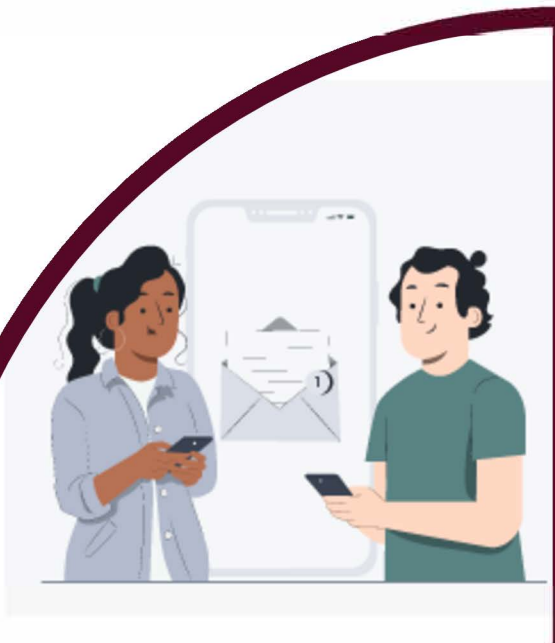


RSI

Toolkit for Making ODR Make Sense to the Public



Home Court
Online Dispute Resolution
Small Claims Court

Mandatory Online Dispute Resolution

What is Online Dispute
Resolution (ODR)?

Watch this video for an example of [How to Register](#)

Find Your Case

To start the process, please enter your court case below.

Enter your case number, eg. 24-SC-00145

[Find my case number?](#)

my case number

Find case →



Jane Roe
Defendant

Up to Plaintiff

what I can offer...

ers and court



Toolkit for Making ODR Make Sense to the Public

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[Court ADR Connection \(e-newsletter\)](#)

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We are extremely grateful for the American Arbitration Association-International Centre for Dispute Resolution Foundation's support for the OPEN Project and the dissemination of its findings.

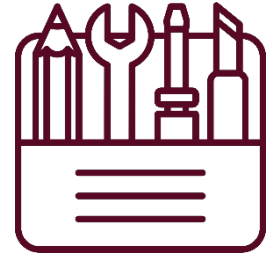
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Introduction

This toolkit provides models of resources for self-represented litigants (SRLs) who are defendants to a debt or small claim, describes the flow of information we developed for the models, and walks through ways courts and others can use the models or adapt them for their own purposes. The models include: RSI’s Model Notice to Defendant of Mandatory ODR, our Model ODR Explainer Video, and a website prototype that includes our Model ODR Home Page, our Model ODR Self-Help Guide for Defendants, and our Model Account Registration Webpages.



We designed the Toolkit for Making ODR Make Sense to the Public (Toolkit) as part of our [ODR Party Engagement \(OPEN\) Project](#), which aims to improve access to justice by reducing barriers to the use of court-connected online dispute resolution (ODR) programs. The Toolkit is the product of what we learned from focus groups, usability testing, and research on how to communicate with individuals with low literacy and low digital literacy, as well as our work with an inclusive designer and an accessibility expert.

The Toolkit provides guidance on how to use and adapt our models and create an information flow. We also highlight insights from conducting usability testing on the models and reviewing them for accessibility. After your court or other entity adapts our models, we highly recommend that you conduct usability testing and partner with an accessibility expert to assess how your materials can best accommodate the needs of individuals with low literacy and low digital literacy, as well as disabled individuals. We have included resources for conducting usability testing and designing accessible materials.

RSI can also offer customized technical assistance to meet your unique communication needs. Please reach out to research@aboutrsi.org to learn more.





Goals for the models

We created these models with three main goals in mind:

1. **Provide materials that are user-friendly and accessible** so individuals can easily navigate webpages and follow instructions to complete required tasks for ODR.
2. **Address technology access issues** so individuals with low tech literacy can successfully participate in ODR, especially on mobile devices.
3. **Increase comprehensibility of court communications** so important information about ODR and its potential benefits are easily understood by individuals with low literacy.



What are the models?

The models we developed provide an information flow that defendants can follow from receiving an initial summons to registering for ODR. The models include our Model Notice to Defendant of Mandatory ODR, our Model ODR Explainer Video, and an ODR website. The website is composed of three prototypes,¹ which allow for navigation and simple interactions, such as inputting text into a field. They include: the ODR Home Page, ODR Self-Help Guide for Defendants and ODR Account Registration Webpages.

We structured our models to gradually provide information about ODR within a cohesive sequence of tasks: Participants read the Notice, review the ODR Home Page, watch the ODR Explainer Video, use the Self-Help Guide and register for an account. Each model includes new information that builds on what individuals learned from previous models in the sequence; for example, we introduced only the most essential information about ODR in the Notice, as the first model in the sequence. Within the Notice, we break down this initial information into short

¹ Our design partner created the ODR webpage models using Figma, an app that can be used to create working prototypes of web interfaces.

bullet points and create instructions with as few steps as possible. We also provided a progress bar on the ODR website which our research showed increased comfort and encouraged proceeding through the process.

The Models



Notice to Defendant of Mandatory Online Dispute Resolution ([print](#) | [digital](#))

A document that accompanies the party's court summons. It provides basic information about ODR, steps the recipient needs to take to get started using ODR, and resources available to them.



ODR Home Page ([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

The main landing webpage that explains how ODR works, how user data is protected, and contact information for help.



ODR Explainer Video ([Standard version](#) | [Accessible version](#))

A short explainer video that describes and illustrates how the ODR process works, as well as step-by-step instructions on how to register for ODR.



ODR Self-Help Guide for Defendants ([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

An interactive webpage that includes seven steps for users to follow to prepare for ODR as a defendant.



ODR Account Registration Webpages ([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

A series of short webpages that allows users to register for ODR using the information provided to them.

How to Adapt the Models or Create Your Own Resources

Below we tell you what guidance we used and how we used it. The objective is to give you guidelines on how to ensure that your resources continue to provide the benefits we found with our models when you adapt the models for your own use, or when you create resources from scratch.

The models are free for you to use as a guide or to adapt. If you would like adaptable models that you can edit or change for your own use, please [contact RSI](#).

This information is designed to be used in tandem with RSI's [Communicating Effectively About ODR: A Guide for Courts](#). The Guide provides general information on how to communicate with individuals with low literacy.

Notice to Defendant of Mandatory Online Dispute Resolution

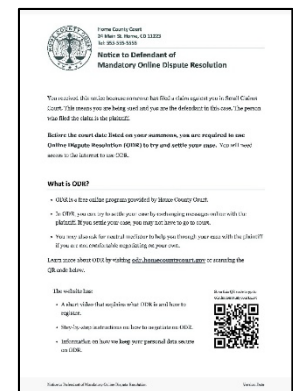
([print](#) | [digital](#))

We designed our three-page Notice to be the first communication material defendants receive about the court's requirement to use ODR. It accompanies their court summons.

Information flow recommendations

Page 1: Start by introducing the most pressing information first, and make it visible.

We started by informing the defendant about the ODR requirement and the deadline for registering. This was in large, bold text to draw their eye. Bolding is one option for this. Another might be to use color. However you choose to draw the reader's eye, be sure it is not distracting, with too much color or detail.



Next, help the reader understand the program with bullet points or short paragraphs.

We helped readers to understand what ODR is in short, bulleted items, so they would have a basic understanding of the program but not feel overwhelmed with a lot of information about it. Putting this information next was meant to answer the first question they would have after learning that they have to use ODR: What is it?

Tell them where to find more information.

Next, we informed the reader that the website has more details about how ODR works and includes an explainer video. This advises them that more information is available and gives them a reason to go to the website, rather than going to a search engine or calling the court for information that can be found on the website. We inserted a QR code next to the web information, to capture their attention and make it easy for smartphone users to get to the information on the website.

Page 2: Provide step-by-step instructions.

It was only after letting the readers know that there was more information that we added steps for what to do to use ODR. We included a four-step process for registering for ODR, which emphasized the importance of going to the website for more information by making that the first step, as well as a screenshot of the website with an arrow that points to the button they need to click to register. Within each listed step, we bolded the most important information to ensure it is not missed.

Next, we included a brief section on how ODR can help the reader. We also added a small section to help those who cannot use ODR or do not have internet access.

Page 3: Provide contact information.

If you read our reports, you will see that focus group participants and usability testers alike wanted and appreciated a phone number to call for help. On page 3, we included contact information (phone number and email or website) for legal assistance and accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Each resource is in a separate box to ensure the information is visually distinct.

Design recommendations for effective court notices

Below are a set of recommendations for designing effective court notices based on feedback from our focus group participants and usability testers:

Display a court seal



Figure 1. Court seal and information at the top of the Notice.

Our focus group participants shared that it is critical for any official mail from the court to have a seal. Ideally, the seal should be in color. The Notice we gave them to review did not have a seal, which made them doubt its authenticity.

