment is called a guarantor. Section 59(6) of the *Law and Equity Act* requires the guarantee to be in writing to be enforceable, although there are exceptions to this requirement in special circumstances: see *Ace Instruments Ltd v. Tobinsnet Oil & Gas Ltd.*, 2022 BCSC 421.

If a debtor is unwilling or unable to pay the debt and if the creditor demands that the guarantor pay, then the guarantor effectively becomes the debtor along with the original debtor. This means the creditor is entitled to sue the guarantor for the debt and to pursue the prejudgment and postjudgment remedies available to the creditor.

The creditor can also elect to sue the original debtor along with the guarantor; however, the creditor cannot recover damages that are greater than the outstanding debt plus applicable interest. The guarantor is entitled to any defences that might be available to the original debtor and to any applicable exemptions under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*.

(b) Legal Considerations

When assessing the action, the lawyer must review carefully all the information they have gathered and consider the applicable law. The applicable law includes the common law of contract or consumer-oriented statute law.

In some cases it may be appropriate to render an opinion on the validity and enforceability of a client's debt or security instruments. This is a standard preliminary step in most enforcement actions related to security under the *Personal Property Security Act*, for example. This is a specialized area of practice, particularly in relation to competing security interests. Before tendering such an opinion, take care to fully understand the *Personal Property Security Act* and its implications for certain classes of creditors and debts.

A review of all potential legal issues that may arise in a collection action is beyond the scope of this chapter. These are a few of the many issues that may arise that are not covered here:

- applicability of seize or sue laws when dealing with consumer goods;
- limits on seizure of consumer assets;
- joint and several liability of defendants, and the doctrine of merger;
- insurers or sureties;
- common law and equitable defences; and
- set-off and counterclaims.

4. Contingency Fees

While contingency fee arrangements (no fees if no recovery) may be attractive to creditor clients,

before entering into a contingency fee agreement for a collections matter, you should consider several factors:

- the history of the relationship between the law firm and the client;
- the credit-worthiness of the client;
- the exigible assets of the debtor;
- the claims from competing creditors and priorities;
- the likelihood of a bankruptcy of the debtor;
- the length of time to obtain a recovery; and
- the risk of non-recovery.

Essentially, you must analyze the economic risks compared to the potential rewards of a particular contingency fee arrangement.

It is unusual for lawyers to agree to work on contingency in debtor-creditor files, since the outcome is so uncertain. It is impossible to predict what the debtor's financial situation will be by the time judgment is obtained, how many other creditors will be asserting claims against the debtor's assets at that time, and where they will rank in priority to your client's claim.

5. Prohibited Collection Practices

There are many limits on the conduct of a person demanding payment or collecting debts. Part 7 of the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act* lists prohibited collection practices (ss. 113–124). Section 114 of the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act* prohibits creditors from harassing debtors. Harassment includes using threatening, profane or intimidating language. It also includes exerting undue, excessive or unreasonable pressure, and publishing (or threatening to publish) a debtor's failure to pay.

In addition to acts prohibited under the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act*, other conduct is prohibited under the *Criminal Code*, such as direct threats of harm to persons or property (s. 264.1), extortion (s. 346), and conveying false messages with intent to alarm (s. 372).

Section 115 of the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act* provides that a "collector," defined broadly as "a person, whether in British Columbia or not, attempting to collect a debt," must not attempt to collect payment of a debt until the collector has notified (or made a reasonable attempt to notify) the debtor in writing of:

- the name of the creditor;

- the amount of the debt; and
- the identity and authority of the collector to collect the debt from the debtor.

Section 121(4) of the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act* prohibits threatening legal proceedings without written or lawful authority.

Section 116(4) of the *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act* prohibits collectors from continuing to communicate directly with a debtor if the debtor tells the collector to communicate with the debtor's lawyer and provides the lawyer's address.

Two *BC Code* rules are particularly important to lawyers in collections matters: the rule against communicating directly with opposing parties who are represented by counsel (rule 7.2-6), and the rule against threatening either a criminal or quasi-criminal prosecution or a complaint to a regulatory authority in order to gain a benefit for the client (rule 3.2-5).

[§9.03] Demand

1. Demanding Payment

It is standard practice for a lawyer acting for a creditor to issue a demand letter for payment before commencing legal action. This letter usually contains these elements:

- the essence of the client's claim;
- the nature of the default;
- the interest rate (if applicable) charged;
- the terms for resolution (for example, payment in full, or otherwise);
- directions for reply (usually to the lawyer); and
- a specific deadline for reply.

Often the client makes a demand for payment before a lawyer is engaged to send a formal demand letter. A lawyer's demand typically includes a deadline by which legal action will be taken.

A demand letter puts the other side on notice that a lawyer is involved and demonstrates that the client "means business." This is a double-edged sword: clients should be aware that in terms of escalating action, there is nowhere to go once a lawyer sends a legal demand, and they run the risk of losing credibility with the debtor if they do not commence the promised legal action when the demand is not met.

Settlement is usually preferable to litigation, but even if settlement is not achieved, offering to settle

in a demand letter can be useful. Send the demand letter by registered mail. The debtor's signed receipt of the demand letter may help if the debtor later evades service and an order for alternative service becomes necessary. Also, the debtor's failure to accept the settlement offer might result in higher court costs being awarded later, pursuant to SCCR 15-1(16). The response may also reveal what defences (if any) the debtor relies on. An inappropriate response or no response will, at least, confirm the need for legal action.

If the creditor offers to settle for less than the total amount owed, that offer should be made without prejudice and ideally in separate correspondence.

When there is a contract, the lawyer should read it carefully to determine whether a demand is contractually required. If it is, does the contract specify the proper form for the demand, the prescribed method of service, or the grace period, if any?

If there is any doubt about the need for a demand, it is prudent to issue one so that you remove a potential defence. A demand may be a legal precondition for a cause of action, such as against some guarantors or in some actions on promissory notes (see *Waldron v. Royal Bank* (1991), 53 B.C.L.R. (2d) 294 (C.A.)), which says that a debtor is entitled to reasonable notice before collateral is seized).

A secured creditor who intends to enforce its security on property used for a business carried on by the insolvent person must notify that insolvent person that the creditor intends to enforce its security, pursuant to s. 244 of the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. B-3. Once the notice is served, the creditor must wait ten days (unless the debtor waives the waiting period in writing) before the creditor seizes the collateral. For more on secured interests, see the *Practice Material: Business: Commercial*, Chapter 3.

In cases where a demand is a legal precondition, ensure that the prescribed form and method of service of the demand is followed exactly. Failing to properly issue a demand can be fatal to the claim, so it is imperative that the demand conforms in all respects with any governing contractual provisions.

The demand letter should not refer to any privileged matters.

2. Not Making a Demand

In some cases, it is *not* appropriate to issue a demand. It may be that your client is a sophisticated creditor who has already issued a clear and complete demand.

It is also important to determine, before sending a legal demand, whether the client knows of a bank account or receivable that could be garnished prior to judgment. In those circumstances, you may not want to alert the debtor that the creditor is taking enforcement steps. In rare cases, the creditor might want to pursue an order freezing assets (see §9.08(1) on *Mareva* injunctions). In cases like that, alerting the debtor could prompt the debtor to divert or remove assets. If it is clear that the debtor is about to leave the jurisdiction, it may be important to file and serve a notice of civil claim quickly.

[§9.04] Limitation Periods

1. Particular Limitation Periods

The *Limitation Act*, S.B.C. 2012, c. 13 provides for a “basic limitation period” of two years for all claims, including those for recovery of debts, damages, or other money. To determine the relevant limitation date for a claim, first identify when the cause of action arose and then identify the applicable section in the *Limitation Act*.

Most creditor claims will come under s. 6 of the *Limitation Act*, which provides a general two-year limitation, calculated from the date when the right to bring the action arose as determined by the discoverability rules contained in s. 8.

Section 7 relates to proceedings to enforce or sue on a judgment, and sets out a limitation period of ten years for a local judgment. In the case of an extra-provincial judgment, the limitation period is limited to the expiry of the judgment in the original jurisdiction or ten years, whichever comes first.

The limitation periods above are subject to the ultimate 15-year limitation period contained in s. 21, which begins to run the day after the act or omission on which the claim is based took place.

Earlier cases allowing a party to bring further actions to renew existing judgments, as in *Sign-O-Lite Plastics Ltd. v. Kennedy* (1983), 48 B.C.L.R. 130 (S.C.), appear to still be good law, subject to the ultimate 15-year limitation period for commencing proceedings on the existing judgment.

See also *Deol v. Shipowick*, 2008 BCSC 108, in which the court held that a judgment creditor may register a judgment against title to a debtor's property, and renew the registration, so long as the limitation period applicable to the judgment itself has not expired and the renewal takes place within two years of the date of the original registration (or of any renewal).

2. When the Limitation Period Commences

The limitation period for debt claims based on loans or obligations where payment is due on a specific date typically starts to run on the day after payment is due, which is the first day payment is in arrears.

Debt claims based on demand loans will be discovered, pursuant to the *Limitation Act* (s. 14), “on the first day that there is a failure to perform the obligation after a demand for the performance has been made.”

In practice, it is safest to work from the earliest possible commencement date and, where there is any doubt, file a notice of civil claim (SCCR 3-1) as a precaution.

3. Extending a Limitation Period

Section 24(1) of the *Limitation Act* provides that the running period for a cause of action will, in effect, start again if a person acknowledges liability in respect of the claim before the expiry of the limitation period. An acknowledgement of liability can be in the form of making a payment, or in a written, signed acknowledgment from the party against whom there is a cause of action. The entirety of s. 24 should be considered in order to determine whether an acknowledgment of liability has occurred.

4. Completion of Enforcement Process and Stays of Execution

Despite the limitation periods set out in ss. 7 or 21, s. 23 permits the completion of outstanding enforcement processes set out in ss. 23(1)(a)-(c), including those related to unexpired writs of execution, enforcement against land, and charging orders. Further, s. 23(2) provides that a court order staying execution on a judgment postpones or suspends the running of the limitation period for proceedings on the judgment.

5. Upcoming Changes to Limitation Periods

When the *MJEA* and the *Money Judgment Enforcement Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions Act* come into force, new limitation periods will apply to post-judgment enforcement (*MJEA*, s. 12).

Section 7 of the *Limitation Act* (concerning proceedings to enforce or sue on a judgment) will be repealed, as will ss. 6(2) and s. 23.

For judgments rendered in BC, a creditor will need to register their judgment in the Money Judgment Registry within two years of the date on which the

money judgment was granted or the judgment debtor or acknowledged their liability, whichever came later. In order to extend the limitation period, the judgment debtor’s acknowledgment of the debt must meet the requirements of s. 12(6), namely the acknowledgement must be:

- in writing;
- signed by hand or by electronic signature within the meaning of the *Electronic Transactions Act*;
- given by the judgment debtor or the judgment debtor’s agent; and
- given to one of the following: the judgment creditor in respect of the money judgment; an agent of the judgment creditor; or, if the judgment creditor is bankrupt, a trustee in bankruptcy.

For extraprovincial judgments, the limitation period under the *MJEA* will be the lesser of two years or the limitation period applicable in the jurisdiction where the judgment was issued.

Registering a judgment in the Money Judgment Registry will be subject to an ultimate limitation period of 15 years from the date the judgment was granted (s. 12(5)).

[§9.05] Initiating Proceedings

All aspects of commencing a legal action and proceeding through to trial are covered in detail in earlier chapters of the *Practice Material: Civil*. A limited number of topics relevant to collections law are canvassed briefly here.

1. Choosing the Court

There are two levels of trial court under provincial jurisdiction that hear debt actions: the Provincial Court–Civil (Small Claims) and the Supreme Court. Note that as of June 1, 2017, most claims in debt up to \$5,000 must be resolved through the Civil Resolution Tribunal instead of in Provincial Court. See Chapter 1 for more on Small Claims Court Procedures and the Civil Resolution Tribunal.

Deciding which court to go to depends on factors such as what is the court’s monetary jurisdiction, what is the most suitable venue, and whether there are any restrictions on causes of action that may be heard in that court. In addition, some matters that come within the exercise of the court’s discretion (such as awarding costs and disbursements) may affect where a party commences action.

2. Monetary Jurisdiction

The monetary jurisdiction of the Small Claims Court is limited by statute (*Small Claims Act*, s. 3). The Small Claims Court has monetary jurisdiction over claims up to \$35,000, exclusive of interest and costs (*Small Claims Act*, s. 3). “Interest” here means court-ordered interest, not contractual interest (see *Telus Services Inc. v. Hussey*, 2016 BCPC 41). The monetary limit of \$35,000 came into effect on June 1, 2017, and is an increase from the previous monetary limit of \$25,000.

A creditor may choose to abandon claims over the statutory limit, but in doing so abandons the right to collect the balance (Small Claims Rules 1(4) and (6)). Also, a creditor may not “split the claim,” bringing one action for a sum within the statutory limit and another for the balance.

There is no upper monetary limit on a claim brought in the Supreme Court.

(a) Pursuing Small Claims Sums in Supreme Court

A plaintiff seeking to recover a sum that is within the Small Claims monetary limit might choose to go to Supreme Court. Reasons to consider initiating such claims in Supreme Court include the availability of a summary trial and other streamlined methods for conducting an action and recovery of costs, as well as the options for enforcement.

Clients considering going to Supreme Court should be advised that if they are awarded a sum that is within the jurisdiction of the Small Claims Court, the court will not grant costs, other than disbursements, unless the court finds there was sufficient reason for bringing the action in Supreme Court (see SCCR 14-1(10)). For the purpose of costs awards, delay in Small Claims Court is not a sufficient reason to bring the action in Supreme Court (*Rassak v. Ad-dante*, [1992] B.C.W.L.D. No. 2226 (S.C.)).

On appeals from Small Claims Court decisions, the Supreme Court does have discretion to award costs for the appeal (*Small Claims Act*, s. 13). Appeal costs on scale 1 were awarded in *Sign-O-Lite Plastics Ltd. v. Watts & Co.*, [1992] B.C.W.L.D. No. 2548 (S.C.); appeal costs were awarded in *Lochhead v. B.C.A.A. Insurance Corporation*, [1992] B.C.W.L.D. No. 1686 (S.C.); and appeal costs were awarded at scale 3 in *Qualico Developments v. Scott*, 2004 BCSC 108.

(b) Currency

The *Currency Act* (Canada), s. 12, provides in part that “any reference to money or monetary value in any indictment or other legal proceedings shall be stated in the currency of Canada.”

The *Foreign Money Claims Act*, s. 1(1) provides:

If, before making an order for the payment of money arising out of a claim or loss, the court considers that the person in whose favour the order will be made will be most truly and exactly compensated if all or part of the money payable under the order is measured in a currency other than the currency of Canada, the court must order that the money payable under the order will be that amount of Canadian currency that is necessary to purchase the equivalent amount of the other currency at a chartered bank located in British Columbia at the close of business on the conversion date.

The “conversion date” is tied to the date that payments are actually made on the judgment. The “bank” refers to the currency values on the last day before the day on which the judgment debtor makes a payment to the judgment creditor under the order.

