FROM THE IUSTORIA BLOG

What to Bring to Your First Meeting with a Lawyer

> *A timeline, every version of the contract, original messages and the court's envelope. What to bring to a first meeting with a lawyer, why to leave it untouched and why to tell us the awkward parts.*

IUSTORIA TEAM

5 November 2026 · 10 min read

Clients turn up to a first meeting in one of two ways. Some bring a bag of papers in no particular order. Others bring nothing, because “I'd rather just tell you”, and send the documents afterwards. Both cost time. The second often costs the result as well: what a client recounts from memory almost always differs from the documents in some respect, and that difference is exactly where disputes are won and lost.

The documents at the first meeting tell us where the matter stands and how much time is left. The more complete and original they are, the more precise our answer. So it is worth knowing what to bring and why the original form matters more than tidiness.

A timeline: one page instead of an hour of storytelling

You can prepare the most useful document yourself. On a single page, write down what happened and when: when you first met the other party, when you entered into the contract, when something went wrong, when you wrote to each other, when the reply came and when you paid. Next to each line, note who was present and what proof you have. Don't comment and don't embellish; “12 March: machine handed over, did not work, warehouse worker present, I have a photo” says more than a paragraph about how the other side behaved.

Mark any dates you don't know exactly. “Around the end of March” is worth more to us than an invented date that an email later disproves.

A timeline shows us two things straight away. The first is time limits. The general limitation period is three years (Section 629(1) of the Czech Civil Code), and it usually runs from the day the person entitled learned, or ought to and could have learned, of the relevant circumstances (Section 619). From the timeline we can see at a glance whether a claim is at risk of becoming time-barred and how quickly we need to act. The second is gaps: lines without proof are where the dispute will be hardest, and the sooner we know about them, the sooner we can look for ways to fill them.

Contracts in every version, and the terms and conditions

Bring the signed contract with all its annexes and amendments. With it, bring the terms and conditions in the version that applied when the contract was concluded. Terms and conditions become part of a contract if the contract refers to them and they were attached to the offer or were known to the parties (Section 1751(1) of the Civil Code). The terms on the supplier's website today may differ from the ones you agreed to.

Then bring what you would probably throw away: earlier drafts, notes from meetings and emails from the negotiations. When a contract is interpreted, account is also taken of what preceded its conclusion and of how the parties themselves understood it afterwards (Section 556(2) of the Civil Code). We see disputes in which the meaning of a contested word was settled not by the contract but by an email from the negotiations, in which one party explained what it meant, or in which it expressly struck something out of a draft.

Purchase orders, order confirmations, invoices, handover records and powers of attorney belong here too. If there is no written contract at all, that is not a problem; an oral contract is generally valid, and the question is how to prove it. We write about this in more detail in the article "An Oral Contract Isn't Binding." What the Law Actually Says.

Keep the original documents yourself and show them at the meeting; copies are enough for us. With a bill of exchange, a written acknowledgment of debt or a contract with a certified signature, the original is itself the evidence and should not be passed around where it can go missing. It is a good idea to email the timeline and the main contract in advance so that we have read them before we meet.

Communication in its original form, not retyped

Clients often bring us emails and messages copied into a single Word document, sometimes with their own notes added. As evidence, a transcript like that is almost useless: it is only your claim about what the message said, without the sender or the exact time, and all the other side has to do is say that is not what they wrote.

So bring emails as files, the whole thread including the replies, and WhatsApp, Messenger or text messages on the phone you have them on, or as an export of the entire conversation. Bring photos and videos as the original files, not forwarded through a chat app. And bring the messages that hurt your case too; we need to know about them before the other side produces them in court. How to preserve messages so that they hold up in court, and what to do if the other side deletes them, is the subject of the article "I Have a Screenshot." When Messages and Emails Hold Up in Court.

Don't edit or delete anything before the meeting. Editing can be a crime: anyone who, in court proceedings, submits documentary or physical evidence of substantial importance for the decision, knowing that it has been altered, or alters it with that intention, can be sentenced to up to two years in prison (Section 347a(1) of the Czech Criminal Code). Deleting is not a crime in itself, but a deleted message usually remains on the other side's phone, and you lose the chance to explain it before they produce it. And a single alteration that comes to light is enough for the court to stop believing your other evidence as well.

One more piece of advice belongs in the same category: until you have taken advice, don't write anything to the other side that you don't have to. Especially if they want money from you. A written acknowledgment of a debt, stating its basis and amount, creates a presumption that the debt exists to the extent acknowledged (Section 2053 of the Civil Code), and a right arising from an acknowledged debt becomes time-barred only ten years after the acknowledgment (Section 639). A single sentence such as "I owe you the CZK 80,000, I'll pay when I can", written to calm things down, can spare the other side a large part of the work of proving its case.