Explain the purpose

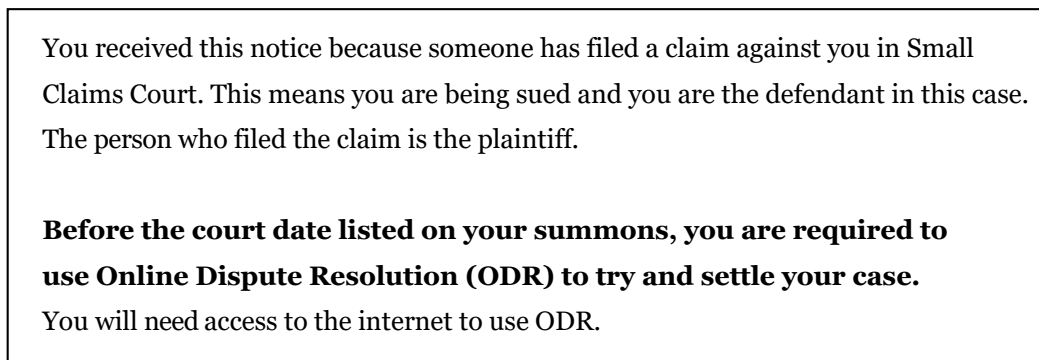


Figure 2. Explanation of the Notice on its first page.

Using simple, jargon-free language, explain the purpose of the notice right away, *before* providing any instructions on what the recipient should do next. We found that if instructions were placed too early in the document, some testers wanted to skip reading and jump straight to the signup process.

Define ODR in simple terms

What is ODR?

- ODR is a free online program provided by Home County Court.
- In ODR, you can try to settle your case by exchanging messages online with the plaintiff. If you settle your case, you may not have to go to court.
- You may also ask for a neutral mediator to help you through your case with the plaintiff if you are not comfortable negotiating on your own.

Figure 3. Simple definition of ODR on the Notice.

Some testers were confused about what exactly ODR was; a few thought it was a platform, others thought it was an app, and the remaining thought it was a company or organization. We included brief bullet points defining ODR as a free online court program.

Provide a QR code

Learn more about ODR by visiting odr.homecountycourt.gov or scanning the QR code below.

The website has:

- A short video that explains what ODR is and how to register.
- Step-by-step instructions on how to negotiate on ODR.
- Information on how we keep your personal data secure on ODR.

Scan this QR code to go to
odr.homecountycourt.gov:



Figure 4. Description of the ODR website on the Notice, including a QR code to access the ODR Home Page.

An overwhelming majority of our usability testers indicated that they exclusively or primarily use smartphones to access the internet. Several shared their anxiety over typing out a long URL, fearing that they may navigate to the wrong website. We included a QR code in the Notice to circumvent these concerns. We also recommend including text that indicates where the QR code will lead; a few participants initially thought the code led to the video, rather than to the ODR Home Page.

Describe ODR's benefits

How can ODR help me?

- You can use ODR anytime and anywhere, so you do not have to take time off from work or find childcare.
- You can come to a resolution that works for you rather than having a judge decide.
- All messages that you, the plaintiff and the mediator send through ODR are confidential and cannot be used in court.

Figure 5. Description of ODR's benefits on the Notice.

Many of our usability testers were completely unfamiliar with ODR before receiving our materials. Since we designed the Notice to be the first material they received, we briefly described the potential benefits of ODR in general, easy-to-understand terms so they would become interested in using the program.

Include a phone number

What if I can't use ODR or don't have internet?

- You can ask to not use ODR if you are not able to use or access the internet. Call the court to learn more: **Call: 555-555-555**
- Please follow **Step 3** above, to find and write down your case number before you call the court. This will help court staff find your case.

Figure 6. Information on the Notice about how to call the court.

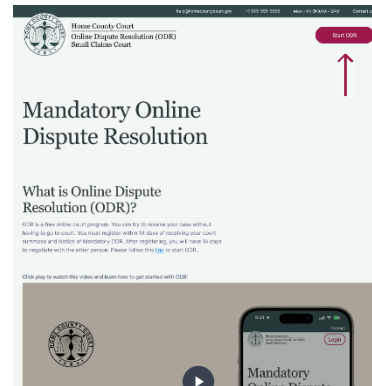
Testers responded very positively to the presence of a phone number they could call for help. Almost all participants shared that when needing more information, they prefer talking to a person over the phone rather than sending an email or using a chat feature.

Provide visual cues for chunking information

How do I get started?

You must register for Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) within 14 days of receiving this notice. Here's how to register:

- Step 1.** Go to odr.homecountycourt.gov
- Step 2.** Click on the **Start ODR** button
- Step 3.** Find your case number on the first page of the court summons. It should look like this: **24-SC-0001**
- Step 4.** Use your **case number** to create a new account



If you're not sure how to create your account, you can watch a video on how to register at odr.homecountycourt.gov.

Figure 7. Instructions to register for ODR on the Notice, with clickable hyperlinks to access the ODR Home Page.

Use headers, white space, visuals, color and text boxes to let your reader know that a new topic is being introduced. These cues help readers to mentally organize the information presented.

Consider the delivery method

We designed two versions of the Notice to Defendants: a digital version meant to be sent via email and a print version that is mailed. In the digital version, we included clickable hyperlinks in blue text to ensure it is easy for the recipient to identify the URL and navigate to the ODR website.

ODR Home Page

([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

Within the Notice, we instruct the participant to navigate to the Home County Court ODR website to find out more information about ODR and to register for an account. The ODR Home Page is thus the next model they encounter in our workflow, and it is designed to build on the information in the Notice.

Information flow recommendations

Make important information visually prominent

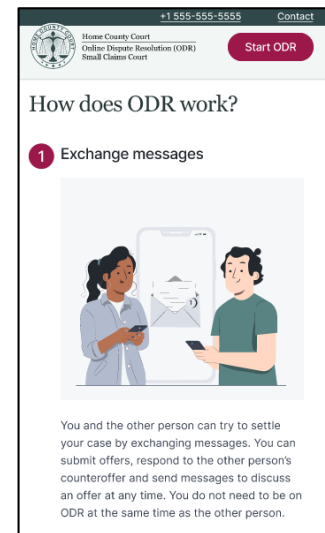


Figure 8. Banner of the ODR Home Page (desktop version).

We designed the ODR Home Page banner to display a large court seal, contact information for the court and a bright maroon “Start ODR” button, which navigates to the account webpages. We decided to make the banner “sticky” so that it remains visible on each page and no matter where the user vertically scrolls on the page. This ensures they can easily and at any point contact the court for help, which testers felt was important, as well as access the “Start ODR” button to login or sign up for an account.

Orient the user

We included “Mandatory Online Dispute Resolution” in big, bold text to confirm to the user that they have navigated to the correct court webpage. Below the main header, we included a brief statement that reiterates the most essential information about ODR included in the Notice.

Offer a video at the beginning

Below the ODR summary, we embedded the Explainer Video, along with brief text inviting the user to watch the video to learn about ODR and how to register. The video has all the same information as is provided in text on the ODR Home Page. We found that at this point, the majority of usability testers played the video right away and were eager to learn more. Providing the video up front helps individuals who prefer to learn visually to feel at ease right away. Videos should include standard features, such as allowing the viewer to be able to pause, rewind and replay the video as needed (due to limitations of Figma, we were unable to implement rewind for our website model).

Build on the Notice

We designed the ODR Home Page to be the second model users interact with after the Notice. Thus, the information should reinforce the basic ideas they have already read about ODR while gradually introducing its other components. To this end, we designed sections such as “How does ODR work?” and “How do I use ODR?” which include details about mediation, how messages are exchanged and the option to mediate by text or video. The information in these sections mirrors the information in the video.

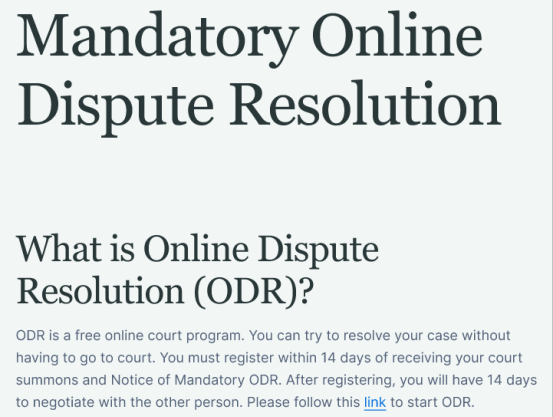


Figure 9. Title of the ODR Home Page in large text and a brief statement about ODR.