The *Foreign Money Claims Act* is not mandatory. A plaintiff may seek to convert its claim to the Canadian-dollar equivalent as at the date of judgment. In practice, having a judgment expressed in Canadian currency can simplify execution proceedings, such as post-judgment garnishment, and is generally preferred.

3. Venue

Small claims actions must be filed at the registry nearest to where the defendant lives or carries on business, or to where the transaction or event that resulted in the claim took place (Small Claims Rule 1(2)).

In credit contracts that call for payments to be made to the creditor at a specific location (e.g. a creditor’s place of business or main credit office), a default in payment gives rise to a cause of action at that payment location (*Simpson-Sears Ltd. v. Marshall* (1979), 104 D.L.R. (3d) 302; *Simpson-Sears Ltd. v. Marshall*, [1979] 12 B.C.L.R. 244). This is important when acting for lenders, as it ensures that the claim will be heard near their offices.

Because the Supreme Court is a court of general jurisdiction throughout the province, a plaintiff is entitled to commence an action in a registry of its choice, and to have the trial heard at the place

named in the notice of civil claim (SCCR 12-1(5)), subject to a judge's discretion to order a change of venue. In addition, there are provisions in SCCR 8-2(1) for hearing applications in different locations by consent of the parties of record, by order of the court, or as per the normal location of the court's sitting in the applicable judicial district. Note that in foreclosure proceedings there are specific "local venue" rules (*Law and Equity Act*, s. 21). The same applies to builders lien actions. When dealing with claims against land, the venue is usually where the land is located.

For all actions, the safest practice is to check the governing statute.

4. Causes of Action

While monetary limits and venue are the two main jurisdictional considerations in collections law, statutory provisions governing causes of action may also come into play. The causes of action over which a court has jurisdiction are governed both by the court statutes themselves and by specific provisions in many other statutes which create or regulate causes of action.

The *Small Claims Act*, s. 3(1), sets out a non-exhaustive list of actions over which the Small Claims Court has jurisdiction. This includes actions for debt or damages, recovery of personal property, and specific performance of an agreement relating to personal property. Section 3(2) prohibits actions for libel, slander or malicious prosecution. Certain actions, such as an action enforcing a builders lien claim, may not be brought in Small Claims Court either.

The Supreme Court of British Columbia is a court of inherent jurisdiction. It has general jurisdiction over actions unless authority is specifically removed by statute.

5. Filing the Claim

To commence a debt action in Small Claims Court, file a notice of claim (Form 1) and an address for service (Form 38), pursuant to Small Claims Rule 1.

To commence an action in Supreme Court, the plaintiff must file a notice of civil claim pursuant to SCCR 3-1. The process is the same even if SCCR 15-1 (fast track) applies.

(a) Availability of Fast Track Litigation

An action in Supreme Court can proceed under the fast track rule if one of the following four criteria in SCCR 15-1(1) is met (*Hemani v. Hillard*, 2011 BCSC 1381 at paras. 10–17):

- (i) the only claims in the action are for one or more of money, real property, a builder's lien or personal property, and the total amount of damages sought is \$100,000 or less, excluding interest and costs;
- (ii) the trial of the action can be completed within three days;
- (iii) the parties to the action consent; or
- (iv) the court so orders.

If any one of these criteria is met, a party can file a notice of fast track action in Form 61 (SCCR 15-1(2)) to have the action proceed under the fast track rule. The words "Subject to Rule 15-1" must be added to the style of proceedings (SCCR 15-1(2)).

(b) Limits of Fast Track Litigation

Fast track litigation is well-suited to debt claims, but before choosing fast track, consider the evidence you may need to prove your case. In particular, if you will need extensive discovery evidence or more than three days in trial to prove your case, fast track litigation might be too restrictive.

SCCR 15-1 is designed to reduce oral discovery, allow the expedited setting of trial dates, and limit the cost of the proceedings. Once a party to an action applies for a trial date, the registrar must set the date for the trial within the next four months (SCCR 15-1(13)).

SCCR 15-1 includes procedures that are different from those applicable to regular actions, so it is important to read the rule carefully. Examinations for discovery are limited to two hours, unless the party being examined consents or the court orders a longer examination (SCCR 15-1(11)). A trial must be heard without a jury (SCCR 15-1(10)). If, as a result of a trial management conference, a judge is of the view that the trial will likely require more than three days, the judge may adjourn the trial to a date to be set (SCCR 15-1(14)).

Costs are fixed in accordance with SCCR 15-1(15). Pursuant to SCCR 15-1(16), the court may, in exercising its discretion to award further costs, consider a settlement offer served under SCCR 9-1.

6. Service of Process

Service of process is a fundamental procedural step in all litigation. Generally, jurisdiction over the subject matter of the litigation arises from the initiation of the action, while jurisdiction over the defendant

arises from service of process. After a proceeding is commenced, notice to the other side is an important precondition to virtually every step in the action.

A party usually has a choice of who may serve process. The general practice is to employ a private process server. Under s. 7 of the *Sheriff Act*, only a sheriff may “serve or execute a judgment summons, an order of committal or writ or warrant of execution.” Sheriff services are contracted out to specific bailiff companies.

Service procedures (including substituted service and service outside British Columbia) are governed mainly by Small Claims Rules 2 and 18, and SCCR 4-2, 4-3, 4-4, and 4-5. There are service procedures in other statutes, such as the *Business Corporations Act*. Service procedures are sometimes more liberal under the Small Claims Rules. For example, Rule 2(2) allows service on an individual defendant by mailing a copy of the notice of claim by registered mail (with proof by photocopy of the signature obtained at the time of service or online confirmation of service). Finally, the debt instrument or the contract documents may provide for the method of service and stipulate the persons to be served.

[§9.06] Proceeding to Judgment

1. Default Judgment

Understanding default proceedings is important in collections matters, as debtors often fail to respond or to file a defence. It may be important to move quickly to secure a default judgment and enforce it.

When a party, properly served, fails to file the required defence documents within the times prescribed by the rules (of whichever court), then default judgment can be entered. Where the claim is for a liquidated amount (this will be the case in most collections-related actions), the plaintiff can enter a final judgment and then proceed to enforce the judgment. A “liquidated amount” has been defined by the courts as a sum that may be determined “as a mere matter of arithmetic” (see *Busnex Business Exchange Ltd. v. Canadian Medical Legacy Corp.*, 1999 BCCA 78).

Claims for non-liquidated amounts include any claims for non-pecuniary, punitive, aggravated or general damages. Where a creditor has a claim with these types of damages, be careful to advise that by asserting such claims the creditor will need to go through the added step of going to court to argue quantum.

If a claim pleads damages in a liquidated amount and makes an alternative claim for damages in an unliquidated amount, default judgment would be

available for the liquidated amount (*Global Fleet Management Inc. v. Deltaura Canada Inc.*, 2020 BCSC 1938).

In a small claims action, the only defence document that must be filed is a dispute form (Form 2) called a reply (Small Claims Rule 3(2)), along with an address for service (Form 38). A defendant can also use a reply form to admit the claim and ask a judge to set a payment schedule, or to make a counterclaim (Small Claims Rule 3(2)).

A defendant in a small claims action must file a reply within 14 days after service, if served within British Columbia (Small Claims Rule 3(4)). If the reply is not filed, default judgment can be entered (Small Claims Rule 6(4)). In debt actions, a plaintiff can obtain final judgment by submitting an application for default order (Form 5) and a certificate of service (Form 4) (Small Claims Rule 6(3)).

In Supreme Court actions, defendants must file a response to civil claim pursuant to SCCR 3-3 within the time limits set out in SCCR 3-3(3) (for example, if the defendant was served with the notice of civil claim within Canada, then within 21 days after that service).

As with small claims actions, if the claim is for a “liquidated” amount, final judgment can be entered in default of the defendant filing a response (SCCR 3-8). As part of the documentation for obtaining default judgment from the court registry, a plaintiff may submit a schedule showing how the interest, if any, has been calculated, and a bill of costs (SCCR 3-8(3)).

Pursuant to SCCR 3-8(2), a plaintiff seeking default judgment must file:

- (a) proof of service (usually in affidavit form);
- (b) proof that a response has not been served;
- (c) a requisition from the court confirming that a response has not been filed; and
- (d) a draft default judgment order in Form 8.

The SCCR do not indicate how the second requirement (proof that no response has been served) is to be satisfied. Typical practice is to file an affidavit confirming this fact, from the plaintiff or someone from the office of the plaintiff’s solicitor who can attest to not having been served with a response.

Certain professional courtesies are expected of lawyers who are in a position to file default judgment when the other side is represented by counsel. Before proceeding by default in a matter, a lawyer must give reasonable notice to another lawyer who has been consulted (see rule 7.2-1, commentary [5] of the *BC Code*: “A lawyer who knows that another

lawyer has been consulted in a matter must not proceed by default in the matter without inquiry and reasonable notice”). See also *Henry v. Zurich Insurance Company*, 81 B.C.A.C. 284. Note also *Foreman v. Gerling*, [1991] B.C.W.L.D. No. 1703 (C.A.), where the court set aside a default judgment that plaintiff’s counsel had kept secret from defendant’s counsel for several months; the court set aside the judgment as a “debt of justice” given the conduct of plaintiff’s counsel.

2. Alternatives to Full Trial

As with default proceedings, applications for summary judgment are often an important part of the collections process. Most collections matters, even when defended, need not go to a conventional trial. The plaintiff has a number of alternatives.

In a small claims action when the defendant has filed a reply (Form 2) defending an action, the parties must follow the procedures for a settlement conference and then trial, as set out in Small Claims Rules 7 and 10 respectively. Alternatively, when liability is admitted, the defendant can use the Form 2 reply to ask for a payment hearing under Small Claims Rule 12. Presently there is no authority under the Small Claims Rules to use summary procedures to obtain judgment (but see §9.06(2)(f)).

Under the SCCR, there are several ways for plaintiffs to obtain judgments before trial when filing a default judgment is not an option (that is, when a response has been filed). These are detailed in the earlier chapters of the *Practice Material: Civil*. Note that the Notice to Mediate (General) Regulation pursuant to the *Law and Equity Act* (B.C. Reg. 4/2001) applies to a proceeding for a debt claim. The Regulation outlines the procedure to be followed.

For collections matters in the Supreme Court, note the following SCCR provisions and practice points.

(a) Consent Judgment

As an alternative to a judgment being entered, there has been a past practice of the parties negotiating an instalment payment arrangement, with the plaintiff taking, but not entering, a consent order to hold as security. If an instalment was missed, the order was entered and judgment taken. SCCR 8-3 authorizes such consent arrangements.

(b) Striking Out Pleadings

Under SCCR 9-5 the court may order that a pleading be struck on various grounds, including that it discloses no reasonable claim or defence. This rule can be useful when non-

lawyers have drafted and filed spurious pleadings, although other summary judgment applications may be more appropriate depending on the nature of the pleadings and the allegations contained in them. The legal test for succeeding in such applications is extremely high and requires the applicant to show that even if all the facts pleaded were found to be true, that the pleading would still almost certainly fail. Even when such a finding is made, the offending party is typically granted at least one opportunity to amend, provided the court does not conclude the action was an abuse of process.

(c) Defendant Non-Compliance

Under SCCR 22-7(5), the court may order proceedings to continue as if no response had been filed, if there has been a failure to comply with certain rules. In practice, a single failure will generally not attract this sanction, whereas repeated breaches may.

(d) Withdrawal of Defence

Sometimes a response may be filed simply to preserve a defendant’s position. When subsequent developments dictate that a defendant allow default judgment to be signed, the defendant may file a notice of withdrawal in Form 37. Once Form 37 has been filed, the plaintiff may file a judgment in default of defence (SCCR 9-8(7)).

(e) Summary Judgment

SCCR 9-6 gives the court authority to grant judgment on application (with supporting affidavits) in chambers, on the ground that there is “no genuine issue for trial.” There is extensive case law on the application of the predecessor to SCCR 9-6, former Rule 18. Essentially, the plaintiff must show that a judgment is clearly and obviously justified, while the defendant, to successfully defend, need only show there is a triable issue. Debt actions are one of the causes of action more likely to be successful under this rule, but there is a very low threshold for the defendant.

An associate judge has jurisdiction to hear these applications (see Supreme Court Practice Direction PD-50).

(f) Summary Trial

The more common summary method for proceeding is to apply for judgment by summary trial. SCCR 9-7 gives the court two broad powers on a summary trial application: to grant

judgment on the whole of the affidavit evidence which has been presented; or, when the court cannot give judgment on the evidence, to make several directions to expedite the proceeding. Only a judge has jurisdiction to hear these applications (see PD-50). The predecessor to SCCR 9-7 is Rule 18A. There is extensive judicial interpretation of the principles in SCCR 9-7 and former Rule 18A. See the *Practice Material: Civil*, Chapter 5 for a review of some of this case law.

Depending on the type of claim and the location of the case, a form of summary trial or simplified trial may be available in Provincial Court:

- At Robson Square Small Claims registry in Vancouver, Small Claims Rule 9.2 provides for a summary trial process to claimants who are commercial lenders. The claimant must be “in the business of lending money or extending credit” and the debt must arise from a loan or extension of credit in the course of that business. Common examples are credit card and loan debts. If Small Claims Rule 9.2 applies, a 30-minute streamlined trial before a judge is scheduled. At the end of the trial, the judge will make a payment order, dismiss the claim, or order that the claim be set for mediation or a trial conference.
- At the Richmond Small Claims and Robson Square registries, a simplified trial process applies to certain claims under Small Claims Rule 9.1. Such claims are scheduled for a one-hour simplified trial before an experienced lawyer, called a justice of the peace adjudicator. The value of the claim must be between \$5,001 and \$10,000 (the court will hear a claim under \$5,001 only if it is outside the jurisdiction of the Civil Resolution Tribunal or if a notice of objection to the decision of the Civil Resolution Tribunal has been filed).

3. Judgment Interest

(a) Interest Before Judgment

While a creditor’s right to prejudgment interest is usually not in doubt, arriving at the appropriate rate can become complicated. Determining the rate in British Columbia is governed by the federal *Interest Act* and the provincial *Court Order Interest Act*.

Under the federal *Interest Act*, parties are generally at liberty to contract for a stipulated rate of interest (s. 2). If by agreement of the parties, or by law, interest is payable but no rate is stipulated, the rate is fixed at 5% per annum under s. 3. This section will rarely be applicable given judicial interpretation of when there is an agreement and when a rate applies by operation of law.

In the great majority of credit contracts, the parties will explicitly agree on a set rate. In addition, it has been held that an agreement can be implied (*Makin Mailey Advertising Ltd. v. Budget Brake & Muffler Distributors Ltd.*, [1987] B.C.D. Civ. 2061-01 (C.A.)).

If no agreement is found, then s. 1 of the *Court Order Interest Act* applies. Under s. 1, a judge may award interest “on the amount ordered to be paid at a rate the court considers appropriate in the circumstances.” Generally, the rate will be approximately 2% below the prime lending rate, although that is only a guideline (see *Jasmine Construction Ltd. v. Adam*, 2010 BCSC 1507 at para. 23). In *Domtar Inc. v. Univar Canada Ltd.*, 2012 BCSC 510 at para. 14, the court said:

[T]he purpose of prejudgment interest is not to redress inequities by punishing or rewarding a party. The purpose is to ensure that the earning capacity of money awarded accrues to the successful party and puts that party in the position it would have been in if the award had been paid on the date the cause of action arose.