Payments, witnesses and the other side

Payments. Bank statements, payment confirmations, cash receipts. Cash paid without a receipt is hard to prove. A creditor who accepts payment must, at the debtor's request, issue a confirmation that the debt has been paid, a receipt (*kvitance*), and the debtor may refuse to pay without one (Section 1949 of the Civil Code). If you pay in

cash, always ask for a receipt. If you paid without one, tell us, and tell us who was present when the money changed hands.

Witnesses. Name, phone number, address, and above all what exactly they saw or heard and what their relationship to you is. They need not be independent; a colleague or a relative can be a credible witness too. But don't tell them what to say. Why and how to call a witness is explained in the article Witnesses in Court: How to Call and Prepare Them.

The other side. The exact name of the person or company, its company ID number (*IČ*), address, who acts on its behalf and whether it has a lawyer. Ideally, send us these details when you book the appointment. A lawyer must refuse to provide legal services if they have already provided legal services in the same or a related matter to someone whose interests conflict with those of the new client (Section 19(1)(a) of the Czech Legal Profession Act, Act No. 85/1996 Coll.). Add what you know about the other side's assets and its other disputes. Winning a case against someone who has nothing only brings further costs.

You. Bring your identity card or passport. When holding money in escrow, arranging the purchase or sale of real estate or setting up a business corporation, a lawyer is an obliged entity under the Czech Anti-Money Laundering Act (Section 2(1)(g) of Act No. 253/2008 Coll.) and must identify the client, which means verifying the client's details against an identity document (Section 7 and Section 8(2)(a)). For these services, a lawyer cannot rely on confidentiality to avoid the obligations under that Act (Section 21(6) of the Legal Profession Act); this does not apply to advice and representation in a dispute (Section 27(1) of Act No. 253/2008 Coll.). If you are acting for a company, expect us to ask for proof that you are authorised to act on its behalf.

Decisions, envelopes and the date of service

Whatever you have received from a court, an authority or a court bailiff (*soudní exekutor*), bring it in full, including the envelope and the notice asking you to collect it, if you have it. Time limits do not run from the day you opened the letter but from the day of service. And a document can be served even if you never saw it.

A document that the addressee does not collect within 10 days of the day it was ready for collection is deemed served on the last day of that period, even if the addressee never learned it had been left there (Section 49(4) of the Czech Code of Civil Procedure). A document sent to a data box (*datová schránka*), the state electronic mailbox for official correspondence, is served when an authorised person logs in, and if nobody logs in within 10 days of delivery, on the last day of that period (Section 17(3) and (4) of Act No. 300/2008 Coll.). A payment order (*platební rozkaz*) is the exception: by post it must be served on the addressee personally and deemed service does not apply to it, though it does in a data box (Section 173(1) of the Code of Civil Procedure). An appeal must be filed within 15 days of service of the written judgment (Section 204(1) of the Code of Civil Procedure), and the same time limit applies to a statement of opposition (*odpor*) to a payment order (Section 172(1)). Against a penal order (*trestní příkaz*) or an order issued by an administrative authority, typically a fine after an inspection, however, you have only eight days (Section 314g(1) of the Czech Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 150(3) of the Czech Code of Administrative Procedure).

If you don't know the date of service, it can be established by inspecting the court file (Section 44(1) of the Code of Civil Procedure), but that takes time. If a time limit is running, say so as soon as you book the appointment, and come even if you don't yet have the other documents together. What can still be saved once a time limit has passed is described in the article Missed a Court Deadline. How things stand with uncollected letters from the other side, such as a notice of termination or a withdrawal from a contract, is explained in the article "I Never Collected the Letter, So It Never Reached Me." When It Still Counts.

Why you should tell us the awkward things too

A lawyer must keep confidential all facts learned in connection with providing legal services (Section 21(1) of the Legal Profession Act). Legal services include giving legal advice (Section 1(2)), so confidentiality already applies to the first meeting, even if no further representation follows. Only the client can release the lawyer from confidentiality, either in writing or orally on the record before a court (Section 21(2)). The duty also extends to the lawyer's employees (Section 21(9)). When taking evidence, a court must respect a statutory duty of confidentiality (Section 124 of the Code of Civil Procedure), so without a release a lawyer does not testify about what the client has entrusted to them.

Confidentiality also covers matters that might be criminal. A lawyer has no duty to report a crime they learn of in connection with practising law (Section 368(3) of the Criminal Code). They do, however, remain under a duty to prevent a serious crime from the statutory list (for example murder, robbery or grievous bodily harm) that is still being prepared or is being committed (Section 21(7) of the Legal Profession Act and Section 367 of the Criminal Code).