Tell users how to prepare using the information provided to them

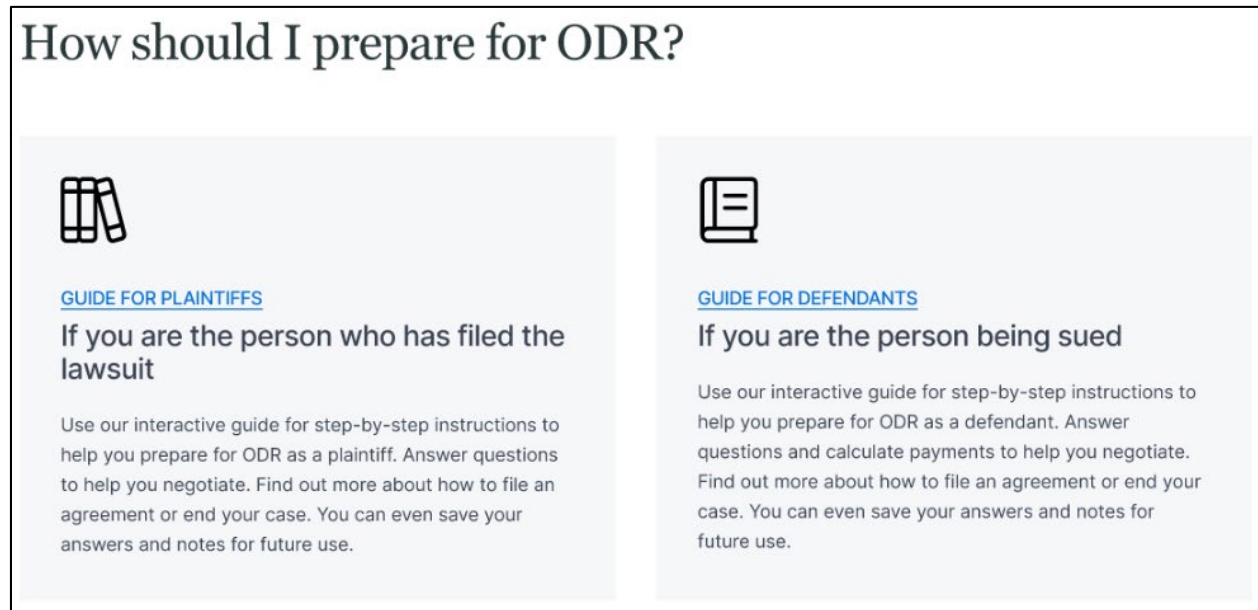


Figure 10. Buttons to access the Self-Help Guide for Plaintiffs and Self-Help Guide for Defendants on the ODR Home Page (desktop version).

Scrolling down, we included two boxes that navigate to separate self-help guides: A Guide for Plaintiffs on the left, and a Guide for Defendants on the right. Within each respective box, we added large text that defines “plaintiff” and “defendant” in the simplest terms possible: “If you are the person who has filed the lawsuit” and “If you are the person being sued.” This text is larger than the “Guide for Plaintiffs” or “Guide for Defendants” text because these are the easiest descriptions for SRLs with limited legal knowledge to understand. To ensure that the boxes look clickable, we asked our designers to change their hover-state color and turn the labels “Guide for Plaintiffs” and “Guide for Defendants” into blue, underlined hyperlinks. We used both methods because they are the two main ways usability testers told us they recognize something as clickable on a website.

Include details about privacy and confidentiality

Usability testers told us that data privacy and confidentiality information was critical to their trust in ODR and the website.

We added a section dedicated to personal data privacy and confidentiality (“How will my information be kept safe and confidential?”). Usability testers found this section to be critical to their trust in ODR and the website. We formatted this information as first-person questions (e.g., “Who has access to my personal information?”) about confidentiality that users could expand to read more. This perspective allows the user to experience the answers as direct responses to their potential concerns.

Put information users expect in the footer

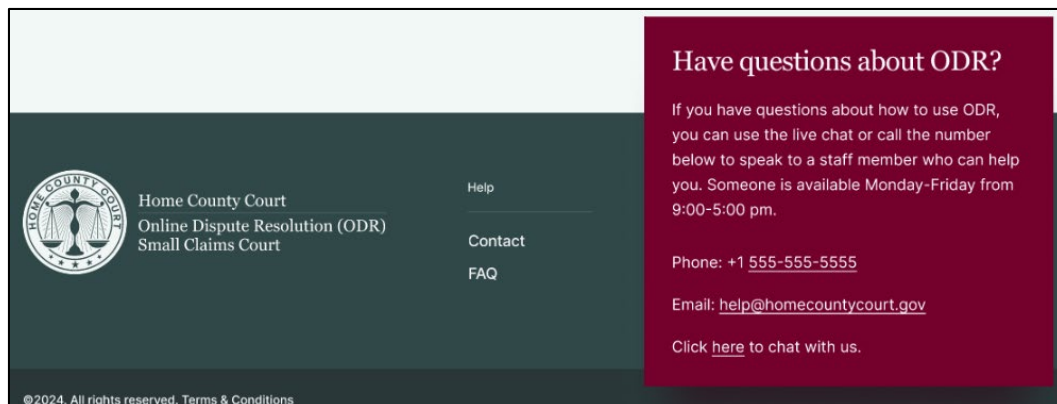


Figure 11. Footer of the ODR Home Page, which includes a help box.

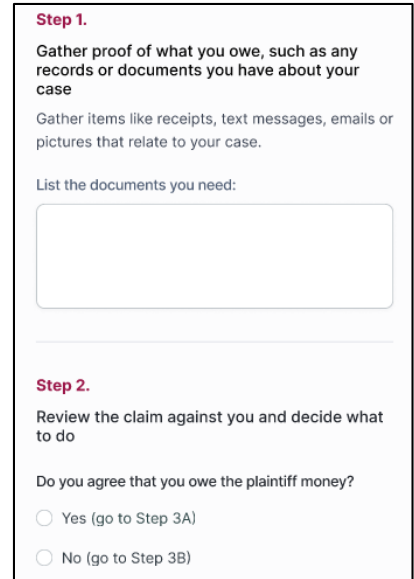
During our focus groups, we found that the footer was important to participants. They looked to it for indicators of legitimacy and for contact information. We designed the footer of the ODR Home Page to include the court seal, contact and FAQ links and a large help box with multiple contact methods. The help box is in a bright maroon color and sticks out from the footer to draw the user’s eye. Both focus group participants and usability testers expressed the importance of having multiple options for contacting the court, with a phone number being the most important to them. The help box ensures that these methods are not missed; testers provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about its presence and its prominent design.

Design recommendations

Below are a set of recommendations for designing effective home pages based on feedback from our focus group participants and usability testers:

Design for mobile phones

The site and its functions should all be smartphone focused. We ensured that the website design worked on both desktop and phone. In one instance, we had a graphic that was too small to read on a phone. We deleted that and provided the information in a different format. Just as importantly, we considered how phone users would interact with the site. We decided that our interactive guide would be a webpage, not a PDF, for example, and gave the user the opportunity to save their answers rather than print them.



Step 1.

Gather proof of what you owe, such as any records or documents you have about your case

Gather items like receipts, text messages, emails or pictures that relate to your case.

List the documents you need:

Step 2.

Review the claim against you and decide what to do

Do you agree that you owe the plaintiff money?

☐ Yes (go to Step 3A)

☐ No (go to Step 3B)

Figure 12. Steps 1 and 2 of the Self-Help Guide (mobile version).

Display a court seal



Figure 13. Banner of the ODR Home Page with a court seal (mobile version).

We learned from our focus groups that it is critical for any official website connected to the court to have a seal. We included the court seal within the top banner of the website, which also includes contact information and a “Start ODR” button. Our designers suggested making the banner “sticky” so it is visible no matter where the user scrolls on the page. Testers liked having the banner available at all times. We also included the court seal in the footer.

Organize and vary the presentation of information

As seen in Figure 14, we ensured that each chunk of information was visually separate through both ample use of white space and small, recognizable icons that indicate what the information is about. To keep the experience of using the webpage engaging, we varied the way that sections are visually presented; some sections use accordion-style formatting, while others use a card/grid format.

Use high-contrast color

Color can help to make webpages feel welcoming. When deciding on colors, however, the adjacent text and UI (user interface) element colors must be high contrast to be readable, especially for individuals with vision disabilities. Our testers felt that the model used enough color to make the webpage engaging but not so much that the page appeared unprofessional. We used a dark maroon color to highlight important information against the more neutral green tones. Our accessibility evaluator helped us to ensure all webpage text and UI components complied with WCAG 2.1 contrast ratio requirements to make content readable for individuals with vision disabilities.