Section 4 of the *Interest Act* requires written contracts (other than those involving real property mortgages), where interest is calculated over a period of less than a year (e.g. monthly), to contain an express statement of an equivalent yearly rate. Failing the statement of that equivalent, only 5% per annum is chargeable. The threshold issue in invoking this section appears to be how the rate is expressed, not when the interest itself is actually payable (*Bank of Nova Scotia v. Dunphy Leasing Enterprises Ltd.* (1991), 83 Alta. L.R. (2d) 289 (C.A.)). Failure to expressly state the rate of interest as a monthly rate generally renders that part of a contract unenforceable under the *Interest Act* and forces the creditor to use the lesser rates under the *Court Order Interest Act* to obtain interest.

(b) Interest After Judgment

The *Court Order Interest Act* is divided into two parts: Part I governs prejudgment interest, and Part II governs postjudgment interest.

In Part II, under s. 7 of the Act, pecuniary judgments bear interest at a rate equal to the prime lending rate of the banker to the government. The rate is fixed semi-annually on January 1 and July 1.

Under s. 8, the court has authority to vary the rate or fix a different date from which interest is to be calculated. Under s. 9, postjudgment interest is deemed to be included in the judgment for enforcement purposes, and a partial payment on a judgment is to be applied first to outstanding interest.

(c) Criminal Interest Rates

The *Criminal Code*, s. 347, prohibits agreements for interest at an annual percentage rate of over 35% (effective January 1, 2025), subject to some exemptions. (The criminal interest rate prior to January 1, 2025 was an effective annual rate of 60%, which corresponds to an annual percentage rate of approximately 48%.) Most reported decisions under previous versions of this section of the *Criminal Code* involve litigation over financing for large property development projects.

When calculating the actual rate of interest to determine if it exceeds the criminal rate, courts have broadly interpreted the definition of “interest” in s. 347 of the *Criminal Code*. For example, “interest” may include penalties or charges for late payment of an account or bill (*Garland v. Consumers’ Gas Co.*, [1998] 3 S.C.R. 112).

In practice, the determination of whether interest is actually being charged at the criminal rate can be a complex accounting exercise requiring expert evidence.

The Supreme Court of Canada (in *Transport North American Express Inc. v. New Solutions Financial Corp.*, 2004 SCC 7) said that courts have discretion to read down an illegal rate of interest and enforce the parties’ bargain at a lower interest rate, subject to four factors:

- (i) whether the purpose or policy of s. 347 would be subverted by severance;
- (ii) whether the parties entered into the agreement for an illegal purpose or with an evil intention;

(iii) the relative bargaining position of the parties and their conduct in reaching the agreement; and

(iv) the potential for the debtor to enjoy an unjustified windfall.

[§9.07] Enforcing Foreign Judgments

A “foreign judgment” is a judgment from any jurisdiction outside British Columbia. Hence, judgments from other Canadian provinces or territories, United States courts, and elsewhere are all considered foreign.

A foreign money judgment can be enforced in British Columbia in one of three ways:

1. by complying with the simplified registration and filing system for Canadian judgments under the *Enforcement of Canadian Judgments and Decrees Act*;
2. through the registration procedures set out in ss. 28 to 39 (and Schedules) of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* and SCCR 19-3; or
3. at common law, by suing to initiate a claim in British Columbia, with the outstanding foreign judgment as the cause of action in the new court action.

If the money judgment is from another Canadian province or territory, it can be registered as a judgment of the Supreme Court of British Columbia under the *Enforcement of Canadian Judgments and Decrees Act*. The statute sets out a simplified procedure for registration (s. 3): the judgment can be registered simply by paying a fee and filing a certified true copy of the judgment, along with a requisition pursuant to SCCR 17-1(1)(b), and a certified translation of the judgment, if it was made in a language other than English (SCCR 19-2(2)). Once the Canadian judgment is registered in British Columbia, it may be enforced as if it were a judgment of the Supreme Court of British Columbia (s. 4). Note that for a money judgment to be registered under the *Enforcement of Canadian Judgments and Decrees Act*, it must be a final judgment.

Parties can apply under the *Enforcement of Canadian Judgments and Decrees Act* for directions relating to enforcing the judgment. At that application, the court may limit enforcement of the judgment if there is evidence that a party affected by it plans to apply to set it aside, a stay is in effect in the province or territory where the judgment was made, or enforcement of the judgment would be contrary to public policy in British Columbia. If the Canadian judgment was obtained without notice to the persons bound by it, an application for directions must be made prior to any attempts to enforce it after registration in British Columbia (s. 6).

The *Enforcement of Canadian Judgments and Decrees Act* provides that the Supreme Court will not entertain as grounds for staying or limiting the enforcement of a judgment from another Canadian province or territory an argument that the originating court lacked jurisdiction over the defendant or the dispute or that the British Columbia court might have come to a different view of the merits of the decision (s. 6(3)). A party wishing to raise those matters must seek relief where the judgment was originally made, either through appeal or further application to the court that made the judgment.

Under s. 7 of the *Limitation Act*, the limitation period for the enforcement of any judgment from another Canadian province or territory is prior to the expiry of the original judgment, or ten years, whichever is sooner.

Registration under the *Court Order Enforcement Act* is available only if the foreign judgment was granted in a “reciprocating state.” Several jurisdictions are declared to be reciprocating states for the purposes of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, and are listed in the Schedule to that Act. They include all Canadian provinces and territories except Quebec, the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, several states and territories in Australia, and several states in the United States (including the State of Washington, State of Oregon, and the State of California). Judgments from those jurisdictions may be registered pursuant to a simplified process under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, and then become enforceable in the same way a local judgment would be.

The application for registration of a reciprocally enforceable judgment under the *Court Order Enforcement Act* must be supported by an affidavit attaching a certified copy of the judgment under seal of the original court; a certified translation, where applicable; and a statement similar to that included in Schedule 2 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*. Finally, the affidavit must state that the judgment is not one that is disqualified from registration under s. 29(6) of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* (for example, a judgment would be disqualified from registration if it was obtained by fraud, was contrary to public policy, or an appeal on the judgment was pending).

Judgments from non-reciprocating jurisdictions can be pursued in British Columbia, but it is necessary to commence an action on the foreign judgment and obtain judgment in British Columbia prior to enforcement (see *Owen v. Rocketinfo Inc.*, 2008 BCCA 502). As set out in *Wei v. Mei*, 2018 BCSC 1057 (citing *Beals v. Saldanha*, 2003 SCC 72), the British Columbia court will recognize a foreign judgment in such an action provided three conditions are met:

1. the foreign court had jurisdiction over the subject matter of the foreign judgment;
2. the foreign judgment is final and conclusive; and

3. there is no available defence.

An action on the obligation created by a foreign jurisdiction is typically suitable for determination by summary trial because a substantive analysis of the merits of the claim is not required. The jurisdiction of the foreign court will be recognized if there is a “real and substantial connection” between the cause of action and the foreign court (*Beals* at para. 19).

Defences to a common-law action to recognize or enforce a foreign judgment are limited to fraud, public policy, and lack of natural justice, all of which are narrow in application (*Beals* and *LLS America LLC (Trustee of) v. Dill*, 2018 BCCA 86).

Counsel for a foreign judgment creditor must take care to ensure sufficient evidence is before the court in order to succeed on an action to enforce the foreign judgment (see e.g. *Wei v. Mei*, 2018 BCSC 1057; *Xu v. Yang*, 2018 BCSC 393; *Liu v. Luo*, 2018 BCSC 1237).

Note that neither the *MJEA* nor the *Money Judgment Enforcement Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions Act* appear to interfere with the three registration procedures for foreign judgments described in this section. At present, it appears likely that a foreign judgment registered under the *Enforcement of Canadian Judgments and Decrees Act* or *Court Order Enforcement Act* and SCCR 19-3 will then be registrable in the Money Judgment Registry established by the *MJEA*. This is because the definition of a money judgment includes “an instrument that is, under an enactment, enforceable as if it were an order or judgment of a court” (s. 1). However, the definition of “money judgment” excludes classes or types of orders to be detailed in the regulation.

As well, as noted earlier, s. 7 of the *Limitation Act* (along with ss. 6(2) and 23) will be repealed when the *Money Judgment Enforcement Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions Act* comes into force (s. 30). Instead, the limitation periods for registering a money judgment (s. 12) will likely govern. Once registered, a money judgment will be effective for a duration specified in the “judgment statement” used to register the Money Judgment (s. 11(5)). The specific requirements of a judgment statement will be clarified by regulation (s. 11(3)).

[§9.08] Prejudgment Execution

Generally, a creditor must start a debt action and obtain a judgment before the creditor can proceed against the assets of a debtor. In British Columbia, there is authority for two significant exceptions to this rule: *Mareva* injunctions (available only in Supreme Court actions and exceptional as a remedy) and prejudgment garnishment (available in both Supreme Court and Small Claims Court). Garnishment law and procedure will also be dealt with under the postjudgment remedy heading.

1. *Mareva* Injunctions

(a) Extraordinary Remedy

Mareva injunctions are a form of interlocutory injunction which prohibits the defendant from transferring or disposing of its assets pending the outcome of the action between the parties. The name comes from the English decision *Mareva Compania Naviera S.A. v. Int. Bulkcarriers S.A.*, [1980] 1 All E.R. 213 (C.A.). The injunction can apply to assets within British Columbia or held worldwide. Usually, the injunction will still allow the debtor to deal with the assets in order to meet legitimate debt payments accruing in the ordinary course of business (see e.g. *Mooney v. Orr* (1994), 98 B.C.L.R. (2d) 318 (S.C.)). In most cases, the application is made without notice.

The court's authority to grant *Mareva* injunctions is rooted in the equitable jurisdiction of the courts, though there is specific statutory authority in the *Law and Equity Act*, s. 39. Section 39 grants authority to make the order when "it appears to the court to be just or convenient that the order should be made." It continues to fall to established equitable principles for the court to decide when an injunction will be granted. SCCR 10-4 governs the procedure for pre-trial injunctions.

A *Mareva* injunction is an extraordinary and draconian remedy, and is therefore not granted readily. The court will demand a high standard of proof and will scrutinize the evidence. The court will also expect full and frank disclosure from counsel seeking the order, given that the application is typically brought without notice, and it will be incumbent upon counsel to alert the court to any facts which may adversely affect their application. Many orders without notice have been set aside for failure to disclose all relevant evidence.

The leading case on *Mareva* injunctions in Canada is *Aetna Financial Services Limited v. Feigelman*, [1985] 2 W.W.R. 97 (S.C.C.), in which the court approved the use of the *Mareva* injunction in Canada and generally agreed with the principles for granting *Mareva* injunctions as they had evolved in Britain and Canada. The threshold issues are whether the plaintiff has a strong *prima facie* case and whether the balance of convenience favours the plaintiff.

Historically, the *Mareva* injunction would only be granted following a stringent assessment of

the evidence to establish it had met several stringent tests demonstrating, among other things, that:

- the object of the relief is not simply to provide the applicant with security for the amount of its claim before judgment;
- there is a real risk (factually substantiated) of assets being disposed of or dissipated;
- the purpose of such dissipation is wrongful or untoward; and
- the applicant will suffer irreparable harm unless the court grants the relief.

The case authority in British Columbia has diverged somewhat from these rigid rules and developed a "flexible approach" to applications for *Mareva* injunctions. This approach was first set out in *Mooney v. Orr* (1994), 100 B.C.L.R. (2d) 335; confirmed by the BC Court of Appeal in *Silver Standard Resources Inc. v. Joint Stock Company Geolog*, 1998 CanLII 6468 (BC CA) and (by a five-judge panel) in *Tracy v. Instalozans Financial Solutions Centres (B.C.) Ltd*, 2007 BCCA 481; and applied in *ICBC v. Patko*, 2008 BCCA 65. Under this approach, the fundamental question in each case is "whether the granting of an injunction is just and equitable in all the circumstances of the case" and the legal test is as follows (*ICBC* at para. 25):

To obtain the injunction, the applicant must first establish a strong *prima facie* or good arguable case on the merits. Second, the interests of the parties must be balanced, having regard to all the relevant factors, to reach a just and equitable result. Two relevant factors are evidence showing the existence of assets within British Columbia or outside, and evidence showing a real risk of their disposal or dissipation, so as to render nugatory any judgment[.]

See also *Kepis & Pobe Financial Group Inc. v. Timis Corporation*, 2018 BCCA 420 for a recent statement of this test. The flexible approach has been applied in cases such as *Blue Horizon v. Ko Yo Development Co.*, 2012 BCSC 58, where the court confirmed that there is no requirement that the applicant show anything "untoward" in the respondent's conduct in order to succeed in obtaining an injunction.

The court has discretion to confine the scope of the *Mareva* injunction. In *Fernandes v. Legacy Financial Systems, Inc.*, 2020 BCSC 885, it was held that even when the constituent elements for a *Mareva* injunction are satisfied, the

court can refuse to grant the order if it has concerns about the applicant's case or conduct. In *Fernandes*, the court limited the scope of the *Mareva* injunction due to a lack of clarity in the pleadings and weakness in the evidence (para. 31).

For a discussion of the procedure and legal test on an application to set aside a *Mareva* injunction, see *Northwestpharmacy.com Inc. v. Yates*, 2018 BCSC 41 and *Wood-Tielenburg Estate v. Zacher*, 2022 BCSC 1720.

(b) Model Order for Preservation of Assets

BC courts have adopted a “model order” for asset preservation (see the link in Supreme Court Practice Direction PD-47—*Model Orders*). When applying for a *Mareva* injunction, the judge will expect you to confirm that you are using the model order, without changes. If you have altered it in any way, explain to the judge why and what authority you have for doing so (see *Shakeri-Saleh v. Estate of Ahmadi-Niri*, 2021 BCSC 2257 (Chambers)).

The model order seeks to balance the interests of the applicant and the respondent (who is not given notice). It permits the respondent to access funds for living expenses and ordinary business expenses.

The applicant for an interlocutory injunction must give an undertaking to pay damages for any loss suffered by the defendant as a result of the granting of the injunction if, at trial, it appears that the injunction was wrongly granted (SCCR 10-4(5)).

For a more complete discussion of *Mareva* injunctions, see *British Columbia Creditors' Remedies—An Annotated Guide* (Vancouver: CLEBC), Chapter 5.

2. Prejudgment Garnishment

(a) The Process

A plaintiff in an action claiming judgment for a liquidated amount may apply, without notice, for an order that amounts due from the garnishee (a third party) to the defendant be attached (*Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 3). Garnishing orders before judgment are available in both Small Claims Court and Supreme Court actions. The requirements for the contents of the affidavit that supports the application are set out in s. 3(2) of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*. Also, Schedule 1 to the Act contains forms to follow (Form A or Form C, depending on the circumstances). An

applicant for a prejudgment or postjudgment garnishing order must also file a requisition in Form 17 (see Supreme Court Practice Direction PD-10—*Garnishing Orders*).

Counsel must take great care to ensure that the amount claimed is a liquidated claim, the supporting materials comply with the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, and appropriate full disclosure is made to the court, otherwise the prejudgment garnishing order may be subsequently set aside.