The other side usually knows the awkward facts anyway. A cash payment without a receipt, a handover record signed without reservations, a message written in anger: all of it will come out in court regardless. The only difference is whether it comes out today in our office, when we can still work with it, or a year from now at a hearing, when we can't. A weakness we know about in advance can be factored into our assessment of your chances, into a settlement offer and into what we say ourselves, and when. Why an admitted weakness can even be a strong card is explained in the article Admitting a Weakness as a Weapon.

Trust works both ways. A lawyer follows the client's instructions but is not bound by them if they conflict with the law or the rules of the profession (Section 16(1) of the Legal Profession Act). So a lawyer will not submit altered evidence on your behalf. And if it turns out that the client is lying to the lawyer or not providing the necessary cooperation, the lawyer may terminate the contract for legal services (Section 20(2)).

Before you come, write a one-page timeline: date, what happened, who was there, what proof you have. Mark uncertain dates; don't make them up.
Don't retype your communication into Word. Bring your phone, an export of the conversation and emails as files, complete, including the messages that hurt your case.
If anything has come from a court or an authority, say so when you book, bring it with its envelope and don't wait until you have the other documents together.

At a glance

Question	Answer	Provision
Is the first meeting confidential	Yes, confidentiality covers everything the lawyer learns in connection with legal services, including advice	Section 1(2) and Section 21(1) of the Legal Profession Act
Who can release the lawyer from confidentiality	Only the client, in writing or on the record before a court	Section 21(2) of the Legal Profession Act
Must the lawyer report a crime they learn of from the client	No; the duty to prevent a serious crime from the statutory list remains	Sections 368(3) and 367 of the Criminal Code, Section 21(7) of the Legal Profession Act
Do earlier drafts of the contract and negotiation emails matter	Yes, interpretation takes account of what preceded the conclusion of the contract	Section 556(2) of the Civil Code
Submitting an altered document to a court	A criminal offence, up to two years in prison	Section 347a(1) of the Criminal Code
When an uncollected document is served	On the last day of the ten-day collection period, unless the law or the court rules this out (a payment order sent by post cannot be served this way)	Section 49(4) and (5), Section 173(1) of the Code of Civil Procedure
Time limit for an appeal and for opposing a payment order	15 days from service; opposing a penal order or an administrative order, only 8 days	Section 204(1) and Section 172(1) of the Code of Civil Procedure, Section 314g(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 150(3) of the Code of Administrative Procedure
Why the lawyer wants the other side's name in advance	To rule out a conflict of interest	Section 19(1) of the Legal Profession Act

About to see a lawyer and not sure what in your pile of papers actually matters? At the first meeting we go through the documents and tell you where the matter stands, how much time is left and what we recommend doing. We handle disputes as part of our dispute resolution practice. Get in touch.

Conclusion

What makes a good first meeting is mainly what the client brings. From a timeline, contracts in every version, communication in its original form, proof of payment and decisions complete with their envelopes, within an hour we can see the strong and weak points of the matter and how much time is left.

The rest is a matter of trust: what you tell us is protected by confidentiality; what you keep back we will most likely find out anyway, only later and from the other side.

Sources

- Act No. 85/1996 Coll., the Legal Profession Act, Sections 1, 16, 19, 20 and 21 (as in force from 1 January 2026).
- Act No. 89/2012 Coll., the Civil Code, Sections 556, 619, 629, 639, 1751, 1949 and 2053.
- Act No. 99/1963 Coll., the Code of Civil Procedure, Sections 44, 49, 124, 172, 173 and 204 (as in force on 1 November 2026).
- Act No. 40/2009 Coll., the Criminal Code, Sections 347a, 367 and 368.
- Act No. 300/2008 Coll., on Electronic Acts and Authorised Document Conversion, Section 17.
- Act No. 253/2008 Coll., on Certain Measures against the Legitimisation of Proceeds of Crime and the Financing of Terrorism, Sections 2, 7, 8 and 27.
- Act No. 141/1961 Coll., the Code of Criminal Procedure, Section 314g.
- Act No. 500/2004 Coll., the Code of Administrative Procedure, Section 150.

This article is for information only and does not constitute legal advice. It reflects the law as at the date of publication; which documents are decisive in a particular matter always depends on its circumstances.

What to Bring to Your First Meeting with a Lawyer

IUSTORIA team · Published 5 November 2026

https://www.iustoria.cz/en/blog/what-to-bring-to-your-first-meeting-with-a-lawyer/

This text is protected by copyright. Sharing the document whole and unaltered is welcome; reuse of parts in other texts requires attribution. © IUSTORIA, advokátní kancelář, s.r.o.