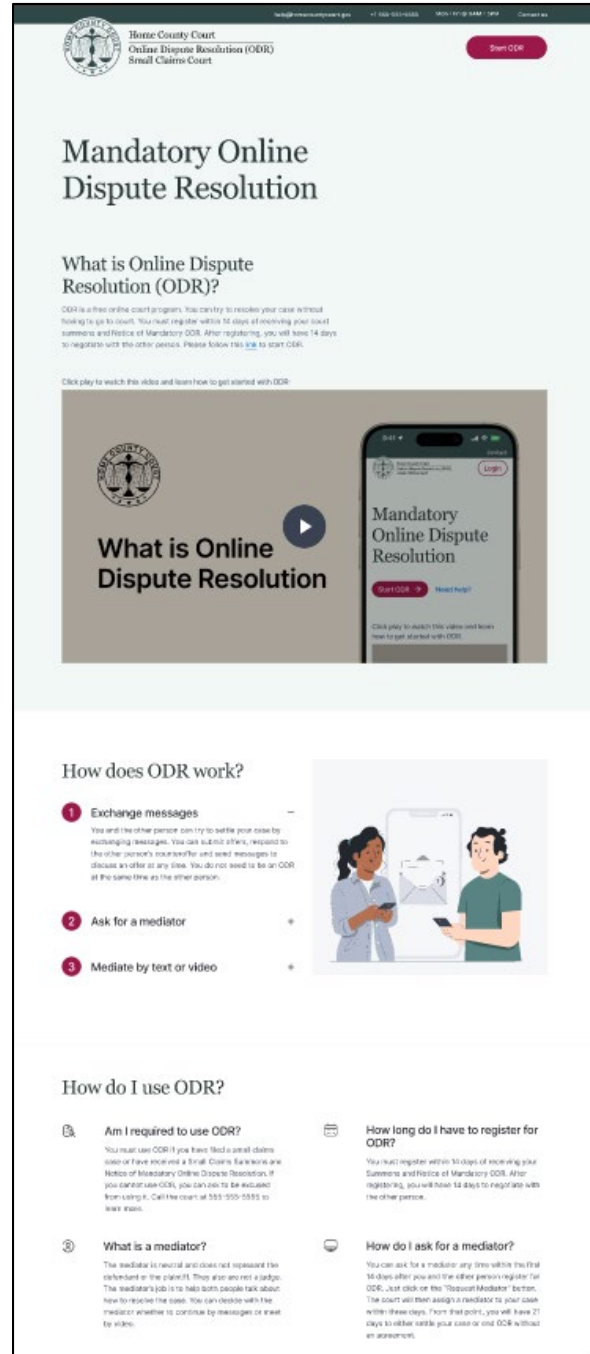


Figure 14. Top and middle sections of the ODR Home Page (desktop).

Include illustrations

We used simple illustrations of a diverse set of characters (a plaintiff, a defendant and a mediator) to depict three key points in the “How does ODR work?” section. Previous research suggests illustrations are more effective than photos — they are less likely to include distracting details and do a better job at reinforcing the relevant text.

Be consistent and use standard navigation cues

During the first round of usability testing, we discovered an important oversight in the visual design of the home page — we did not use consistent icons to indicate when items could expand. Testers said that for hyperlinks, they look for blue, underlined text, and for expandable menu items, they look for plus signs. The final models employ this design language consistently across all sections and pages to ensure they are intuitive to navigate.

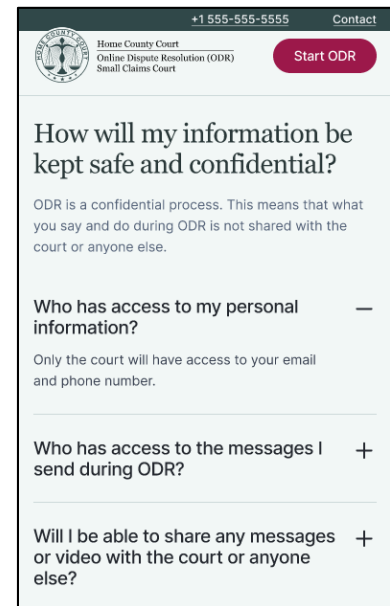


Figure 15. Data privacy and confidentiality section on the ODR Home Page (mobile version).

Highlight security information

We found that testers responded very positively to the presence of our dedicated data safety and confidentiality section. Testers felt it indicated the court took these specific concerns, as well as their general anxieties about using the internet, seriously. In this section, we display a series of first-person questions and direct answers, which helps to make the information feel more personalized and direct.

Offer multiple contact methods

As was the case for the Notice, participants appreciated the presence of multiple contact methods offered on the webpage, especially a phone number. They also liked that the contact information was displayed prominently in the banner and in a dedicated, maroon-colored help box at the bottom.

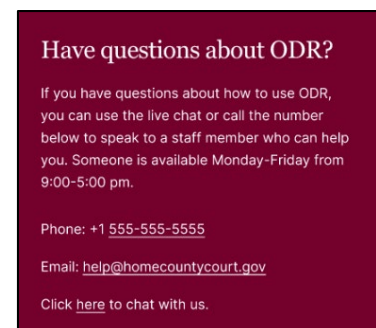


Figure 16. Help box included in the banner of the ODR Home Page.

Design steps

Identify goals

When designing a webpage, start by identifying a set of goals you want the user to achieve.

Below is the list of goals we outlined for our webpage.

After viewing the content on the home page, parties should at minimum:

- Understand what the purpose of ODR is
- Understand their responsibilities for the program (e.g., register within 14 days)
- Understand how the process works
 - Text-based
 - Can ask for a mediator
 - What a mediator does
 - Options for mediating
- Be clear about confidentiality
- Feel confident that their data is secure
- Know what they should do next

To achieve these goals, we determined we needed the following:

- Clear and concise language with different topics clearly delineated
- Illustrations to help guide the user
- A video that went over the same information as the text on the page
- A highly visible “Start ODR” button

Create a user journey

Once you have identified the goals and the webpage elements needed to achieve them, map the user journey, or the path through the pages and information that you want your user to take. Consider each specific activity that the user will need to do in order to progress from one section of the page to another: scrolling, clicking/tapping, expanding, reading, filling out a form.

Ideally, you should try to limit the number of activities to make the experience of navigating the site as simple as possible.

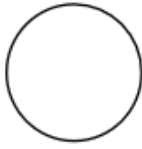
Develop an outline

Next, develop an outline that you will share with your web designer. The outline includes header, footer and main body text. Organize the main body text into separate sections with distinct headers. Keep these sections concise; break down chunks of information into two- to three-sentence paragraphs at most. Consider where you want to place clickable buttons, and indicate those using simple word processor features such as outlined text boxes. Your designer should use the outline as a guide, but also have suggestions about design based upon their own expertise.

On the next page is a section of the webpage outline we sent to our designers (Figure 17). The designers used it as a starting point for their own ideas for the webpage layout. As you can see from our final design, this outline changed quite a bit. This was based not only on our designers' feedback, but on feedback from our usability testers as well.



Web outline draft



Home County Court
Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)
Small Claims Court

Click here to start ODR (Button)

What is online dispute resolution (ODR)

ODR is a free online court program. You must register within 14 days of receiving your court summons and Notice of Mandatory ODR. After registering, you will have 14 days to negotiate with the plaintiff.

In ODR, you can try to settle your case by exchanging messages online with the plaintiff. You can also ask for a neutral mediator to help you talk through your case with the plaintiff. Your mediator is a neutral third person who can help you and the plaintiff discuss your case and come to an agreement.

If you ask for a mediator, the court will appoint one for you. The mediator will decide with you whether you will continue to exchange messages or whether you will all meet together on video.

Watch this video to find out more about ODR:

Video Screen
With Play button

[If you want to read more about ODR, Click here!](#)

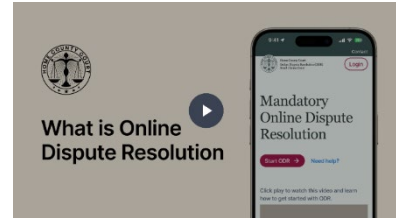
How should I prepare for ODR?

Figure 17. Initial outline for our ODR Home Page that we sent to our design partner.

ODR Explainer Video

([Standard version](#) | [Accessible version](#))

We embedded the ODR Explainer Video toward the top of the ODR Home Page. The video summarizes the information about ODR included on the Notice and on the rest of the Home Page with simple visuals and clear language.



The majority of our testers clicked play on the video right away, often unprompted by the researchers. We found that they appreciated having the information about ODR presented in this way.

The video received the most attention and praise among our materials for how simply it presented the essential information needed to understand and prepare for ODR.

Information flow recommendations

Keep video consistent with other resources

We designed the video to be both informational and instructional. It opens with a human narrator's voice welcoming the viewer to ODR with a screen that displays the court's seal; "What is Online Dispute Resolution (ODR)?" in large, bold text; and a screenshot of the Home Page on a mobile phone. This information matches the other models — importantly, the Home Page screenshot is the most recent version of the webpage.

When we designed the storyboard for the video, we ensured its information flow matched the one on the ODR Home Page.

Make your video accessible to everyone

In addition to developing the standard version of the video, we worked with our accessibility evaluator to design an accessible version of the video with enhanced audio descriptions. We

were pleased to learn that this meant including additional narration in only two sections: at the very beginning of the video and a brief addition to one of the account registration steps. We highly recommend working with an accessibility expert to ensure your videos are accessible and follow federal guidelines, which require enhanced audio description and captioning.