A creditor-plaintiff cannot serve itself a garnishing order such that it becomes a garnishee, (for example, a bank that has a cause of action against one of its customers) (*Bank of Montreal v. Big White Land Development Ltd.* (1982), 17 B.L.R. 257 (B.C.S.C.)). However, such a creditor may have other remedies, such as set-off rights at common law, or if a bank or financial institution has multiple current accounts, a right to “consolidate” the current accounts and regard them as a single obligation.

A garnishing order can be obtained from a registrar at a court registry. The usual practice in Supreme Court is to file a notice of civil claim and simultaneously seek a garnishing order. There is no hearing before a judge or associate judge. The registrar decides whether the formalities have been met, and may confirm or reject the order. This is one of the more difficult legal areas that registrars are authorized to deal with. Counsel should look carefully at any rejection to determine if the law has been followed. If the order is rejected, the applicant may appeal the decision to a judge or associate judge under SCCR 23-6(8.1)-(8.10).

The order is directed at a person within the province who owes the defendant money. The order is then served on the garnishee immediately. The garnishee is obligated to pay into court any amounts owing to the defendant, up to the value of the claim.

Note that the applicant is obligated to serve the garnishing order and supporting materials on the defendant “at once, or within a time as allowed by the judge or registrar” after the order is served on the garnishee (s. 9 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*).

Banks are frequently the target of garnishing orders. Accordingly, the specific rules governing the attachment of bank accounts are important. The primary rule, as set out in the federal *Bank Act*, is that the specific **branch** where the bank account is located must be

served with the garnishing order (ss. 462(1)(d)). However, as long as the bank has a business presence in British Columbia, the branch of the bank need not be located in British Columbia to be subject to a prejudgment garnishing order, provided an order for *ex juris* service is obtained. See *Univar Canada v. PCL Packaging Corp.*, 2007 BCSC 1737.

As a practical matter, if a debtor has made any payments to the creditor by cheque, that cheque will identify the branch at which at least one of the debtor's accounts are located.

Prejudgment garnishment does not give the creditor a proprietary interest over the funds paid into court. The funds must remain in court pending judgment or settlement by the parties. Nonetheless, it can be strategically advantageous for the creditor. It provides security against asset removal, and it can provide a very strong bargaining tool.

Notably, wages cannot be garnished before judgment (*Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 3(4)). Wages include commission salary.

(b) Setting Aside Prejudgment Garnishing Orders

Because garnishing orders are obtained without notice, the defendant is entitled to apply for a rehearing or a trial *de novo* to argue that the order should be set aside. Regardless of the merits of any defence, a defendant may decide to make such an application as a matter of tactics. The application is made by notice of motion in the proceeding, frequently on short notice.

British Columbia courts have consistently held that the exceptional nature of prejudgment garnishment demands meticulous adherence to the requirements of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*. Where the creditor (plaintiff) fails to observe the statutory requirements, the order will be set aside and the funds in court will be returned to the defendant. A plaintiff cannot rectify a defective first order by unilaterally attempting to withdraw it and obtaining a second order—both will be set aside (*Richardson Greenshields of Canada Ltd. v. McKim and Bank of BC* (1987), 14 B.C.L.R. (2d) 101 (S.C.)).

Applications to set aside prejudgment garnishing orders usually involve an attack on the formalities and substance of the affidavit sworn in support of the order. The applicant in *Coast Tractor & Equipment Ltd. v. Halliday* (1987), 13 B.C.L.R. (2d) 66 (S.C.) was unsuccessful in arguing that s. 8 of the *Canadian*

Charter of Rights and Freedoms was a ground to set aside an order.

Evidence allowed at the hearing is limited. When the affidavit in support is found insufficient, the difficulty generally cannot be cured by reference to other (unsworn) material (*Brent Koop Yachts Inc. v. Fraser Valley Bus Service Ltd.*, [1982] B.C.D. Civ. 1722-03 (S.C.)), nor can it be corrected by a supplementary affidavit by the plaintiff (*Vitek v. Poh*, [1984] B.C.D. Civ. 1720-02 (S.C.)). A defendant's mere denial of liability will not be sufficient to set aside an order (*Findlay v. Boyd*, [1983] B.C.D. Civ. 1723-01 (S.C.) and *Weber v. D5 Enterprises Ltd.* (1983), 51 B.C.L.R. 172 (S.C.)). For a discussion of the test for leave to appeal pre-trial orders such as garnishing orders, see *Lenec v. Mallinson*, [1995] B.C.W.L.D. No. 2190 (C.A. Chambers).

There is extensive case law on attempts to set aside a garnishing order; a sampling of cases follows.

(i) Cause of action not succinctly stated

Under s. 3(2)(d)(iii) the claimant must set out in the affidavit "the nature of the cause of action." This is a threshold issue. The benchmark case on inadequacy of a statement of the nature of the cause of action as set out in the affidavit is *Knowles v. Peter* (1954), 12 W.W.R. (N.S.) 560 (B.C.S.C.). In that case the court held as defective a cause of action described as "for debt on a chattel mortgage."

It is difficult to extract general principles on this ground since most cases turn on the specific language of the particular affidavit. In some instances, the courts also appear to merge this ground with the requirement that the claim be for a liquidated amount.

One example of satisfactory language is contained in *Pro-Conic Electronics Limited v. Pro Quality International Limited* (1985), 63 B.C.L.R. 279 (C.A.), where the claim was described as for "electronic products sold by the plaintiff to the defendant [between particular dates] pursuant to contracts made in British Columbia whereby the sum of \$598,900.85 (US \$453,129.19) was due on December 4, 1984 and remains unpaid." In *Co-operators Gen. Ins. Co. v. Billett* (1988), 27 B.C.L.R. (2d) 367 (C.A.), the Court of Appeal held as sufficient a cause of action described in the supporting affidavit

as for “monies of the Plaintiffs had and received by the Defendants.”

In *Li v. Jin*, 2020 BCSC 1324, aff’d in *Li v. Westside Preparatory Society*, 2021 BCCA 153, although there was a mistake in the plaintiff’s first affidavit, it was an innocent mistake that did not affect the core of the application (para. 55). The Court of Appeal agreed with the trial judge that the plaintiff had made full and frank disclosure of all relevant and material facts. The defendant’s application to set aside the garnishing orders before judgment was dismissed.

The cases are divided on the practice of appending the notice of claim to the affidavit as an exhibit as a substitute for or in addition to a statement of the nature of the claim in the affidavit itself. The practice of appending the notice of claim to the affidavit appears satisfactory in view of the Court of Appeal decision in *Skybound Developments Ltd. v. Hughes Properties Ltd.* (1985), 65 B.C.L.R. 79 (C.A.). However, in a case where the affidavit in support alleged more than one cause of action, the court set aside the garnishing order on the basis that not all the causes of action were liquidated and the court would not speculate on which cause of action the plaintiff intended to rely (*Knowland v. C.E.L. Industries Ltd.* (1988), 32 B.C.L.R. (2d) 381 (S.C.)).

Still, the vast majority of prejudgment garnishing orders are for matters of simple debt between creditors and debtors, and in such cases the attachment of the pleading as an exhibit setting out that sole cause of action will generally be sufficient.

(ii) Cause of action not for a liquidated sum

The cause of action must be for a liquidated sum (*Pe Ben Industries Company Ltd. v. Chinook Construction & Engineering Ltd.*, [1977] 3 W.W.R. 481 (B.C. C.A.)). A “liquidated sum” is defined as “a liquidated demand in the nature of a debt, i.e. a specific sum of money due and payable under or by virtue of a contract. The amount must either be already ascertained or capable of being ascertained as a mere matter of arithmetic” (*Busnex Business Exchange Ltd. v. Canadian Medical Legacy Corp.*, 1999 BCCA 78). As discussed below, the liquidated claim must take into account all just discounts (*Nisa Holdings Inc. v. LMG Mgmt. Ltd.*, 2020 BCSC 11).

In *Zhang v. 0906825 B.C. Ltd.*, 2018 BCSC 13, the court held that a prejudgment garnishing order may be made, provided it is clear that one of the causes of action described in the affidavit is for a liquidated amount. If an unliquidated claim forms part of the overall cause of action described in the affidavit, a prejudgment garnishing order will be set aside unless the affidavit clearly delineates separate causes of action and the liquidated sum arising from that cause of action for which the remedy is being sought (*K.M. Simon Enterprises Ltd v. Canadian Pacific Airlines Limited* (1983), 48 B.C.L.R. 250 (S.C.)).

Many cases have considered which causes of action are liquidated claims. Essentially, when the basis for the amounts claimed cannot be ascertained with any precision, or any part of the judgment will require a judge to determine damages, a court may find the claim is not for a liquidated amount. A claim for damages rather than a fixed sum is not a liquidated claim.

A claim for professional services may be liquidated if the price is calculable. The claim must be sufficiently clear to put the defendant on notice that the plaintiff seeks a liquidated amount, otherwise the garnishing order will be set aside (*Bazargan v. Milinx Business Services Inc.*, 2001 BCSC 907).

A claim for prejudgment interest in addition to the principal debt is defective, since there is no entitlement to such interest until there is a judgment (*Brown Farris & Jefferson Ltd. v. Diligenti* (1979), 17 B.C.L.R. 220 (S.C.)). However, a plaintiff can make a claim for interest as part of an otherwise liquidated claim if the interest was provided by contract (*Daleco Resources v. Loredi Resources Ltd.*, [1983] B.C.J. No. 108 (S.C.)), and if the interest portion of the claim is clearly set out in the affidavit (*Nevin Sadlier-Brown Goodbrand Ltd. v. Adola Mining Corp* (1988), 24 B.C.L.R. (2d) 341 (Co. Ct.)). An assertion on an invoice is not sufficient if the defendant has not agreed to it (*Kalicum Drilling Ltd. v. Orca Estates Ltd.*, 1997 CanLII 4113 (B.C.C.A.)).

Whether legal fees, accountants’ fees, and other fees based on hourly rates or subject to bonus contingencies are liquidated claims is a matter of some dispute. See *Nathanson, Schacter & Thompson v. Sarcee Band of Indians and Others* (1992), 70 B.C.L.R. (2d)

253, reviewed on other grounds at (1994), 90 B.C.L.R. (2d) 13; but see also *Eades v. Kootnikoff* (1995), 13 B.C.L.R. (3d) 182 (S.C.); *Shier v. Copper Mountain Mining Corporation*, 2023 BCSC 152. The notice of claim should sufficiently describe how the amount of the claim is calculated. For example, it should describe information such as the contractual hourly rate, the number of hours worked, taxes, disbursements, costs of supplies, and any other amounts that are included in the claim (see *Eades*). Master Horn further concluded that the *Court Order Enforcement Act* “does not require a deponent to set out the basis upon which a fee for services was calculated.”

(iii) All just discounts not made

Section 3(2)(d)(v) of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* requires the plaintiff to affirm that an amount is “justly due and owing, after making all just discounts.” “All just discounts” is not defined in the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, but has been interpreted to mean the party seeking a prejudgment garnishing order must reduce the amount claimed by the amount of any valid and liquidated claims of the other party advanced by way of “set-off or counterclaim” (see *Ohman v. Sync Access + Security Technology Ltd.*, 2018 BCSC 1001).

In practice, this issue is cited in the majority of applications to set aside garnishing orders. A court may consider evidence from the defendant that genuine claims and counterclaims exist between the parties to the proceeding, evidence that would undermine the plaintiff’s claim to have given effect to all just discounts (*Ridgeway-Pacific Construction Limited v. United Contractors Ltd.*, [1976] 1 W.W.R. 285 (B.C. C.A.)).

In *Design Sportswear Ltd. v. Goodmark Apparel Inc.* (1994), 26 C.P.C. (3d) 279 (B.C.S.C.), the court held that a just discount could only be made for an ascertained or liquidated amount. The court later clarified this concept in *Eagle Crest Explorations Ltd. v. Consolidated Madison Holdings Ltd.* (1995), 14 B.C.L.R. (3d) 336 (S.C.). In that case, the court confirmed that a valid, liquidated claim means evidence of a claim, which, “if ultimately accepted at trial, will establish that the sum or at least some part of it is due to the defendant.”

In practice, if the defendant sought a discount or claimed an offsetting charge before

the litigation started, counsel should carefully consider the evidence supporting that claim. If that claim has merit, counsel should consider reducing the order sought.

This is particularly important in construction law matters where most claims are offset by claims from the other side for things like defective work or unpaid holdbacks.

Generally, be cautious when applying for this remedy, to reduce the risk of an *ex parte* garnishing order before judgment being challenged and set aside. If parts of the claim are not easily quantified, or if the defendant has made an offsetting claim, it is often better to pursue only the clearly liquidated amounts that are not subject to any “just discount” (see *Nisa Holdings Inc. v. LMG Mgmt. Ltd.*, 2020 BCSC 11).

(iv) Failure to follow formalities

Decisions on whether the procedural formalities have been complied with are varied and can be difficult to reconcile.

Failure of the official swearing the affidavit to indicate capacity (for example, notary or commissioner) was fatal in *Vitek v. Poh*. A failure to have alterations and deletions initialed by the person before whom the affidavit was sworn was fatal in *Langley Stainless Prod. Ltd. v. 2051 Investments Ltd.*, [1987] B.C.D. Civ. 1720-02 (S.C.). However, additions and filling in spaces need not be initialed (*Bel Fran Investments Ltd.*, [1975] 6 W.W.R. 374 (B.C. S.C.)).

There is divided authority on the sufficiency of a solicitor, as opposed to the plaintiff, being the deponent for the affidavit. Such a practice was held insufficient in *Caribou Construction Ltd. v. Cementation Co. (Can.)* (1987), 11 B.C.L.R. (2d) 122 (S.C.). However, later cases have doubted this decision: see *Samuel and Sons Travel Ltd. v. Right On Travel (1984) Inc.* (1987), 19 B.C.L.R. (2d) 199 (Co. Ct.), and *Trade Fortune Inc. v. Amalgamated Mill Supplies Ltd.* (1994), 89 B.C.L.R. (2d) 132 (S.C.). Furthermore, s. 3(2)(b) of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* specifically contemplates that the supporting affidavit may be sworn by the solicitor for the plaintiff. Nevertheless, the risk is that the solicitor may be cross-examined on the affidavit, so the recommended practice is to have the client swear the affidavit in support of any prejudgment garnishing order in all but the most urgent

situations. If a lawyer must swear the affidavit, it is advisable to have another lawyer at your firm swear it.

(v) Timing of the order

The times at which a garnishing order is issued and subsequently served are important for the validity of attachment attempts both before and after judgment. The cases on this issue are not easily reconciled. The strictest interpretation is that there must be “obligations and liabilities owing, payable or accruing” (excepting wages) at the time the order is issued and when the order is served (*Vater v. Styles* (1930), 42 B.C.L.R. 463 (C.A.); *Canadian Bank of Commerce v. Dabrowski* (1954), 13 W.W.R. (N.S.) 442 (B.C.S.C.); *Ahaus Developments Ltd. v. Savage* (1994), 92 B.C.L.R. (2d) 307 (C.A.)).

