

Practice pointers for entering judgment

- ✱ [Except for parties often in small claims court], the announcement of your decision is what they came for. Don't let the number of cases left on your docket—or your emotional discomfort with ruling against a party – cause you to shortcut through this most important moment in a small claims trial. Don't mumble, talk super fast, avoid eye contact, or use body language indicating that you're in a hurry and want them to leave immediately. Your judgment can be very short, but your delivery of your judgment should not be rushed.

- ✱ It's okay to pause to consult a resource or do mathematical calculations (or even just look like you're doing this while you check your email). Taking your time communicates that you're taking this matter seriously. Even a 10-second pause can really have an impact.

- ✱ Every judgment should include (1) a reference to or acknowledgment of the evidence, and 2) a sentence that begins with something like "North Carolina law provides"

- ✱ Address the parties by name, rather than plaintiff and defendant.

- ✱ Write out a script for the judgments you repeatedly enter, get the language just right, and then use it every time.

- ✱ Do the same thing for your answers to FAQ.

- ✱ Write down your decision, and then carefully say out loud what you've written.