Design recommendations

Below is a set of recommendations for designing effective explainer videos based on feedback from our focus group participants and usability testers:

Use simple step-by-step instructions

The video should both provide information about ODR and include a step-by-step tutorial on how parties can start the ODR process. Instructions should be the same as on the Notice; we found that testers liked having the option to reference either the video, the Notice or both side by side when registering for ODR.

Guide viewers with simple animations and visual cues

Any instructional content included in the video's narration, such as clicking a button on the website or filling out a text box, should be visualized on screen with a pointer that highlights the referenced material. Using pointers and animated gestures also helps to make the video engaging to watch and to screenshot.

Narrate the information with an adult human voice

We learned through our focus groups that if participants are distracted by a video narrator's voice, they may not retain the information provided in the video. In particular, voices that seem childlike or computerized were critiqued for sounding unprofessional or untrustworthy. Our videos use an adult human voice speaking slowly and clearly with a conversational but neutral tone to address these concerns.

Illustrate a scenario with a diverse set of characters

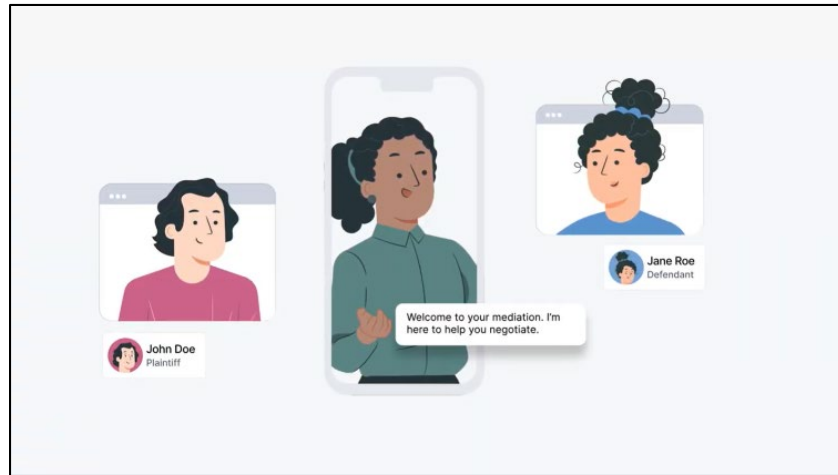


Figure 18. Still from the ODR Explainer Video depicting a plaintiff, a defendant and a mediator using ODR.

We designed our video to include illustrations of a scenario in which a plaintiff, a defendant and a mediator participate in ODR. It is important for the characters to visually reflect the diversity of people who may use ODR. We also ensured that the video characters matched the illustration style included on the ODR Home Page.

Keep a neutral tone

We discovered during our focus groups that participants did not like videos that either showed overly cheerful people or felt like advertisements. For our video, we designed the characters to be relatable but not overly emotionally expressive. The information is also presented in a neutral way, focused on how ODR works rather than its potential benefits to parties.

Make it concise

Testers found our video to be a satisfying length at 2 minutes and 48 seconds. They felt that if the video was any longer, they would lose focus, and that if it was shorter, it may not include all of the necessary information. During testing, we found that all 20 participants remained attentive to the end of the video.

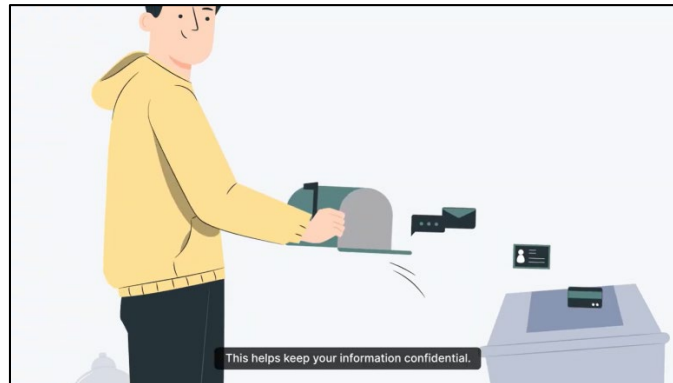
Ensure information is consistent

Figure 19. Still from the section of the ODR Explainer Video about confidentiality in ODR.

The video should not present information that is unique to that format or contradicts information presented in the other materials. We ensured that our video included information that is also accessible within the text of the webpage and vice versa, using the same language. Participation in ODR should not require watching a video, in the event that an individual prefers to read the information.

Include standard video features

Viewers should have the ability to pause, rewind and replay the videos. We were unable to implement a rewind function on the ODR website model due to limitations of Figma. However, many usability testers felt that they would need to rewind or replay the video during subsequent steps in the process, such as registering for an account.

Design steps***Start with a storyboard***

When creating a video, start with a storyboard. The storyboard includes narration and ideas for the visuals that will accompany the narration. One that is static or too long will reduce attention. Ideally, each visual is on screen for five to seven seconds. You may need to change the narration or add a new visual to address these issues. Animation can also be used to maintain your viewers' attention.

Below is part of the storyboard we sent to our designers. The designers used it as a starting point for their own ideas for illustrations.

Video Script	Images paired with script
Welcome to Home County Court’s online dispute resolution, also known as ODR. You can use ODR on your smartphone, computer or a tablet, as long as you can connect to the internet.	Screenshot of ODR prototype webpage with court seal and name. Image of computer, smartphone and tablet
You must use online dispute resolution to try to settle your case instead of, or before, going to court. Using Home County Court’s online dispute resolution, you can exchange messages with the other party, including offers and counteroffers to try to settle your case. If you do not feel comfortable messaging with the other person in the case on your own, you can request a mediator to help. The mediator is neutral, and does not decide your case or represent either of you. Your mediator will guide you and the other person through a discussion to help you try to settle your case.	Image of a message being sent, and an offer being made. Image of a mediator message. Image of three people on a zoom call.

If you choose to use a mediator, you will have the option of mediating over a video call or by exchanging messages on the ODR platform.	
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Determine what visuals to use

If you are not using a designer, the next step is to find visuals that fit your narrative. There are a lot of resources for visuals, including animated illustrations, images and video (e.g. iStock, Adobe, Canva). When it comes to visuals, remember that simpler is better. Illustrations can be less detailed and allow for more focus on what's important both in the narrative and on screen.

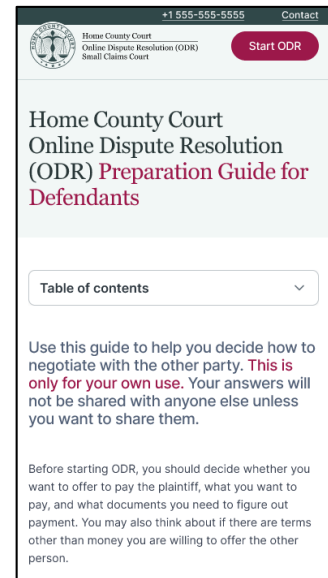
Once you put your visuals together to form a video, check the narration time for each. A visual that is too short will reduce comprehension. A visual that is too long will lose your audience's attention. You may also wish to break up the video into chapters to provide context to each section.

ODR Self-Help Guide for Defendants

([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

Within our information flow, at this point the user has reviewed information on the Notice and the Home Page and watched the Explainer Video. They are now prepared to use our Self-Help Guide for Defendants to begin preparing for ODR as a defendant.

We designed the Self-Help Guide to include seven interactive steps to help the user understand what they need to consider to participate capably in ODR. We learned that an interactive guide is more effective than simply reading an explanation of how the process works, because it allows the participant to learn from engaging with the materials directly.



Information flow recommendations

Orient the user

Use this guide to help you decide how to negotiate with the other party. **This is only for your own use.** Your answers will not be shared with anyone else unless you want to share them.

Before starting ODR, you should decide whether you want to offer to pay the plaintiff, what you want to pay, and what documents you need to figure out payment. You may also think about if there are terms other than money you are willing to offer the other person.

Figure 20. Instructions at the top of the ODR Self-Help Guide (desktop version).

At the top of the Self-Help Guide, we included large, maroon text highlighting that the user is on the “Preparation Guide for Defendants” page within the Home County Court’s Online Dispute Resolution website.

Below the header is the main Self-Help Guide content. We included medium-size text that provides information on the purpose of the guide. Based on usability testing feedback, we also

clarified that the guide is only for the participant's use; this information is highlighted in maroon to ensure it is not missed from the outset. Below this initial information are instructions in a slightly smaller font, which ask the user to consider what they want to offer for payment, what documents they may need, and other terms they wish to offer the other party.

Provide a way for users to see the steps and skip to the ones they want to skip

We included a list of the steps as clickable links, which was visible at the outset. This provides a quick summary of what is on the page and provides an opportunity to skip steps. Each of these things makes the page feel less overwhelming and more manageable. On the left side of the page, the table of contents lists each of the seven steps (and substeps for Steps 3 and 7) as clickable links. Clicking on the link scrolls down the page to the selected step. The table of contents also includes a maroon color hover state that indicates which step the user is currently viewing. (This feature is not functional within on our model website, so we have highlighted Step 1 as an example of what it would look like.)