In cases in which a debt will accrue and is due in the future, and where attempting to intercept funds involves difficult questions of timing, it is best to apply under s. 15 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* for payment of a claim or demand into court at maturity. The application is made after a garnishing order is issued and should detail why serving the garnishing order in the ordinary course is impractical.

(vi) Section 5 applications

There is an additional ground for applying to set aside a prejudgment garnishing order, beyond alleging defects in the affidavit. The *Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 5, provides the defendant with a right to apply to have the order set aside where the court considers it “just in all the circumstances.” The leading case on the exercise of discretion under this section is *Webster v. Webster* (1979), 12 B.C.L.R. 172 (C.A.). Where a judge has exercised discretion to set aside an order under s. 5, the Court of Appeal will not lightly vary that decision (*Bartle & Gibson Co. Ltd. v. Deakin Equipment Ltd.*, [1985] B.C.D. Civ. 1720-02 (C.A.)).

There have been several decisions on s. 5 applications since *Webster*. Essentially, each case is decided on its own merits, but the defendant must show that the order is unnecessary, an abuse of process, or that it creates an undue hardship. The burden is on the defendant to adduce compelling evidence supporting the application.

To show the order is “unnecessary,” the applicant must show that the applicant has substantial unencumbered assets that would be available after judgment, making the garnishing order unnecessary. If you make this argument on behalf of a corporation, the court will generally require financial statements showing the assets are not encumbered, and a statement from the company’s accountant on the corporation’s net worth.

To show an abuse of process, it is necessary to show a collateral and improper purpose, an overt act in furtherance of the collateral improper purpose, and a resulting loss (see e.g. *Nouhi v. Pourtaghi*, 2022 BCSC 807).

If the defendant is arguing undue hardship, the defendant must show substantial and compelling evidence of unusual hardship, as the unpaid creditor is also suffering hardship. Successful arguments for undue hardship tend to focus on prejudice to innocent third parties who will be affected by the order.

Even if the defendant is not successful in setting aside a pre-judgment garnishing order under s. 5, the garnishing orders may be reduced if some of the claims on which the garnishing orders are based are weak (*Bear Ridge Railing MFG Inc. v. D.K. Railings Ltd.*, 2024 BCSC 1995).

(c) Upcoming Changes to Prejudgment Garnishment

When the *Money Judgment Enforcement Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions Act* comes into force, the prejudgment garnishment process will still proceed under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, albeit with certain amendments set out in s. 7 of the *Money Judgment Enforcement Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions Act*, including the following:

- limiting prejudgment garnishment to judgments that have not been recovered; and
- removing the exemption contemplated under s. 3(7) of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* in respect of an order under s. 18(2) of the *Family Maintenance Act*.

[§9.09] Acting for Debtors Before Judgment

1. General

Some substantive and procedural law and professional responsibility matters are especially important to lawyers acting for debtors. These matters are in addition to the general comments made in §9.02.

As noted earlier, plaintiff creditors want full payment quickly and with as little expense as possible. Defendant debtors might seek delay, or seek to make the proceedings costly so as to encourage the plaintiff to settle for a reduced amount. The lawyer should be wary if a debtor client whose case has limited merit wants to litigate.

Lawyers have a duty under the *BC Code*, rule 5.1-2, not to knowingly assist a client to do anything dishonest or dishonourable. Commentary [8] to *BC Code* rule 5.1-1 says:

[A] lawyer should avoid and discourage the client from resorting to frivolous or vexatious objections [...] or tactics that will merely delay or harass the other side.

In general, debtors are likely to be under a variety of pressures and it may be important for the lawyer to work towards a quick but fair resolution.

Lawyers' fees are an obvious problem for many debtor clients. If a satisfactory arrangement cannot be worked out, then the lawyer should consider what services can be given *pro bono*, or the lawyer should refer the debtor to a not-for-profit debt counselling service.

It is important that lawyers fully review with debtors not only the specifics of the claim by the other side, but all details of the parties' dealings. For example, there may not be a defence to the claim, but there may be a counterclaim.

A discussion of common law, equitable and statutory defences, and causes of action for debtors is beyond the scope of this chapter. Some of the more important defences at law and equity are mistake, lack of consideration, and unconscionable bargain (unequal bargaining power and unfairness of the bargain). There are also statutory defences set out in the *Personal Property Security Act*, *Business Practices and Consumer Protection Act*, and the *Bills of Exchange Act* (Canada). See the "Collections Procedure" checklist in the Law Society's *Practice Checklists Manual*, and "Debtor Remedies" in the CLEBC course publications. For procedural and other strategies for defending a claim, see Chapter 14, "Acting for a Debtor" in *British Columbia*

Creditors' Remedies—An Annotated Guide (Vancouver: CLEBC).

It is important that the lawyer review a debtor's entire financial picture. Besides the immediate problem that brings the client to the lawyer, there may be other unsecured (or secured) creditors pressing for payment as well. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss details of the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act*, lawyers should remember that a debtor might have remedies under that statute, including assignment in bankruptcy, consumer proposals (Part III, Division 2), commercial proposals (Part III, Division 1), and orderly payment of debts (Part X). In some cases it may be prudent to refer the debtor to someone who is experienced in assisting people who are in financial trouble, such as a trustee in bankruptcy.

There are many settlement alternatives to litigating a collections matter. A creditor may be satisfied with reinstatement of instalment payments, perhaps in a smaller amount. A debtor may have security to give, either over property or from a guarantor. Where a creditor insists on having judgment, it may be possible to negotiate an instalment payment clause as part of the judgment order. It may be open to the parties to agree to allow the debtor to liquidate some assets voluntarily to pay the creditor, as an alternative to potential loss of value to both sides through forced seizure and sale.

If liability and quantum of the debt are not in issue, but repayment terms cannot be settled, there are still remedies open to the debtor. SCCR 13-2(31) gives the court authority to make instalment payment orders on judgments. That rule also empowers the court to make orders suspending execution. There is authority in Small Claims Rules 11 and 12 for the Small Claims Court to order judgments payable by instalments.

2. Ethical Concerns

There are special ethical concerns for lawyers when acting for debtors. In collection matters, of special concern to the Law Society is the potential for counsel to become involved in fraudulent preferences and fraudulent conveyances (see rule 3.2-7 of the *BC Code*). There may be risks both for the client and for the lawyer. Before acting in situations where there is any possibility of these allegations being raised against a client, the lawyer should thoroughly review the Law Society commentaries, and possibly seek the opinion of a practice advisor. Rule 3.2-7 of the *BC Code* describes some of the limits on the advice a lawyer can give:

A lawyer must not engage in any activity that the lawyer knows or ought to know assists in or encourages any dishonesty, crime or fraud.

Commentary [1] to rule 3.2-7 states:

A lawyer should be on guard against becoming the tool or dupe of an unscrupulous client, or of others, whether or not associated with the unscrupulous client.

The August 1987 *Discipline Digest* warns lawyers to resist temptations that can arise in debtor situations:

It is the lawyer's duty to protect [that lawyer's] client within the bounds of the law. The temptation to push beyond those bounds is never more intense than when the client is a harried debtor in search of relief. Yet assisting in any attempt to remove assets from the reach of lawful creditors, whether for the benefit of the lawyer or the client, exposes the lawyer to serious criminal and civil liability, and professional discipline risks.

The following warnings from the February 1985 *Discipline Digest* address fraudulent conveyances specifically:

[M]embers who are asked to advise client in this type of situation should thoroughly review the case law on fraudulent conveyances.

[. . .]

[M]embers should exercise extreme caution in accepting instructions to effect a transfer in circumstances which *may* constitute a fraudulent conveyance.

Determining the validity of a debtor client's proposed course of conduct can be difficult. The difference between valid and invalid transactions may eventually turn on fairly narrow legal principles.

Lawyers are frequently called upon to give advice to debtors who have already filed for bankruptcy and remain undischarged. In those circumstances it is important to note that the debtor cannot offer to pay a lawyer's fee without permission from the trustee, and accepting a payment from an undischarged bankrupt can often result in a preference claim where the trustee can claw back the retainer or fees.

For a thorough review of the distinctions between fraudulent conveyances and fraudulent preferences, and of those transfers that are within the scope of the relevant acts, see *British Columbia Creditors' Remedies—An Annotated Guide* (Vancouver: CLEBC); and Robinson's *British Columbia Debtor-Creditor Law & Precedents* (Toronto: Carswell).

[§9.10] Postjudgment Execution

Once a creditor obtains a judgment, the creditor is able to use a variety of payment enforcement methods. There is no practice requirement that the creditor make a further demand for payment. Under the *Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act* a judgment is considered continuing demand for payment.

As a practical matter, while a collection agent must not charge fees and disbursements to a debtor except as authorized by legislation, a bailiff's reasonable fees and disbursements are deemed to be part of the amount owing by the debtor. Therefore, it may in some circumstances be prudent to use the services of a bailiff rather than a collection agent.

Note that the *MJEA* will substantially alter the postjudgment execution process; §9.10 concludes with a summary of upcoming changes.

1. Debtor Examinations

In situations where the judgment creditor has insufficient information with which to attempt judgment execution, there are two procedures under the SCCR that can be used to compel judgment debtors to appear personally and answer questions, under oath, about their ability to pay. Aside from providing the creditor an opportunity for questioning, the debtor and creditor may be able to use the occasion to come to an agreement on repayment, thus avoiding the unnecessary expense and delay associated with asset execution procedures.

(a) Examination in Aid of Execution

SCCR 13-4 allows a judgment creditor to examine a debtor in aid of execution. The process is similar to examinations for discovery. The process is initiated by serving an appointment and sufficient conduct money on the debtor.

Service on counsel for an officer of a company to be examined was held sufficient in *Bank of Montreal v. Quality Feeds Alberta Ltd.*, 1995 CanLII 3189 (B.C.S.C.), aff'd (1996), 49 C.P.C. (3d) 8 (C.A.).

No court order for attendance is required. The debtor, the creditor and counsel are the only parties to the hearing, though a reporter may be brought in to record the proceedings. SCCR 13-4 lists the range of subjects on which the debtor can be examined; see the "Collections—Examination in Aid of Execution" checklist in the Law Society's *Practice Checklists Manual* for a suggested list of questions. This should be modified to suit the circumstances.

The examination in aid of execution process can be used concurrently with judgment execution attempts (unlike the subpoena to debtor process, discussed later). The existence of an outstanding writ of execution is not a valid ground for refusing to appear at the examination (*Kendall and Dolphin Ventures Ltd. v. Hunt* (1978), 9 B.C.L.R. 332 (S.C.)).

In *Haywood Securities Inc. v. Inter-Tech Resource Group* (1985), 68 B.C.L.R. 145 (C.A.), affirming (1985), 62 B.C.L.R. 183 (S.C.), the Court of Appeal, with dissent, held that s. 13 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was not a defence for refusing to answer questions in examinations in aid of execution.

In *Slater Vecchio LLP v. Arvanitis*, 2022 BCSC 1139, the court was satisfied that financial documents sought from the judgment debtor, which the debtor had failed to produce, were relevant in terms of the judgment debtor examination, and so the court ordered production.

The court has discretion under SCCR 13-4(5) to order attendance and examination of any other person who may have knowledge of the debtor's circumstances. This provision was used to compel a spouse to attend (*Dezcam Industries Ltd. v. Kwak* (1983), 38 B.C.L.R. 121 (S.C.) and *Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. v. Fleming*, 2002 BCSC 995), and the manager of a financial institution to attend (*Hrabcak v. Hrabcak* (1982), 44 B.C.L.R. 22 (S.C.)). In *Royal Bank of Canada v. Scheinberg*, [1995] B.C.J. No. 2013 (B.C.S.C. Master), the court refused to order an examination of a defendant's counsel on the basis that the plaintiff had not reasonably exhausted alternatives for obtaining financial information about the defendant. In *Edelweiss Credit Union v. Waschke* (1986), 8 B.C.L.R. (2d) 392 (Co. Ct.), the court disapproved of a judgment creditor applying under former Rule 26(11) (discovery of documents) as a method of obtaining a judgment debtor's address from a person who was not a party to the action.

Because judgment debtors often fail to appear at the examination, counsel should always remember to obtain an affidavit of service from the process server who served the appointment. Counsel will also require the appointment to be endorsed for non-appearance. The reporter attending will provide this after a 30-minute grace period to the debtor. Note that the examination must be held at the registry nearest to where the debtor resides.

Although the failure to attend at an examination in aid of execution is punishable by contempt, the courts have held that the "usual practice" requires the creditor to obtain an order requiring the debtor to attend which makes clear that the failure to attend may constitute contempt: *Sears, Roebuck & Co. v. Eadie*, 1984 CanLII 308 (B.C.C.A.). This is despite the fact that this provision is typically included on the appointment previously served upon the debtor.

(b) Subpoena to Debtor

SCCR 13-3 sets out the procedure for subpoenas to debtors. The process begins with the debtor being served with the subpoena, which contains a hearing date (substituted service is possible per *Margetish v. Gildemeester*, [1985] B.C.D. Civ. 3717-01 (Co. Ct.)), and sufficient conduct money.

There are a number of distinctions between an examination in aid of execution and a subpoena to debtor: in the latter, the hearing is held before an examiner (usually a registrar or an associate judge), and the examiner has the authority to make an order for repayment of the judgment, on terms. The range of subjects on which the debtor can be questioned is narrower for a subpoena to debtor hearing (SCCR 13-3(4) and see *Kareena (B.C.) Services v. Superstar Holding Inc.* (1983), 44 B.C.L.R. 96 (Co. Ct. Registrar)).

A subpoena to debtor cannot be issued while a writ of execution is outstanding against the debtor (SCCR 13-3(1)). Also, a subpoena to debtor hearing (but not an examination in aid of execution) should be dismissed when a monthly repayment order (in lieu of garnishment) under s. 5(2) of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* exists (*Bank of BC v. Joulie* (1982), 29 C.P.C. 273 (B.C. Co. Ct.)). However, the parties may seek a variation of the order (SCCR 13-3(11) and see *Armstrong Spallumcheen Savings & Credit Union v. McKinlay*, [1992] B.C.W.L.D. No. 1338 (S.C. Master)).

The subpoena to debtor process generally is more advantageous to the debtor than the creditor. For the creditor, it is a method by which a debtor can be forced to disclose financial information but the likely result will be small periodic payments, with committal as a penalty for failure to either disclose or pay.

Debtors can expect that an examiner's repayment order will be reasonable and tailored to the debtor's financial circumstances. Debtors

are protected against writs of execution and garnishment from that creditor so long as the payment order is not in default. Even if there is default, but an order has not been rescinded, execution can only issue for the amount in default (*Bank of Montreal v. Monsell* (1985), 58 B.C.L.R. 11 (S.C.)). Rule 42(21)(b) under the former Rules, which provided for acceleration when there was default on instalment orders made under that rule, was held not to govern instalment orders made under Rule 42(33) (*McKay v. McKay*, [1992] B.C.W.L.D. No. 2497 (S.C. Master)). These rules have been replaced by SCCR 13-2(32) and 13-3(11), respectively.

