

LII > Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure
> **Rule 31. Serving and Filing Briefs**

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(a) TIME TO SERVE AND FILE A BRIEF.

(1) The appellant must serve and file a brief within 40 days after the record is filed. The appellee must serve and file a brief within 30 days after the appellant's brief is served. The appellant may serve and file a reply brief within 21 days after service of the appellee's brief but a reply brief must be filed at least 7 days before argument, unless the court, for good cause, allows a later filing.

(2) A court of appeals that routinely considers cases on the merits promptly after the briefs are filed may shorten the time to serve and file briefs, either by local rule or by order in a particular case.

(b) NUMBER OF COPIES. Twenty-five copies of each brief must be filed with the clerk and 2 copies must be served on each unrepresented party and on counsel for each separately represented party. An unrepresented party proceeding in forma pauperis must file 4 legible copies with the clerk, and one copy must be served on each unrepresented party and on counsel for each separately represented party. The court may by local rule or by order in a particular case require the filing or service of a different number.

(c) CONSEQUENCE OF FAILURE TO FILE. If an appellant fails to file a brief within the time provided by this rule, or within an extended time, an appellee may move to dismiss the appeal. An appellee who fails to file a brief will not be heard at oral argument unless the court grants permission.

Notes

(As amended Mar. 30, 1970, eff. July 1, 1970; Mar. 10, 1986, eff. July 1, 1986; Apr. 29, 1994, eff. Dec. 1, 1994; Apr. 24, 1998, eff. Dec. 1, 1998; Apr. 29, 2002, eff. Dec. 1, 2002; Mar. 26, 2009, eff. Dec. 1, 2009.)

Notes of Advisory Committee on Rules—1967

A majority of the circuits now require the brief of the appellant to be filed within 30 days from the date on which the record is filed. But in those circuits an exchange of designations is unnecessary in the preparation of the appendix. The appellant files with his brief an appendix containing the parts of the record which he deems essential. If the appellee considers other parts essential, he includes those parts in his own appendix. Since the proposed rule requires the appellant to file with his brief an appendix containing necessary parts of the record as designated by both parties, the rule allows the appellant 40 days in order to provide time for the exchange of designations respecting the content of the appendix (see Rule 30(b)).

Notes of Advisory Committee on Rules—1970 Amendment

The time prescribed by Rule 31(a) for preparing briefs—40 days to the appellant, 30 days to the appellee—is well within the time that must ordinarily elapse in most circuits before an appeal can be reached for consideration. In those circuits, the time prescribed by the Rule should not be disturbed. But if a court of appeals maintains a current calendar, that is, if an appeal can be heard as soon as the briefs have been filed, or if the practice of the court permits the submission of appeals for preliminary consideration as soon as the briefs have been filed, the court should be free to prescribe shorter periods in the interest of expediting decision.

Notes of Advisory Committee on Rules—1986 Amendment

The amendments to Rules 31(a) and (c) are technical. No substantive change is intended.

Notes of Advisory Committee on Rules—1994 Amendment

Subdivision (b). The amendment allows a court of appeals to require the filing of a greater, as well as a lesser, number of copies of briefs. The amendment also allows the required number to be prescribed by local rule as well as by order in a particular case.

Committee Notes on Rules—1998 Amendment

The language and organization of the rule are amended to make the rule more easily understood. In addition to changes made to improve the understanding, the Advisory Committee has changed language to make style and terminology consistent throughout the appellate rules. These changes are intended to be stylistic only; a substantive change is made, however, in subdivision (b).

Subdivision (a). Paragraph (a)(2) explicitly authorizes a court of appeals to shorten a briefing schedule if the court routinely considers cases on the merits promptly after the briefs are filed. Extensions of the briefing schedule, by order, are permitted under the general provisions of Rule 26(b).

Subdivision (b). The current rule says that a party who is permitted to file “typewritten ribbon and carbon copies of the brief” need only file an original and three copies of the brief. The quoted language, in conjunction with current rule 24(c), means that a party allowed to proceed in forma pauperis need not file 25 copies of the brief. Two changes are made in this subdivision. First, it is anachronistic to refer to a party who is allowed to file a typewritten brief as if that would distinguish the party from all other parties; any party is permitted to file a typewritten brief. The amended rule states directly that it applies to a party permitted to proceed in forma pauperis. Second, the amended rule does not generally permit parties who are represented by counsel to file the lesser number of briefs. Inexpensive methods of copying are generally available. Unless it would impose hardship, in which case a motion to file a lesser number should be filed, a represented party must file the usual number of briefs.

Committee Notes on Rules—2002 Amendment

Subdivision (b). In requiring that two copies of each brief “must be served on counsel for each separately represented party,” Rule 31(b) may be read to imply that copies of briefs need not be served on unrepresented parties. The Rule has been amended to clarify that briefs must be served on all parties, including those who are not represented by counsel.

Changes Made After Publication and Comments. No changes were made to the text of the proposed amendment or to the Committee Note.

Committee Notes on Rules—2009 Amendment

Subdivision (a)(1). Subdivision (a)(1) formerly required that the appellant's reply brief be served “at least 3 days before argument, unless the court, for good cause, allows a later filing.” Under former Rule 26(a), “3 days” could mean as many as 5 or even 6 days. See the Note to Rule 26. Under revised Rule 26(a), intermediate weekends and holidays are counted. Changing “3 days” to “7 days” alters the period accordingly. Under revised Rule 26(a), when a period ends on a weekend or holiday, one must continue to count in the same direction until the next day that is not a weekend or holiday; the choice of the 7-day period for subdivision (a)(1) will minimize such occurrences.

Committee Notes - 2018 Amendment

Subdivision (a)(1) is revised to extend the period for filing a reply brief from 14 days to 21 days. Before the elimination of the “three-day rule” in Rule 26(c), attorneys were accustomed to a period of 17 days within which to file a reply brief, and the committee concluded that

shortening the period from 17 days to 14 days could adversely affect the preparation of useful reply briefs. Because time periods are best measured in increments of 7 days, the period is extended to 21 days.

[◀ Rule 30. Appendix to the Briefs](#) [Up](#) [Rule 32. Form of Briefs, Appendices, and Other Papers](#) ▶



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