Table of contents
Step 1. Gather proof of what you owe, such as any records or documents you have about your case
Step 2. Review the claim against you and decide what to do
Step 3. Determine whether you owe the plaintiff any money
A. If you think you owe money, decide how much you will offer to pay
B. If you think you owe money, decide how much you will offer to pay
Step 4. Decide if you want to include other terms in your agreement
Step 5. Make an offer
Step 6. Respond to the plaintiff's counteroffer
Step 7. Decide how you want the case to end
A. If you reach an agreement, decide whether to dismiss or continue the case
B. If you can't reach an agreement, let the court know

Figure 21. Table of Contents on the ODR Self-Help Guide webpage (desktop version).

Offer an option for users to save their answers at the end of the Guide

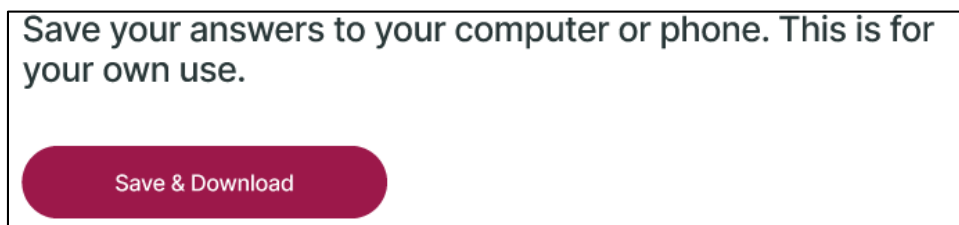


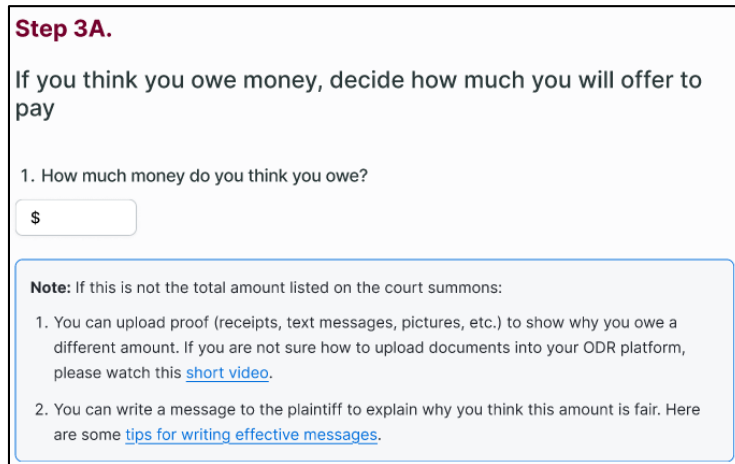
Figure 22. Instructions and a button to save answers to the ODR Self-Help Guide (desktop version).

Below the final step in our Self-Help Guide, we included a “Save & Download” button, which allows the user to save their answers locally to their computer or mobile device. We learned from testing that participants were unsure how this was saved or who it was shared with, so in the final version, we added large, bold text that clarifies that this is only for their own use.

Design recommendations

Below is a set of recommendations for designing effective interactive guides based on feedback from our focus group participants and usability testers:

Vary formatting to break up text



Step 3A.

If you think you owe money, decide how much you will offer to pay

1. How much money do you think you owe?

\$

Note: If this is not the total amount listed on the court summons:

1. You can upload proof (receipts, text messages, pictures, etc.) to show why you owe a different amount. If you are not sure how to upload documents into your ODR platform, please watch this [short video](#).
2. You can write a message to the plaintiff to explain why you think this amount is fair. Here are some [tips for writing effective messages](#).

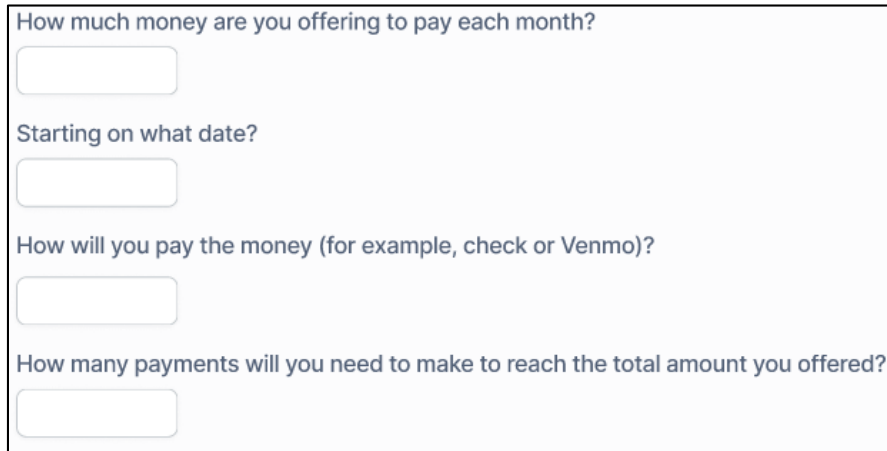
Figure 23. Step 3A of the ODR Self-Help Guide (desktop version).

We learned from focus group participants that information is easier to digest when broken up. Avoid large blocks of text by varying the formatting. Our participants identified question-and-answer or fill-in-the-blank questions and bullet points as the most effective way of formatting information.

Use bullet points

During focus groups and through our plain language research, we learned that bullet points help to increase the speed at which people can read information. For the steps that do not have an interactive component and are informational in nature, we broke up the text into a few bullet points with a maximum of three lines each.

Ask fill-in-the-blank questions



How much money are you offering to pay each month?

Starting on what date?

How will you pay the money (for example, check or Venmo)?

How many payments will you need to make to reach the total amount you offered?

Figure 24. Section of Step 3A of the ODR Self-Help Guide (desktop version).

We designed a few questions in our guide to ask the user questions to help them decide if they owe the plaintiff money, calculate payment options (Figure 24) and decide if there are other non-monetary terms they would like to include in their agreement. All of these questions are limited to one line of text.

Help users understand where they are on the page

In earlier versions of the model, we experimented with different ways of presenting an outline at the top of the page to introduce the seven steps. One version included a non-clickable list of steps; we discovered through testing that participants felt they should be clickable. We also realized that a picture-based diagram was not readable on the mobile version of the website and did not enhance navigation on the page. For the final model, we decided on a clickable table of contents as the most effective approach (see Figure 21). We placed it on the left side of the page to differentiate it from the main content.

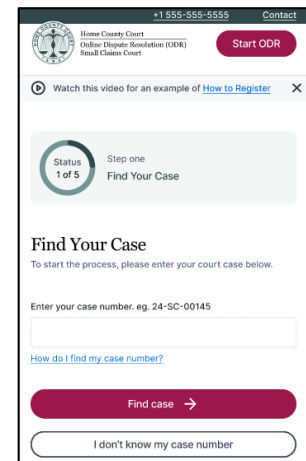
Label all text fields

We learned from our accessibility partner that all text boxes should have some kind of instruction or label to indicate how the user is supposed to respond to the information. While including placeholder text within the text field is acceptable, because that information will disappear, it is not a *replacement* for regular text outside the box.

ODR Account Registration Webpages

([Desktop version](#) | [Mobile version](#))

The last step in our workflow is for the user to register for ODR; we designed a series of webpages that walk the user through the five steps they need to complete to start using ODR. Users navigate to the registration pages by clicking on the maroon “Start ODR” button at the top of the website, which we made easily accessible via a “sticky” banner that is visible on any of the webpages.



Information flow recommendations

Break down the process into discrete tasks

Each of the five main account registration webpages involves a simple, discrete task for users to complete: “Find Your Case,” “Verify Your Identity,” “Create an Account,” “Sign ODR Consent,” and “Start Using ODR.” These are displayed in large text so that the primary task is easily understood. We found that usability testers quickly recognized what they needed to do to complete these tasks.

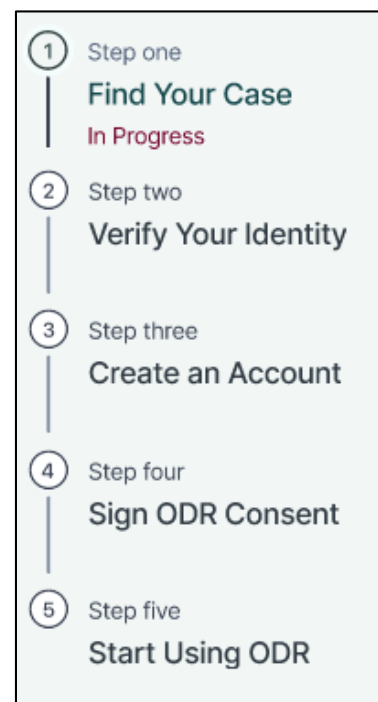


Figure 25. Progress bar on the ODR Account Registration webpage (desktop version).