(c) Committal for Contempt

Section 51 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* states: “a person must not be taken in execution on a judgment.” However, imprisonment for contempt of orders arising from SCCR 13-2, 13-3, and 13-4 is still a remedy that a creditor may seek (*Microwave Cablevision Ltd. v. Harvard House Capital Ltd.* (1982), 37 B.C.L.R. 101 (C.A.), decided under former Rules 42 and 42A), although the practical value of the remedy is questionable.

In examinations in aid of execution, a debtor may risk contempt proceedings, for example, by failing to attend at all, or by attending but failing to bring relevant documents or answer relevant questions. Such actions are subject to a contempt application and punishment by fine or committal under SCCR 22-8 (*Sears, Roebuck & Company v. Eadie*, 1984 CanLII 308 (B.C.C.A.)). However, as noted above, in *Sears*, the Court of Appeal held that a precondition to such a contempt application was an application for an order of the court specifically directing the debtor to attend or answer as required. If the debtor failed to obey that order, then contempt proceedings could be brought.

On subpoenas to debtors, the authority for committal is specifically set out in SCCR 13-3. Under SCCR 13-3(8) a failure to attend, to be sworn, or to give satisfactory answers, among other actions, can lead to a committal order. Under SCCR 13-3(10), an unreasonable failure to pay on an instalment order, among other actions, can also lead to committal. The SCCR require a specific court hearing for committal if, as is usually the case, the original subpoena hearing was before a registrar.

When a client wants counsel to proceed with any form of contempt application, it is vital that the SCCR (which have only been summa-

rized here) be strictly followed. Failure to do so will lead to dismissal of the application. Even when SCCR requirements are followed and the elements of civil contempt are made out, the court may exercise discretion to decline to impose a contempt finding (*Architectural Institute of British Columbia v. Halarewicz*, 2019 BCCA 146; *Slater Vecchio LLP v. Arvanitis*, 2020 BCSC 385).

(d) Small Claims Court

Small Claims Rules 12 to 15 set out an examination and payment order process for judgments made in Small Claims Court. A first step that is open to either debtor or creditor is to apply for a payment hearing under Small Claims Rule 12. At that hearing, the court has authority to order repayment by instalments, or it can confirm a date for full payment.

If a debtor does not make payments ordered under a payment hearing, or if payments are not made as can be ordered at a settlement conference or trial, the creditor can apply for a default hearing under Small Claims Rule 13. At that hearing, the court may confirm or change payment terms. Failure by the debtor to make payments or reasonably explain that failure, or failure by the debtor to attend the hearing, can eventually lead to committal.

2. Garnishment

Garnishment, or attachment of debts, is a statutory remedy. The provisions for garnishing debts, both before and after judgment, are set out in the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, Part I. Garnishment is usually directed against bank accounts or wages, though many other funds are subject to garnishment.

(a) The Process

A judgment creditor can obtain a garnishing order after judgment, on application without notice, at the court registry (see Supreme Court Practice Direction PD-10—*Garnishing Orders*). An affidavit is submitted in support. An applicant for a prejudgment or postjudgment garnishing order must also file a requisition in Form 17. The applicant files a draft garnishing order along with the affidavit, requisition and filing fee. The order binds the obligations due to the debtor from the garnishee, from the time the order is served on the garnishee (s. 9(1)).

Garnishment is available in both Small Claims Court and Supreme Court actions. The form of order and supporting affidavits are nearly

identical at both levels of court. Note that most Small Claims Court forms are printed in specific formats; where such prescribed forms are available, they must be used. It is necessary to make full and frank disclosure of all material facts in the affidavit in support of an application for a garnishing order, as failure to do so may be grounds for setting that order aside (*Cummings v. Chen*, 2023 BCSC 266).

In British Columbia, garnishing orders do not continue to attach subsequent funds (except in some maintenance enforcement situations). The order attaches to wages that become owing, payable, or due within seven days from the date the affidavit in support was sworn. The order must be timed to coincide with the debtor's pay period and a new order obtained for a subsequent pay period. For this reason, wage garnishment for a relatively large judgment is a cumbersome process for creditors and employers.

When the garnishee is obligated to the judgment debtor, the garnishee may be ordered to pay into court the lesser of the amount stated in the order or the amount of the garnishee's obligation to the judgment debtor (s. 11). The Act sets out a process for resolving disputes over garnishee liability or amount due; see ss. 11 and 16 to 20.

Section 11(d) allows a judge to order the garnishee to pay the judgment creditor the amount garnished. In *Royal Bank of Canada v. Osprey Electric*, 2020 BCCA 343, the court overturned a chambers decision that granted the order under s. 11 and directed the garnishee to pay. The court noted that the provisions of s. 11 must be read together, and held that to make an order under s. 11(d), the garnishee must have neither disputed the debt nor appeared at the hearing. Since the garnishee had appeared and disputed the notice, the judge had no authority to make an order under s. 11(d) (para. 35).

As a matter of discretionary practice, garnishees who deny any debt, obligation, or liability to the defendant often address a letter to the court registry (with a copy to plaintiff's counsel) advising of that position.

The garnishing order is to be served on the judgment debtor "at once, or within a time as allowed by the judge or registrar" (s. 9(2)). In practice, service on the debtor may take several days to accomplish. This will not be fatal in a later application to set aside, provided that the attempt is underway shortly after service is effected on the garnishee. While there are a small

number of cases where the court, in the interest of fairness and equity, stretched the term "at once" to allow for service much later, counsel should, as a matter of practice, serve the defendant immediately after serving the garnishee, to ensure compliance with s. 9(2).

Once the garnishee pays money into court, a notice is sent from the registry to the creditor or the creditor's lawyer. Alternatively, the lawyer can simply contact the garnishee immediately after service to confirm if there will be payment in or not, or if there will be a dispute. If money is not to be paid in, then the lawyer can dispense with serving the order on the judgment debtor. The Act does not stipulate that the affidavit in support must be served but the common practice is to do so. The garnishing order can be served by substituted service, upon order of the court (s. 9(5)).

Payment of money out of court is governed by ss. 12 and 13. The creditor has a number of options. An application can be made to court for an order for payment out, but the debtor must be notified of the application, unless an order is also obtained dispensing with service (or ordering substituted service). If written consent is obtained from the debtor for payment out (for example, where the parties have come to a settlement), then no court order is necessary and the money can be paid out upon a requisition to the registry. In this instance, proof of service of the original garnishing order is not required (*Sears Canada Inc. v. Naswell* (1987), 20 C.P.C. (2d) 97 (B.C. Co. Ct.)).

The creditor can also have the money paid out by requisition if the debtor is served with a notice of an intention to apply for payment out, and if the debtor does not file a notice within ten days disputing the payment out. In order to save service costs and time, a lawyer may serve the debtor with the garnishing order and the notice of intention to apply for payment out simultaneously.

(b) Funds Subject to Garnishment

The essential issue in garnishment after judgment is whether a garnishee's obligation to the debtor is subject to attachment under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*. Section 3 provides that the "debt, obligations, and liabilities" must arise from a trust or contract obligation (unless it is itself a judgment due to the debtor). Wages and salaries are included (s. 1).

A great deal of case law exists around what funds can be garnished, and under what

conditions. In addition, timing of the service of the order is often crucial.

Wages are subject to garnishment only **after** judgment. “Wages” include salary, commission, and fees, and any money payable by an employer to an employee for work or services performed in the course of employment, but do not include deductions from wages made by an employer under federal or provincial legislation (s. 1). This definition includes wages payable to the debtor within seven days after the day on which the affidavit in support of the order is sworn (s. 1).

A garnishing order for wages is not continual—a new application and garnishing order must be sought for each pay period, unless you are acting for the Crown and are relying on specific statutory authority that allows for “continuous” garnishment of wages. Section 3 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act* limits the amount of wages that can be garnished; usually, the maximum is 30% of the net income after statutory deductions.

Wages of provincial government employees are subject to garnishment (s. 6). Federal public servants are subject to garnishment through a separate federal statute—the *Garnishment, Attachment and Pension Diversion Act*, R.S.C. 1985, c. G-2.

Wages and salaries received on reserve by Indigenous people registered as Indians for the purposes of the *Indian Act* cannot be garnished unless all of the proceeds of the garnishment are in favour of a creditor who is an Indian (s. 89(1) of the *Indian Act*). An Indian development corporation is not an Indian and cannot garnish the wages owed by a band to an Indian (*Tsilhqot'in Economic Development Corp. v. Johnny*, [1995] B.C.J. No. 2896 (Prov. Ct.)).

Garnishment of real estate commissions is possible, but very problematic. A garnishing order cannot be issued on monies that the debtor *may* become entitled to in the future. The creditor would need to monitor the realtor’s sales to determine at what point a commission became payable to the realtor, and garnish it immediately (*First Pac. Credit Union v. Dewhurst*, 1987 CanLII 2649 (B.C. S.C.)).

Funds held by financial institutions, such as chequing or savings accounts, are usually subject to garnishment so long as they are not held jointly with someone who is not indebted to the creditor. Term deposits can be garnisheed (*Bel Fran Investments Ltd. v.*

Pantuity Holdings, [1975] 6 W.W.R. 374 (B.C.S.C.)). DPSPs, RRIFs and RRSPs are protected against garnishment (s. 71.3 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*). A bank line of credit was held not garnishable in *Yakir v. March Films B.C. Ltd.* (1980), 19 B.C.L.R. 211 (S.C.). A debtor’s funds put aside by a bank into a “suspense” account to cover possible dishonoured cheques was held garnishable in *Bank of Montreal v. Redlack*, 1987 CarswellBC 3398, 3 A.C.W.S. (3d) 146; see also *Garon Realty & Insurance Ltd. v. James and Royal Bank of Canada*, [1978] 6 W.W.R. 694 (B.C.S.C.). Bankers’ acceptances were held to be attachable in *Knowland v. C.E.L. Industries Ltd.*

Garnishing orders against banks (as garnishees) only attach funds in judgment debtor accounts at the branch served (*Bank Act*, s. 462(1)). There is case authority that this section does not apply to bank employees whose wages are being garnisheed (*Bank of Nova Scotia v. Mitchell and Mitchell*, [1981] 5 W.W.R. 149 (B.C.C.A.)).

If the financial institution’s branch that is served is on a reserve, then a garnishing order cannot attach to an Indian’s account. Funds held on deposit (on or off reserve) for Indians or Indian Bands are also not exigible if they are “deemed to be situated on a reserve” under s. 90 of the *Indian Act*: this section applies to personal property that was “purchased by [the Crown] with Indian moneys or moneys appropriated by Parliament for the use and benefit of Indians or bands” (s. 90(1)(a)) or “given to Indians or bands under a treaty or agreement” between a band and the Crown (s. 90(1)(b)).

While the general principle of non-exigibility pursuant to the *Indian Act* remains in force, the Supreme Court of Canada in *McDiarmid Lumber Ltd. v. God’s Lake First Nation*, [2006] 2 S.C.R. 846 significantly qualified the application of such exemption by narrowly construing the word “agreement” in ss. 90(1)(b) of the *Indian Act*. The impact of *McDiarmid Lumber* can be seen in recent decisions granting more liberal execution against funds not physically located on reserve property (see e.g. *Joyes v. Louis Bull Tribe #439*, 2009 ABCA 49).

The exemption from garnishment also may not apply to incorporated companies such as Tribal Councils or Indigenous organizations (*R. v. National Indian Brotherhood*, [1979] 1 F.C. 103 (Fed. T.D.); *Johnson v. West Region Tribal Council*, [1994] 1 C.N.L.R. 94 (Fed. T.D.)).

An Indian can effectively waive the protection of s. 89 of the *Indian Act* with respect to a commercial transaction on a reserve. In *Tribal Wi-Chi-Way-Win Capital Corp. v. Stevenson*, 2009 MBCA 72, the court ruled that an Indian may waive the s. 89 exemption in contract or loan arrangements with creditors, opening up the prospect that, with pre-existing waivers in place, a creditor may now be able to attach to assets situated on a reserve.

Money stored physically in an off-reserve safety deposit box is not protected by s. 89 of the *Indian Act*.

Rent payments are garnishable, but the order must apparently be served on the tenant on the day the rent is due and before payment has been forwarded (*Access Mortgage Group Ltd. v. Stuart* (1984), 49 B.C.L.R. 260 (C.A.)).

Money paid into court may not be garnisheed (*Provincial Treasurer of Alberta v. Zen*, [1981] 5 W.W.R. 188 (B.C.S.C.)) but it may be subject to charging orders.

Money payable by the federal Crown to third parties cannot be attached under the Act (*Selness v. Luk* ([1990] B.C.D. Civ. 1724-02 (B.C. Co. Ct.)). That portion of funds held by a garnishee on statutory trusts for GST, employment insurance, Canada Pension Plan, and income tax cannot be garnisheed because they do not belong to the debtor (*Bhattacharjee v. Strong Western Holdings Ltd.*, [1993] B.C.J. No. 6 (S.C.)).

Pensions and annuities may be subject to garnishment, depending on their nature. A private annuity was subject to garnishment in *Bank of Montreal v. Freedman* (1984), 58 B.C.L.R. 289 (S.C.). In *Crosson v. Crosson* (1985), 14 C.C.L.I. 246 (B.C.S.C.), a disability pension was subject to garnishment. Welfare payments are not subject to garnishment for reasons of public policy (*Constantini and Company v. Fischer* (1982), 34 B.C.L.R. 363 (S.C.)). Old Age Security and Canada Pension Plan benefits are exempt from garnishment except by the government (*Old Age Security Act*, s. 36; *Canada Pension Plan*, s. 65).

Shareholder loans are subject to garnishment, so long as they are due and payable (*British Columbia v. Big White Developments Ltd.*, [1984] B.C.D. Civ. 1724-05 (S.C.)), although in practice it is difficult if not impossible to determine when a debt owed to a shareholder is due and payable without inside knowledge of the affairs of the company, and so such loans

are rarely garnished. A demand loan between businesses was held garnishable, despite an allegation that there was a postponement understanding which would make the obligation conditional, in *Roe v. Mr. Build (Can.) Ltd.*, [1988] B.C.W.L.D. No. 845 (Co. Ct.).

Builders lien trust funds may be subject to garnishment, but the funds remain subject to the claims of the trust beneficiaries whose statutory trust claims under s. 10 of the *Builders Lien Act* will generally have priority over the claims of most creditors (*A & M Painting v. Byers* (1981), 28 B.C.L.R. 43 (C.A.)). See also *Aebig v. Miller Contracting Ltd.* (1993), 81 B.C.L.R. (2d) 221 (S.C. Master)).

Lawyers' trust accounts may be subject to garnishment but may also be subject to offsetting claims by the lawyer for monies due and owing (see *Capozzi Enterprises Ltd. v. Tower Enterprises Inc.* (1983), 50 B.C.L.R. 100 (S.C.)). However, funds held in client transactions generally are not garnishable, depending on conditionality or entitlement (*Ahaus Developments Ltd. v. Savage*).

Funds assigned as security are not subject to garnishment, so long as the security instrument is valid and in place before the garnishment. For a case on this point, see *Tyrer Enterprises Ltd. v. Lytton Lumber Ltd.*, [1992] B.C.W.L.D. No. 2452 (C.A. Chambers). However, a mere direction to pay will not constitute an assignment, and a garnishing order will succeed (*Weber v. D5 Enterprises Ltd.* (1983), 51 B.C.L.R. 172 (S.C.)). A receiver appointed under a debenture took priority in *Weldon Metal Products Ltd. v. First Food Corporation*, [1987] B.C.D. Civ. 1727-01 (S.C.).