Help users to locate important information

The first step in the process is “Find Your Case.” We added smaller text to help users locate their case number, as well as a link that displays a pop-up screen when clicked that displays where the case is located on their court summons. We included two buttons for them to click: “I don’t know my case number” and “Find case.” The former leads to a separate sequence of

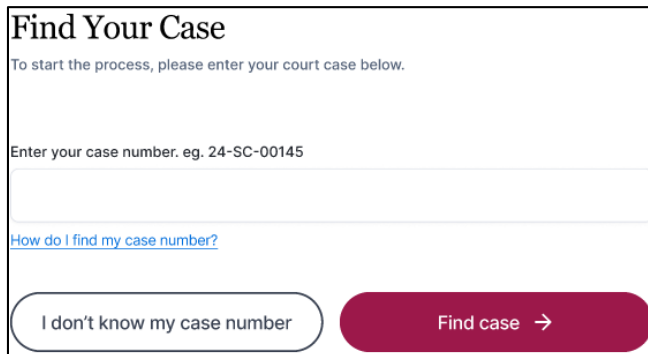


Figure 26. Section of the ODR Account Registration webpage (desktop version).

pages that allows the user to recover their case number by identifying themselves and their case. Whether they go this route or simply enter their case number and click on “Find case,” they end up proceeding to the same Second step, which is to verify their identity.

Define legal terms when relevant to tasks

Within the “Verify Your Identity” step, we display their already inputted (or recovered) case number and then prompt the user to select their name. Below the selection options, we included two hyperlinked questions: “Who is the Plaintiff?” and “Who is the Defendant?” If the user clicks on either of these, a pop-up window is meant to display a definition in simple language. Again, it is important to include easy-to-understand definitions for legal terms when those are unavoidable.

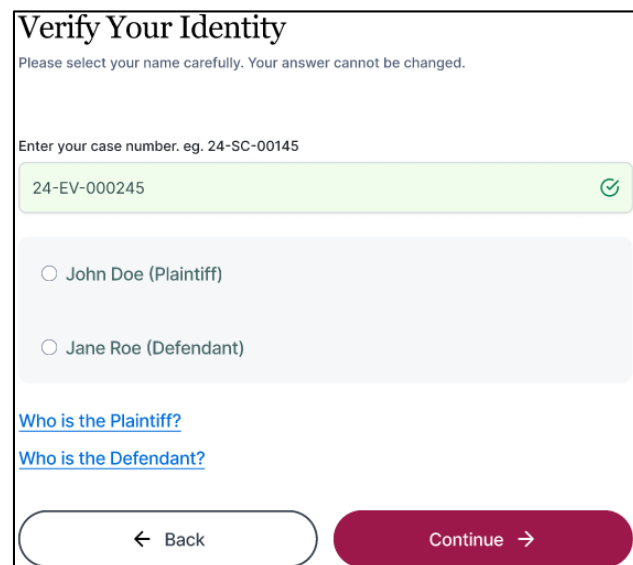


Figure 27. Section of the “Verify Your Identity” step of the ODR Account Registration webpages (desktop version).

Offer an opportunity to review previous resources

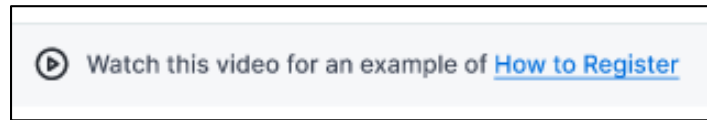


Figure 28. Banner displayed on the ODR Account Registration webpages.

We added a short banner just above the progress bar and main steps content that includes a hyperlink for the user to watch the video in case they want to review how to register. If it is clicked, a popup window is meant to display the embedded video, allowing the user to stay on the account registration pages while watching and not lose their progress.

Design recommendations

Below is a set of recommendations for designing effective account registration pages based on feedback from our usability testers:

Make the registration button easily accessible

In earlier versions of the models, we had separate Start ODR and Login buttons to provide multiple paths to the account platform pages. Usability testers found this confusing but liked how easily they could access the button across pages. We collapsed the buttons into a single Start ODR button and ensured that it is accessible on any of the model webpages. The button is also highlighted in a screenshot of the website in the Notice.



Figure 29. Start ODR button accessible on the ODR website.

Let the user know where they are in the registration process

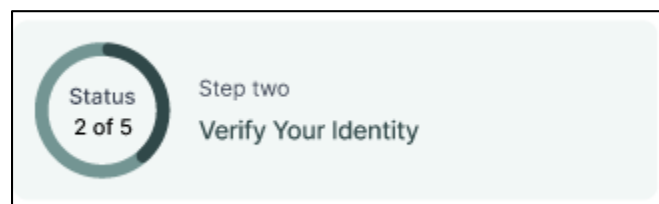


Figure 30. Circular progress bar on the ODR Account Registration webpages (mobile version).

We designed the Account Registration Webpages to use consistent formatting across each page. On the left, we added a progress box that visually indicates which step the user is currently completing (in the mobile version, we use a simple circle progress bar that is on the top of the page). The user is able to see all five steps so they understand how much more they have to complete to register. Our testers appreciated being able to view their progress.

Consider different scenarios

Our models included an option for the participant to look up their case number in the event they did not know it or lost the court summons. During usability testing, we asked participants to imagine a scenario in which they lost the notice and summons but still had to register. We found that they were able to figure it out using this option.

Embed a limited number of earlier resources

While the function of these pages is first and foremost to allow the participants to register for ODR, we also included a link to watch the video in a popup screen. Although most participants did not decide to rewatch the video, we felt it was important to make it accessible without the user having to lose progress in the registration process. Similarly, we included simple definitions to help users understand what “plaintiff” and “defendant” mean. These are accessible by clicking on a hyperlinked question (for example, “Who is the Plaintiff?”), which can produce a popup screen with a short definition.

Ensure screen captures reflect the most recent versions

During the later phases of design work, we realized that the final version of the video did not have the most up-to-date screenshots of the account registration pages. To avoid any confusion among participants, it is important to make changes to video screens, Notice images and other instances of screen captures to reflect the most recent webpage designs.



How We Created Information Materials for SRLs

Below is information on how we designed the models, the principles we used to create them and how they work together. We also discuss scaffolding as a critical approach to addressing the communication barriers that prevent SRLs from effectively using court resources.

How did we design the models?

The Toolkit is the result of a two-year project to learn from individuals with backgrounds similar to those of self-represented litigants about how they need courts to communicate with them about online dispute resolution. We started by conducting focus groups around the country to uncover barriers to using ODR and to obtain insights on how SRLs prefer to receive information. See our [OPEN Phase 1 report](#) to learn more about the focus groups and our findings.

We created the communication models based on our focus group findings, as well as research on how best to communicate with individuals with low literacy. We designed the models in partnership with an inclusive designer.



Once we had initial working versions of the models, we conducted a first round of usability tests with individuals around the United States. Our goal was to obtain feedback on the content, design and navigation of each model from participants whose backgrounds resembled those of typical self-represented litigants. After reviewing feedback from usability testers, we worked with our design partner to make major enhancements to the models. We also worked with an expert accessibility evaluator to review and revise the models so they comply with the latest [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG 2.1).

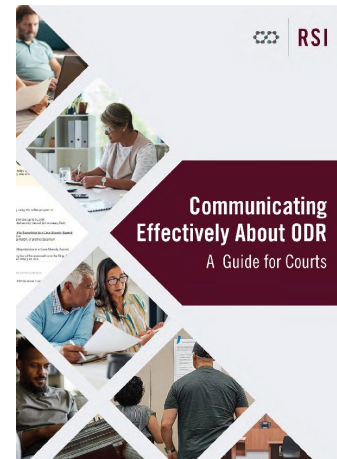
After revising the models, we conducted one more round of usability testing to determine if any further changes were needed. Testers responded very positively to the revised models; we made only a few minor enhancements to finalize the models.

The final models thus reflect the expertise of our inclusive design partner and our accessibility evaluator; the feedback of 20 real users from backgrounds similar to SRLs; and secondary research we conducted on best practices for communicating with individuals with low literacy and low digital technology literacy.

See our [OPEN Phase 2 report](#) to learn more about the usability tests and our findings.

What principles did we use to create the models?

During our focus groups, we identified several communication-related barriers that prevented individuals with low literacy from understanding court materials. We discuss these barriers and effective design principles that courts should use to address them in greater detail in our [Guide for Courts on Communicating Effectively About ODR](#).



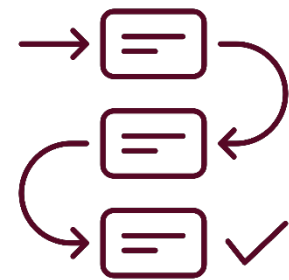
Below are some of the key design principles we adopted to ensure the materials are easy to read and understand:

- **Plain language text:** We avoided using dense text blocks, legal jargon and passive voice in our materials. Whenever legal terms (e.g., plaintiff or defendant) were necessary, we included simple definitions to help people understand those terms.
- **White space:** We ensured the materials included ample white space and separate sections to make content more digestible. Effective formatting can prevent people from feeling overwhelmed by the amount of information the materials are trying to convey.
- **Intuitive workflow:** We designed the materials to scaffold information about ODR and the ODR registration process so tasks would feel manageable to complete. Scaffolding allows people to gradually increase their understanding of all that ODR entails.

- **Multimedia content:** We included simple illustrations related to important text to ensure the materials were engaging and would reach those who learn more effectively through visuals.
- **Accessibility:** We partnered with a leading accessibility expert to review and revise the models to ensure they are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

How do the models work together?

Resources courts create to inform and communicate with SRLs should be designed to work cohesively, and SRLs should be guided through them in a logical order. During our focus groups, we [learned](#) that participants were excited about ODR but found the amount of information presented in the Notice to Defendant of Mandatory ODR to be overwhelming. This sense of overwhelm can trigger avoidance behavior as a coping strategy. As a result, participants may not understand the information provided to them, may feel unsure how to proceed or may give up on the process altogether. Often, court resources are also presented as individual pieces of information, which can prevent people from understanding how concepts and processes relate. We also noted that court resources were disconnected from each other, and there was no obvious flow from one resource to the next.



How did we structure our models?

To prevent “information overload” and to address resource disconnect, we designed our models to **scaffold** information about ODR. [Scaffolding](#) is an educational strategy used to break down large, complex amounts of information or instruction into digestible chunks, with each step building on the former one. It provides a structure for people to follow that enhances their comprehension of the information and builds their confidence and interest in the process.

How did usability testers respond to scaffolding?

During usability tests, we found that when participants finished reading the Notice, they demonstrated a basic understanding of ODR and what was required of them to proceed. At this point, testers expressed an interest in learning more about ODR and knew the next step they needed to take: going to the website. When participants navigated to the ODR



Home Page, they encountered information that reiterated what they had read in the Notice, such as the fact that mediation was available to them, while adding new information, such as how to ask for a mediator.

An important part of scaffolding is to demonstrate how individuals should approach tasks; we do so via the Explainer Video, which illustrates how ODR works and narrates tasks such as asking for a mediator and registering for an account. Once the individual reaches our Self-Help Guide, they are able to confidently apply the information they have internalized from the Notice, ODR Home Page and Explainer Video to prepare for ODR and, finally, to register for an account.

By scaffolding information about ODR along a simple workflow, our models help participants to both accurately retain the information provided to them and to feel increasingly more assured in their understanding of how ODR works.

We highly recommend scaffolding the information provided by your materials along a single workflow to enhance their approachability and usability to SRLs.

Notes on Our Design

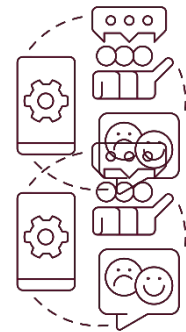
We designed our models with human mediators in mind. Correspondingly, our usability testers assumed that ODR involved human mediators and that is what we discussed with them. When

designing your own written material, visuals and videos it will be important to consider thoughtfully how to communicate whether AI may be used to mediate or if ODR will involve only human mediators.

Additionally, we did not address abusive language or harassment on the ODR platform by one party to another when discussing confidentiality in our model webpage. Whether and how this type of behavior is treated as confidential is a policy consideration for courts. In your own materials, you should identify any exceptions to confidentiality.

Usability Testing

We highly recommend conducting usability testing to ensure the communication materials you create or enhance are easy to read and understand. Through our usability testing sessions, we uncovered major and minor usability issues that we then addressed to enhance our models; these enhancements would not have been possible without real-world feedback.



In order to ensure your materials are readily understood by all, we recommend recruiting participants who may have lower literacy or who have limited English proficiency. You only need [five participants to test your resources](#). In our experience, participants were eager to share their thoughts and found the experience to be enlightening and fun.

If you would like to learn more about how we conducted usability testing, check out our [OPEN Phase 2 Report](#). Note that we conducted the tests in person in order to be able to test a paper notice, as well as to ensure that individuals in our sample included those who were not technologically proficient. Others, however, have conducted usability tests using video conferencing.

Recruitment

A note about recruitment: We conducted tests around the country and thus relied on Facebook ads and locally placed flyers for recruiting testers. Other sources of testers may include those visiting a law library or self-help desk, those visiting a self-help or legal aid website, etc.

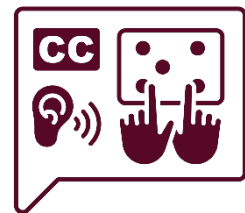
Usability testers are generally paid for their time. Payment depends on the length of time needed and whether testers will need to travel or schedule time. Reviewing a Notice, for example, might take 10 minutes, and payment could be as little as \$25.

Usability Testing Resources

- NN/g: [Usability \(User\) Testing 101](#)
- Maze: [A Beginner's Guide to Usability Testing](#)
- User Interviews: [The User Experience Research Field Guide](#)
- User Testing: [The Complete Guide to Usability Testing](#)
- U.S. General Services Administration (Digital.gov): [Usability](#)

Accessibility

We worked with an external accessibility evaluator to ensure that the models complied with [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG 2.1). The evaluators identified issues in earlier versions of the models that we then changed.



Below, we list a few key issue areas that we enhanced to meet accessibility requirements. We recommend you consider these factors when designing your own materials:



- **Color contrast:** The accessibility evaluator identified several instances where our earlier webpage models did not pass WCAG 2.1 minimum requirements for color contrast. The issue areas included both text and UI elements: hyperlinks, progress bar indicators, hover states of text, radio buttons and scroll bars. We used a free color contrast analyzer tool to remedy this issue. A color contrast analyzer can provide you with color HEX codes to share with your designers to ensure your webpage elements meet the minimum contrast ratios under WCAG.
- **Visual indicators:** As discussed in the Home Page section of this Toolkit, an earlier version of the home page included accordion components that did not have visual indicators. This oversight was confirmed by usability test participants, who did not interact with this section and missed important information. The evaluator recommended an arrow or other symbol to convey the presence of additional information; we went with a plus sign to match the content we had already designed and that testers liked.
- **Placeholder text:** There were a few instances where we included placeholder text within textbox fields to provide an example of the type of information the user should provide. However, the evaluator noted that this information disappears when the user clicks on the text box, which may be confusing should the user forget what was there. To address this issue, we labeled text boxes that did not otherwise already have clear instructions or questions to answer.
- **Audio captions and description:** The evaluator noted a few issues with an earlier version of the video. Most notably, the video lacked captions and did not include an audio description track available. We ensured that the standard version of the video included captions by default. We then worked with the accessibility evaluators again to create an accessible version of the video that included audio description. We were pleased to learn that the evaluator felt there were only two instances that needed this enhanced description. The evaluator also noted that the video should be accompanied



by a viewable transcript document and playback options; while we were unable to implement these features on our Figma platform for our model, they should be included in any final website design. We have included the accessible version of the video as a separate file.

Accessibility Resources

Web accessibility guides:

- U.S. General Services Administration (Section 508): [Create Accessible Digital Products](#)
- U.S. Americans with Disabilities Act: [Guidance on Web Accessibility and the ADA](#)
- W3C: [Accessibility Fundamentals Overview](#)
- WebAIM: [Introduction to Web Accessibility](#)
- A2J Tech: [Introduction to Accessibility](#)
- The Washington Post: [Accessibility Resources](#)

For PDFs/Word docs:

- Adobe: [Create and verify PDF accessibility \(Acrobat Pro\)](#)
- Microsoft: [Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities](#)
- WebAIM: [Microsoft Word](#) and [PDF Accessibility](#)

For Videos:

- W3C: [Making Audio and Video Media Accessible](#)



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- U.S. General Services Administration (Section 508): [Create Accessible Audio- and Video-Only Media](#)
 - WebAIM: [Captions, Transcripts, and Audio Descriptions](#)
 - University of Colorado Boulder: [Creating Accessible Videos](#)
 - Columbia University: [Creating Accessible Video](#)
 - Adobe: [Video accessibility guide](#)

Software/tools:

- NV Access: [NVDA screen reader](#) (free screen reader program; Windows/PC)
- Freedom Scientific: [JAWS](#) (paid screen reader program; Windows/PC)
- WebAIM: [VoiceOver](#) (free/built-in Mac program to check web accessibility)
- WebAIM: [WAVE](#) (browser extension to check web accessibility; Firefox and Chrome)
- Google: [Lighthouse](#) (free tool to audit websites for accessibility; Chrome DevTools)
- TPGi: [Colour Contrast Analyser \(CCA\)](#) (free program to optimize text and visuals; Windows/PC and Mac)

Contact Us

Please reach out to us at research@aboutrsi.org if you would like access to editable models, if you have any questions or if you just want to tell us about your experience using the Toolkit.