(c) Release of Garnishment

As with prejudgment garnishing orders, there is authority in the *Court Order Enforcement Act* for garnishing orders after judgment to be released, on conditions (s. 5). This is a discretionary remedy available where it would be "just in all the circumstances" and the debtor can show abuse, hardship, or that the order is unnecessary. However, if there is a judgment, instalment repayment terms must be set if the order is released.

If funds are paid into court but are not properly attached by the garnishing order, they will be released, as "it would be an abuse to continue to hold them in court" (*RGN Management Limited Partnership v. 7th Light Education Group Inc.*, 2022 BCSC 1866 at para. 69).

3. Execution Against Real Property

If a creditor holds a mortgage registered against real property owned by a debtor, the creditor may execute against that property through foreclosure proceedings. Mortgage enforcement through foreclosure proceedings is governed by specific procedures set out in SCCR 21-7 and other applicable statutes such as the *Law and Equity Act*. A detailed discussion of foreclosure practice is beyond the scope of this chapter. For further information see the resource materials listed in §9.01 above.

An unsecured creditor who seeks to recover monies by execution against real property must generally do so under the enforcement mechanisms of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*. Only a creditor who has a registered mortgage on title is entitled to use the foreclosure proceedings set out in the SCCR and the *Law and Equity Act*. All other creditors must use the enforcement provisions in ss. 80 to 113 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*.

Lawyers and clients alike should recognize that this process is lengthy, cumbersome, and therefore costly. Accordingly, before initiating this form of execution, a judgment creditor should consider all relevant factors carefully, particularly whether there is any realistic potential for recovery by forcing a sale of the property. In many instances, recovery by the creditor through execution will be doubtful. However, the execution process can be used creatively and cost-effectively to provide a creditor with leverage to assist in a negotiated settlement of a judgment, as discussed below.

The first step in executing against real property is for the judgment creditor to register the judgment against the debtor's title. The debtor might own the real property as a tenant in common or in joint tenancy, but that part of the title that the debtor owns is an interest that the creditor can pursue. If all the registered owners are debtors the creditor is pursuing, the creditor can register against the full title. If the debtor only owns a part interest, the creditor's charge only affects that part of the title owned by the debtor. If the creditor is planning to force a sale of a fraction of the title, another owner registered on title might be an interested buyer. Alternatively, the creditor might buy the debtor's interest, or the creditor might look for a prospective buyer among third parties.

When you get a judgment in Small Claims Court, the registrar will give you a Certificate of Judgment. In Supreme Court, the form of the order is governed by SCCR 13-1. It is important to note that the registration of a judgment on land title expires after two years unless it is renewed (s. 83).

Regardless of whether the judgment was obtained in Supreme Court or Small Claims Court, proceedings must be brought in the Supreme Court for sale of that interest. If the original judgment was obtained in the Supreme Court, the process is simpler, and can be initiated by notice of application under the judgment action (*Young v. Battiston* (1983), 50 B.C.L.R. 139 (S.C.)).

Once registered against the title, the judgment becomes a charge against the property. From a practical perspective, such a charge can cause significant difficulties for a debtor who wishes to sell or remortgage the property, depending upon the purchaser or lender in question. Depending upon the circumstances of the debtor, registering the judgment might be enough to prompt the debtor to pay the outstanding judgment in full, in order to remove the charge on title. If a creditor can wait for recovery on its judgment, registration alone without any further execution steps can be a feasible and cost-effective recovery strategy.

If the property is the principal residence of the debtor and the debtor's equity in it is less than \$12,000 in Vancouver or Victoria, or \$9,000 elsewhere in the province, it is exempt from forced seizure or sale. If the equity of the debtor in the principal residence exceeds the exemption on a sale, the debtor is entitled to the amount of the exemption and the creditor receives the balance of the equity.

The process of selling the property to satisfy the judgment involves three hearings:

1. an initial show-cause hearing before the court (s. 92);
2. a registrar's hearing to determine details of the title (s. 94); and
3. a confirmation hearing before the court for a sale order (s. 94).

A party seeking approval of a sale is required by SCCR 21-7(9) to apply to the court for an order confirming the sale. An order approving sale will enable transfer of title and identify how the proceeds are distributed. A creditor cannot avoid having sale proceeds paid into court as required under s. 110 (*Minister of National Revenue v. Bival Holdings Qualicum Ltd.* (1993), 79 B.C.L.R. (2d) 137 (S.C. Master)). However, in *Hongkong Bank of Canada v. R. in Right of Canada* (1989), 36 B.C.L.R. (2d) 373 (C.A.), the Court of Appeal excused the omission of several steps in a sale ordered under the authority of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*. There is no prohibition against the creditor bidding on the property in the course of the auction.

Despite the apparently mandatory provisions in the *Court Order Enforcement Act* governing the sale of land, it has been held that the *Court Order Enforcement Act* is not a “complete code” and that a chambers judge has discretion to incorporate the provisions of former Rule 43 (now SCCR 13-5) in granting orders for the sale of real property pursuant to execution proceedings (*Instafund Mortgage Management Corp. v. 379100 British Columbia Ltd.*, 1998 CanLII 5841 (B.C.S.C.)).

As mentioned above, the debtor’s interest in land that a creditor can pursue may be limited by the interests of other persons in the land (*Chichak v. Chichak*, 2021 BCCA 286 at paras. 9–10; *Brar v. Kootenay Savings Credit Union*, 2023 BCCA 68 at para. 32). In *Lumley v. Lacasse*, 1992 CanLII 2151 (B.C. S.C.), the court held that it was open to a co-owner, who was not a judgment debtor, to seek a declaration concerning the interest against which a judgment had been registered. The court held that this right was consistent with the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 86(2), and could be brought by petition under former Rule 10(1)(g) (now SCCR 2-1(2)).

A creditor may execute against land if it can prove that the debtor is the beneficial owner: *RCG Forex Service Corp. v. Chen* (2000), 72 B.C.L.R. (3d) 113 (C.A.).

A debtor’s title interest may prove illusory. In *Kish Equipment Ltd. v. A.W. Logging Ltd.* (1986), 2 B.C.L.R. (2d) 141 (S.C.), the court found a judgment debtor was not the beneficial owner of lands where a relative had transferred title to the judgment debtor without consideration, in order to frustrate a third party’s claim to the lands. (Notably, this is a form of fraudulent conveyance, for which creditors have separate remedies.) In practice, obtaining such orders is often very difficult and requires clear and cogent evidence that the registered owner is knowingly holding title for the benefit of the debtor so that the debtor may avoid creditors.

Evaluating the charges registered against the property may show that the debtor has no significant equity in the property after claims of mortgagees and other priority charge holders are met. In proceedings under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, existing mortgages on the title take priority and are paid out in order of registration. After those claims are met, where there is more than one judgment holder registered against the title, those judgment holders share equally, with no preference and not in priority of registration (*Rutherford, Bazett & Co. v. The Penticton Pub Ltd.* (1983), 50 B.C.L.R. 21 (S.C.)). A subsequent party with a judgment for a

very large amount can diminish a first judgment holder’s return considerably.

Where multiple judgments are registered on property and the property is sold pursuant to foreclosure proceedings, judgments are paid in order of registration, instead of the proceeds being divided amongst all creditors: *Hallmark Homes Ltd. v. Crown Trust Company* (1983), 49 B.C.L.R. 250 (S.C.) and *Land Title Act*, s. 28. However, if the sale is done through a court bailiff, creditors may apply under s. 6 of the *Creditor Assistance Act* and serve notice of their claim to any sheriff or bailiff selling the debtor’s assets to share rateably in the proceeds of sale among other unsecured judgment holders.

The court has discretion to dismiss the process at the show-cause stage (*Jones v. White*, [1975] B.C.J. No. 372). At the time of the confirmation hearing, the court has discretion to defer a sale order where the property is the home of the debtor (s. 96(2)).

The real property of an Indian or Indian Band (as defined in the *Indian Act*) will be exempt from execution (*Indian Act*, s. 89). Sections 29, 87, 89 and 90 of the *Indian Act* acknowledge the Crown’s duty to protect the property of Indians from dispossession by non-Indians (*Mitchell v. Peguis Indian Band*, [1990] 2 S.C.R. 85 (S.C.C.)). However, off-reserve fee simple holdings of an Indian or Indian Band are not protected by s. 89 (*Canada (Attorney General) v. Giroux* (1916), 53 S.C.R. 172).

4. Execution Against Personal Property

(a) The Process

The *Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 55 provides that all goods, chattels and effects of a judgment debtor are liable to seizure and sale under a writ of execution, except as exempted under the Act. Section 58 covers seizing property such as money, cheques and promissory notes; s. 64.1 covers seizing stocks, shares and dividends.

The procedure for obtaining a writ of execution is set out in SCCR 13-2. A writ is obtained by applying to the court registry. The writ remains in force for one year, and can be renewed.

The writ is then placed with a court bailiff for execution. In practice, it is important that the judgment creditor provide as much information as possible in order to aid execution. For motor vehicles, searches should confirm registered ownership (though this does not necessarily confirm beneficial ownership), and to identify

encumbrances. For shares, information should be provided on their nature and location.

A judgment debtor is liable for the taxable costs of the judgment creditor under SCCR 13-2(22) to (26), but only where assets are realized in execution (*Uram v. Uram* (1985), 66 B.C.L.R. 236 (S.C.)). However, if there is asset seizure but no sale (for example, where the parties come to a settlement), the court bailiff is entitled to costs (*Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 113(3)).

Under Small Claims Rule 11(11), a judgment of the Small Claims Court can be enforced by an order for seizure and sale. Under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 47, a writ of execution includes a Small Claims Court order for seizure and sale.

If an order for seizure and sale is wrongfully executed, damages may flow. For example, in *Hamilton v. British Columbia (Workers' Compensation Board)* (1992), 65 B.C.L.R. (2d) 96 (C.A.), the sheriff seized and sold chattels that were not owned by the debtor.

Practitioners should note that the *Commercial Liens Act*, S.B.C. 2022, c. 9 came into force on June 30, 2025. This statute creates a new type of lien (a “commercial lien”) that can be registered in the Personal Property Registry. Commercial liens allow service providers who provide labour or materials to improve, store, transport or salvage goods to retain the property of a customer or register the lien to secure payment of the customer’s debt.

(b) Specific Property Interests

Tangible personal property of the judgment debtor, such as motor vehicles and household furnishings, are exigible under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 55. However, determining and executing upon the interest that the debtor has in the property may prove problematic. For example, a debtor may be the registered owner of a motor vehicle, but not the beneficial owner. It may fall to the court to decide ownership, and hence exigibility.

According to s. 71.3 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, DPSPs, RRIFs and RRSPs are exempt from any enforcement procedures commenced after November 1, 2008.

The procedure for seizure and sale of company shares is set out in ss. 47-51 of the *Securities Transfer Act*, S.B.C. 2007, c. 10 and ss. 63.1, 64.1 and 65.1 of the *Court Order Enforcement Act*. Exigibility of shares and actually realizing

on their value may be difficult. There may be no market if the shares are insignificant in volume or are in a small non-reporting company. Nevertheless, in a family-owned company other family members may offer to purchase the shares to keep the creditor out. Shares that were owned subject to an option to purchase by a third party are not exigible (*Guaranty Trust Company v. International Phasor Telecom Ltd.*, [1985] B.C.D. Civ. 764-01 (S.C.)).

A judgment debtor’s equitable interest in chattels subject to a security agreement is exigible (*Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 62). However, as a practical matter, executing against that interest may not be worthwhile because the secured creditor must be paid in full before the judgment creditor (*Re Ottawa* (1980), 20 B.C.L.R. 313 (C.A.)).

Executing against personal property held by Indigenous people involves considerations under the *Indian Act*, s. 89. Generally, personal property held by an Indian or Indian Band (as defined in the *Indian Act*) and situated on a reserve is exempt from seizure by a non-Indian. A non-Indian can only commence garnishment proceedings against an Indian or Indian Band’s personal property if it is situated off reserve. Prior to the Supreme Court of Canada’s decision in *McDiarmid Lumber Ltd. v. God’s Lake First Nation*, the exemption from execution was given a broad interpretation. However, in *McDiarmid Lumber* the court found that the meaning of “situated on a reserve” in s. 89 was to be given a “concrete common law interpretation” and the term “on the reserve” should be given “its ordinary and common sense” meaning (at para. 19). As well, the court narrowly construed the word “agreement” in ss. 90(1)(b) of the *Indian Act* (which deems property to be situated on a reserve if it was “given to Indians or to a band under a treaty or agreement” between a band and the Crown). As noted earlier in this chapter, the impact of *McDiarmid Lumber* can be seen in recent decisions granting more liberal execution against funds not physically located on reserve property (see e.g. *Joyes v. Louis Bull Tribe #439*).

Chattel property owned by an Indian and located on reserve can be vulnerable to seizure pursuant to s. 89(2) of the *Indian Act*. If a vendor keeps a right of possession in personal property that is sold under the terms of a conditional sales agreement, that property is not protected by s. 89 against seizure, execution, or enforcement. If there is a default of payment and a court order is granted for recovery of the

property, a sheriff is entitled to enter into reserve land and execute the order.

(c) Exemptions

Section 71 allows a debtor an exemption of goods and chattels to the value set by regulation. Current exemptions (B.C. Reg. 28/98) are as follows:

- (i) \$4,000 household items;
- (ii) \$10,000 work tools;
- (iii) \$5,000 car (for one car only);
- (iv) \$12,000 equity for a residence in the Capital Regional District (e.g. in Victoria) or in the Metro Vancouver Regional District (e.g. in Vancouver and surrounding areas); \$9,000 equity elsewhere (s. 71.1);
- (v) essential clothing; and
- (vi) essential medical and dental aids.

Sections 73 to 78 set out the procedure for asset seizure, exemption claims by the debtor, and valuation of the assets.

A debtor must make the exemption selection within two days of the seizure (s. 73(2)). Failure to do so will mean loss of the exemption right (*Lee v. Colonial Cabinets and Plastic Laminates Ltd.*, [1978] 5 W.W.R. 27 (B.C. C.A.)).

In practice, where there is any question about an exemption claim for property such as household furnishings, the court bailiff generally will leave the judgment debtor temporarily in possession of the property. The judgment debtor may be required to sign a “notice of seizure and person in possession” to confirm that the seizure has not been abandoned.

Where counsel knows the debtor has high-value items that may fall within one of the exemption categories, it is prudent to send an expert valuator along with the bailiff for the seizure. The expert can advise the bailiff on the value of those items. This is done most often in relation to exemptions for “tools of trade.”

5. Equitable Execution

Execution remedies arose in equity where existing remedies at law were unavailable to reach certain judgment debtor assets: in this regard, bypassing hindrances with legal execution is the “very purpose” of equitable execution (*Shen v. West Continental Development Inc.* (BC0844848), 2022

BCSC 462 at para. 40). In addition, statute laws were enacted which gave additional authority for equitable-type execution orders. In British Columbia, at least two forms of equitable execution continue to be available to enforce Supreme Court judgments, though in relatively limited circumstances.

(a) Charging Order

The authority for the court to make a charging order arose from British statute law and the court’s equitable jurisdiction (*C.I.B.C. v. Smith*, [1976] 5 W.W.R. 643 (B.C.S.C.)). Consequently, all equitable principles, including the “clean hands doctrine,” apply (*Re Farkas* (1983), 50 B.C.L.R. 94 (S.C.)).

Modern execution laws that permit judgment creditors to execute against debtor interests have largely eclipsed charging orders. The main remaining circumstance for granting a charging order is to attach funds that are in court in another action in favour of the judgment debtor. The funds may be in court through garnishee proceedings in the other action, or through settlement payment. Generally, the charging order will be subject to existing legal or equitable claims on the funds.

In *Watt v. Health Sciences Association of British Columbia*, 2020 BCSC 280, the court explained that “a charging order allows a creditor to execute on a judgment where legal execution is impossible. An equitable charging order is available when there is an ascertainable fund that a debtor has a clear right to which can be charged” (para. 105). In that case, a charging order was made in relation to trust funds held for a proposed settlement of a class action.

(b) Equitable Receiver

The authority for judgment execution through the appointment of an equitable receiver arises from the *Law and Equity Act*, s. 39, and SCCR 13-2(5) and 10-2. The receiver stands in the place of the judgment debtor and gathers assets for the benefit of the judgment creditor. A receiver is typically appointed after judgment (*Vancouver City Savings Credit Union v. Welsh*, [1988] B.C.D. Civ. 3874-01 (S.C.), but see *Grenzservice Speditions Ges. m.b.H. v. Jans* (1995), 15 B.C.L.R. (3d) 370 (S.C.)).

The court in *Ward Western Holdings Corp. v. Brosseuk*, 2022 BCCA 32 set out a non-exhaustive list of factors governing whether it

would be “just and convenient,” in all of the circumstances, to appoint a receiver (para. 49).

Current BC case law suggests equitable receivers will be appointed in two situations: where the judgment creditor seeks to execute against an equitable interest (that is, where execution by writ or other statutory methods is not available), or where the court deems there to be “special circumstances” justifying an order. See *NEC Corporation v. Steintron International* (1985), 67 B.C.L.R. 191 (S.C.) and *Clarke v. Braich*, 2021 BCSC 121 at paras. 52–59.

An equitable receiver was appointed in the following “special circumstances”:

- to liquidate an RRSP so as to avoid devaluation and negative tax consequences (*National Trust Co. v. United Services Funds*, [1986] B.C.D. Civ. 3867-04 (S.C.); *Robson v. Robson*, [1996] B.C.W.L.D. 658, 104 W.A.C. 317); and
- when the conduct of the debtor indicated efforts to make away with assets (*NEC Corporation v. Steintron International*; *Warren v. Warren*, 2008 BCSC 731).

Appointment of an equitable receiver was refused in the following situations:

- when the judgment creditor had not demonstrated the difficulty of enforcing the judgment by other means (*First Western Capital Ltd. v. Wardle* (1984), 54 C.B.R. (N.S.) 230 (B.C.S.C.)); and
- when there was no evidence of evasion by the judgment debtor, and the creditor had other options to secure payment (*First Pacific Credit Union v. Dewhurst* (1987), 16 B.C.L.R. (2d) 371 (S.C. Master)).

For further discussion, see Chapter 9, “Equitable Remedies” in *British Columbia Creditors’ Remedies—An Annotated Guide* (CLEBC).

6. Upcoming Changes to Postjudgment Execution

When it is brought into force, the *MJEA* will substantially alter the postjudgment execution process.

(a) New Money Judgment Registry

One of the most significant changes that will be brought in by the *MJEA* is the creation of a searchable Money Judgment Registry. Under the *MJEA*, a judgment must be registered in the Money Judgment Registry within two years of the date of the judgment in order to pursue

enforcement remedies under the *MJEA*. Once a judgment is registered in the Money Judgment Registry, the judgment creditor will have priority over subsequent creditors for the duration of the registration. The registration can be renewed indefinitely before it expires. Accordingly, the registration alone can make passive collection a much more viable option, as it can make it much more difficult for the debtor to obtain credit, loans, or financing. The cost of registering in the Money Judgment Registry is presently unknown and will be set by regulation.

Once the judgment is registered in the Money Judgment Registry, the judgment creditor will also be able to, without the need to obtain a writ of execution, issue enforcement instructions to a court bailiff appointed under s. 3(1) of the *Sheriff Act*, who will be formally called a “civil enforcement officer.” The enforcement instructions will provide the civil enforcement officer with all of the steps the judgment creditor would like to take to enforce the judgment. The enforcement instructions will therefore be provided directly by the judgment creditor rather than in a writ of execution. The enforcement instructions can be as general (for example, seize and sell everything) or as specific as needed to focus on or exclude certain known assets.

(b) Debtor Examinations Under the *MJEA*

Under the *MJEA*, the process of obtaining information to aid in collecting on a judgment registered in the Money Judgment Registry will be completely overhauled. The new process, described in Part 7 of the *MJEA* (ss. 51–65), ranges from least to most intrusive depending on how evasive the judgement debtor is, summarized as follows:

1. The representative of a judgment creditor—their lawyer or a civil enforcement officer—may require a judgment debtor to submit a “disclosure statement” (s. 53). In completing the disclosure statement, the judgment debtor must disclose various relevant information, listed in ss. 53(1)(a)–(o), including all property they own, the identity of any person who holds an interest in that property, all obligations the judgment debtor has in respect of that property, all the judgment debtor’s sources of income, and any information prescribed by regulation or specified by a civil enforcement officer

that may reasonably assist them in enforcing the money judgment.

2. If the judgment debtor fails to submit a sufficiently complete disclosure statement within 14 days, the judgment creditor or their representative can require the judgment debtor be examined under oath as to any matter related to the information they must disclose under ss. 53(1)(a) through (o) (s. 54). Additionally, the judgment creditor or their representative can also apply to court to obtain information from a prescribed list of parties, such as banks, to be determined by way of regulation (s. 53).
3. Lastly, the judgment creditor or their representative may apply to have the judgment debtor examined before a judge, who may make a variety of further orders pertaining to the disclosure of information, including ordering a third party to disclose such information (ss. 54–56).

Note that the small claims examination and payment order process described earlier in this chapter is likely to continue when the *MJEA* comes into force.

(c) Postjudgment Garnishment Under the *MJEA*

Once the *MJEA* comes into force, postjudgment garnishment will be replaced with a more streamlined system, set out in detail in parts 8–11 of the *MJEA*. Most notably, it will be possible for a civil enforcement officer, acting under the instructions of a judgment creditor, to seize the accounts or income of a judgment debtor (ss. 91–99). Under the new system, there will be no need to re-apply to renew the seizure of such accounts. However, as set out in part 13 of the *MJEA*, the judgment debtor will be entitled to apply for an exemption in respect of what has been seized, or a portion thereof.

(d) Execution Against Real Property Under the *MJEA*

Execution against land will be substantially altered by the *MJEA*. Once the *MJEA* is in force, the first step in executing against real property will be for the judgment creditor to register the judgment in the Money Judgment Registry—this step will need to be taken before the judgment can be registered in the Land Title Office. Under the *MJEA*'s more streamlined process, a civil enforcement officer will be able to seize land by giving a notice of seizure to the judg-

ment debtor (s. 68). Further, property that the judgment debtor holds as a joint tenant with another party may generally be converted into a tenancy in common when a civil enforcement officer decides to dispose of such property (s. 146(2)).

(e) Execution Against Personal Property Under the *MJEA*

The *MJEA* will substantially alter the manner in which execution against personal property will proceed.

Instead of needing to proceed by obtaining writs of execution, a judgment creditor will need to only issue a single enforcement instruction (in a form to be prescribed by regulation) to a civil enforcement officer, who will then proceed to:

1. verify the validity of the creditor's registered judgment and begin the execution process;
2. determine the proper method for seizure, which generally depends upon the type of property in question;
3. provide a notice of seizure and/or take possession of such property;
4. provide the debtor with a notice of their right to make an exemption claim;
5. provide a notice of disposition of such property;
6. give the prescribed amount of time for the judgment debtor and/or a third party to tender an objection to the method of disposition advanced by the civil enforcement officer; and
7. for each property disposed, distribute the proceeds of sale according to the rules set out in s. 185.

As noted above, a broad array of property may be seized and disposed under the *MJEA*, which departs from the property-specific scheme currently in place under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*.

Further, the *MJEA* places the onus on the judgment debtor (or, in some circumstances, other parties, including their dependants) to make an exemption claim (s. 160). Not all property may be claimed as exempt under the *MJEA* (ss. 165–166). The judgment debtor will be able to make an exemption claim by providing written notice of the claimed exemption to the civil enforcement officer,

who then will determine the validity of this claim within ten days (s. 174). Where required, the parties may apply to court to determine the validity of the claim (s. 175). If successful, the exempt property will be returned to the judgment creditor in accordance with s. 177. If the property has already been disposed, the civil enforcement officer will pay the judgment debtor the portion of the proceeds that is in respect of the exempt property (s. 180).

A separate procedure applies in respect of exemptions for income of the judgment debtor. In brief, a civil enforcement officer must not seize or distribute a portion of income which is exempt (s. 173). Once a particular item of the judgment debtor's property is disposed, a "distributable fund" is created in respect of that property (s. 183). This means that, by default, a separate distributable fund will be created for each item of the judgment debtor's property. However, these distributable funds may be combined by a civil enforcement officer (s. 187).

[§9.11] Execution Priorities

Often there is more than one judgment creditor attempting to collect from the debtor. There are several principles governing the priorities among, and shared entitlement of, those competing creditors.

The *Creditor Assistance Act* is the starting point for considering creditor priorities. Under the *Creditor Assistance Act*, the court bailiff recovers money for a judgment creditor under the writ of seizure and sale. Once it is collected, the bailiff must promptly enter a notice in a book stating that a levy of money on a writ of seizure and sale against the property of a debtor has been made. The entry must detail the amount collected and the date on which it was collected. The notice book must be open to the public and there must be no charge to look at it.

The money collected by a court bailiff must be distributed rateably among all execution creditors and other creditors whose writs or certificates under the *Creditor Assistance Act* are in the court bailiff's hands at the time of the levy, or within one month from when the notice was entered (s. 3). If a creditor misses that time limit, they lose the entitlement to a share (*Totem Welding Supplies Ltd. v. Johnston, Wilkinson Company Limited* (1986), 8 B.C.L.R. (2d) 17 (S.C.)).

While s. 46 of the *Creditor Assistance Act* provides that there is no priority among execution creditors, there are many exceptions that may give the Crown, or Crown agencies (among others) a priority over funds. Indeed, many priority-type cases involve issues of priority as

between the federal and provincial Crowns. For example, see the *Workers Compensation Act*, s. 52, and *W.C.B. v. Attorney General/Canada* (1984), 57 B.C.L.R. 338 (S.C.). In another decision in the same case, (1984), 57 B.C.L.R. 21 (S.C.), the court also held the federal Crown had a priority based on prerogative rights.

For the time being, the regime set out above continues to govern execution priorities in British Columbia. However, the *Money Judgment Enforcement Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions Act* will repeal the *Creditor Assistance Act* entirely (s. 42). The *MJEA* contemplates a specific order in which the money in a distributable fund may be distributed (s. 185(1)). However, this order of distribution does not affect the priority of an interest in that property (s. 185(4)). Such priorities are instead determined by Part 4 (ss. 36–41), which sets out specific rules as to the priority of interests for different categories of property, including fixtures and crops (s. 37); securities, security entitlements, or futures contracts (s. 38); land (s. 40) and serial numbered goods (s. 41).

[§9.12] Acting for Debtors After Judgment

In many instances a debtor will only seek a lawyer's help after obtaining judgment, in order to enforce and collect on the judgement. It is important to consider immediately if it is realistic to attack the judgment itself, such as where it was entered in default.

Factors to be considered in an application to set aside a default judgment were established in *Miracle Feeds v. D. & H. Enterprises Ltd.* (1979), 10 B.C.L.R. 58 (Co. Ct.) at 61 (followed in *O'Krane v. Braich*, 1999 BCCA 296, *Huang v. Tseng*, 2001 BCCA 370 and *Royal Bank of Canada v. Rose*, 2022 BCSC 1472). A defendant applying to set aside a default judgment must show that:

- the defendant did not wilfully or deliberately fail to file a response to civil claim;
- the defendant applied to set aside the default judgment as soon as reasonably possible after learning of it, or can explain any delay in the application; and
- the defendant has a meritorious defence, or at least a defence worthy of investigation.

The affidavit in support should address all three points (*Kalfon v. Kalfon*, 2006 BCSC 994 at para. 7), and the onus is on the applicant to prove them (*British Columbia v. Ismail*, 2006 BCSC 1552, leave to appeal refused 2007 BCCA 55 (Chambers)). In *Andrews v. Clay*, 2018 BCCA 50 at para. 28, the court confirmed that these are "factors rather than tests," and are not intended to be either mandatory or exhaustive of the relevant considerations, though they will in most cases be "appropriate

indicators of whether it is in the interests of justice to set aside the default judgment.”

If the debtor cannot set aside the judgment, the debtor may yet be judgment-proof if they have no exigible assets. Enforcement steps may end if the creditor or the creditor’s counsel learn of the debtor’s circumstances.

When the creditor persists, and if there are extenuating circumstances, a debtor can seek an order for a stay of execution or payment by instalments under SCCR 13-2(31) and the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 48. Two cases where the courts found special circumstances justifying a stay are *Bank of Montreal v. Price*, [1983] B.C.D. Civ. 591-01 (Co. Ct.), and *Bank of Nova Scotia v. Pilling*, [1984] B.C.D. Civ. 3423-02 (C.A.). The court refused an application for a stay in *Caisse Populaire Maillardville v. Frigon*, [1988] B.C.D. Civ. 3872-02 (S.C.). In that case, the court found no special circumstances warranting a stay, despite the defendant’s claim that he would be able to pay the creditors judgment when a related court action resolved in his favour.

The parties may be able to negotiate a repayment by instalments as an alternative to execution. When the debtor does have some ability to pay, but the creditor is not willing to agree to such an arrangement, it may be possible for the debtor to apply to the courts, even after judgment, for an instalment payment order. However, as with stays of execution, instalment payment orders should be made only in special circumstances (*Royal Bank v. McLennan* (1918), 41 D.L.R. 27 (B.C.C.A.); *Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce v. Pegg*, [1994] B.C.J. No. 182 (S.C.)). Note also that instalment payment orders can be made under the *Court Order Enforcement Act*, s. 5 (setting aside garnishing orders after judgment) and s. 96 (deferring judgment execution against a debtor’s home), and under SCCR 13-3(11) and SCCR 13-2(31) to 13-2(33). In the Provincial Court, a debtor can apply for payment by instalments under Small Claims Rule 12(10).

When making an order under s. 96(2) to defer the sale of land, the court should not exercise its discretion by granting such a long deferral that it results in prejudice to the creditor (see *Kriegman v. Wilson*, 2020 BCCA 66, in which the Court of Appeal shortened the lower court’s order of a lengthy 24-month deferral of sale).

