

Research Guide: Motion to Vacate a Default Judgment

As adapted from the San Diego County Public Law Library Research Guide

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Updated: May 24, 2021

Law Library for San Bernardino County

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Disclaimer

The information in this research guide is intended to assist patrons with their legal research and is in no way intended to replace the counsel of an Attorney. Any decisions about how to proceed must be determined by the patron. The library staff can recommend and refer you to print and web-based resources that will help you find answers to your law-related questions. The staff at the Law Library for San Bernardino County cannot explain or interpret the law itself and we are not permitted to give legal advice.

What is a Default Judgment?

A default judgment is usually obtained by the plaintiff when the defendant does not appear at a hearing or does not file an answer to the summons and complaint.

I received a default judgment against me, is there anything I can do?

Under certain circumstances you may be able to file a Motion to Vacate Default Judgment. (To understand what a motion is, please review our guide: [What is a Motion?](#))

Under what circumstances can I file a Motion to Vacate Default Judgment?

- If a motion to do so is made within 180 days of the entry of default or dismissal;
- **And** if the default or dismissal was the result of the party's "*mistake, inadvertence, surprise, or excusable neglect,*" or because the court has assumed jurisdiction of the law practice of the party's attorney (California Code of Civil Procedure §§ 473(b), 473.1);
- **Or** up to two years after entry of a default judgment where service of the original summons did not result in actual notice to a defendant in time to defend, or, if the defendant received written notice of the default judgment, within 180 days thereafter. In either case, the defendant must show that the lack of notice was not caused by the defendant's deliberate avoidance of service or inexcusable neglect (California Code of Civil Procedure § 473.5).

Generally, if you cannot actually claim one the above stated grounds than your motion will not be considered by the court.

Examples of mistake, inadvertence, surprise, or excusable neglect may include:

- Illness of defendant.
- Attorney's abandonment of client.
- Fraud of the plaintiff.

Where do I get the forms to file the Motion to Vacate?

Motions are custom forms that you create/draft yourself on pleading paper (paper numbered down the left side, exactly like the paper this guide is printed on).

1 **So how do I draft a motion?**

2 Motions include several parts:

- 3 • The application or motion typically called a “Notice of Motion” (This tells the court what
4 you want to do);
- 5 • A Memorandum of Points and Authorities (The law that allows the court to grant your
6 application/motion);
- 7 • A Declaration (This is your statement of facts, a chance to tell your story);
- 8 • An Order for the Judge to sign if he grants your application/motion.

7 **Is there an example I can use to help me draft this motion?**

8 A sample of what this type of Motion might look like is provided below. But you will have to
9 decide whether the sample is the correct form for your situation. You may need to modify the
10 form so it fits your case.

11 Blank Pleading paper (paper numbered down the left side, exactly like the paper this guide is
12 printed on) is available at [http://www.sblawlibrary.org/research-guides--self-help-
13 information.html](http://www.sblawlibrary.org/research-guides--self-help-information.html).

13 **What do I do after I draft my forms?**

14 Once you have drafted the forms to your specifications you can file them with the court.
15 Typically, the clerk will assign a hearing date for your application/motion. You will most likely
16 need to serve the other party involved and file a **Proof of Service**. Some courts will serve the
17 papers for you.

18 **For information about service of papers and proof of service, please refer to one of the
19 following research guides:**

- 20 ➤ *Personal Service of Court Papers*, published by the Sacramento County Public Law
21 Library, <http://www.saclaw.org/Uploads/files/Step-by-Step/PersonalService.pdf>
- 22 ➤ *Proof of Service by Mail*, published by the Sacramento County Public Law Library,
23 [https://saclaw.org/video-library/how-to-accomplish-proof-of-service-by-mail-in-
24 california/](https://saclaw.org/video-library/how-to-accomplish-proof-of-service-by-mail-in-california/)
- 24 ➤ *Service of Notice and Other Papers*, published by the San Diego County Public Law
25 Library, [https://sandiegolawlibrary.org/wp-
26 content/uploads/2013/04/Service_of_Notice_and_Other_Papers.pdf](https://sandiegolawlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Service_of_Notice_and_Other_Papers.pdf)
- 27 ➤ Proof of Service Forms, <http://courts.ca.gov/forms.htm?filter=POS>
- 28 ➤ Pleading Paper Template, published by the San Diego Law Library:
<https://sandiegolawlibrary.org/pleading-paper-template/>

27 **For additional information please review the following resources at the law library:**

28 *California Civil Procedure Before Trial* 4th ed., vol. 2, ch. 38, Relief From Default or Default
Judgment, §§ 38.75 - 38.109, Forms §§ 38.114 - 38.117.

1
2 *California Forms of Pleading & Practice*, vol 43, ch. 489, Relief From Judgments, Matthew
3 Bender.

4 *California Forms of Pleading & Practice*, vol. 33, ch. 372, Motions & Orders, Matthew Bender.
5 (Use this for ex parte applications when it is necessary to stay execution of a judgment or recall a
6 writ of possession before your full motion to vacate default judgment can be heard.)

7 *California Points & Authorities*, vol. 7, ch.70, Defaults, Default Judgments, and Relief from
8 Judgments and Orders, Matthew Bender. (includes sample forms)

9 *Motion to Vacate a Default Judgment or Set Aside a Dismissal*, San Diego Law Library
10 [https://sandiegolawlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/wpmc-
11 trash/2013/04/Motion_to_Vacate_a_Default_Judgment.pdf](https://sandiegolawlibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/wpmc-trash/2013/04/Motion_to_Vacate_a_Default_Judgment.pdf)

12 **Can I stop the execution of the Judgment?**

13 In some situations you can file for a claim of exemption.

14 The list of exemptions can be located online: <http://courts.ca.gov/documents/ej155.pdf>

15 **SCPLL has provided the following guide: Stop or Reduce a Wage Garnishment Step by
16 Step:** <https://saclaw.org/wp-content/uploads/sbs-wage-garnishment.pdf>

17 **The Judicial Council Forms for Exemption Claims:**

18 Claim of Exemption: [EJ – 160](#), Financial Statement: [EJ – 165/WG – 007](#),

19 Notice of Hearing on Claim of Exemption: [EJ – 175/WG-010](#).

20 **Wage Garnishment Claim of Exemption:**

21 Claim of Exemption Wage Garnishment: [WG – 006](#), Financial Statement: [WG – 007](#),

22 Notice of Filing of Claim of Exemption: [WG – 008](#), Notice of Hearing: [WG - 010](#),

23 Order Determining Claim of Exemption: [WG – 011](#),

24 Notice of Termination or Modification of Earnings Withholding Order: [WG - 012](#).

25 See all WG Forms: <http://courts.ca.gov/forms.htm?filter=WG>

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27 ***Defendant in [Pro Per](#) is a person who handles his/her case without an attorney. It is
28 typical for you to alert the court of your [Pro Per](#) status on pleadings you file with the court.**

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Defendant in Pro Per

IN THE SAN BERNARDINO SUPERIOR COURT
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

_____,
Plaintiff,
vs.
_____,
Defendant.

) Case No.: _____
) NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR
) ORDER VACATING AND SETTING ASIDE
) DEFAULT (AND DEFAULT JUDGMENT)],
) SUPPORTING DECLARATION, AND
) MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND
) AUTHORITIES AND ORDER
) Date: _____
) Time: _____
) Dept: _____

NOTICE OF MOTION TO VACATE DEFAULT JUDGMENT

To plaintiff _____ [*name of plaintiff*] and to his/her attorney of record.
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, a motion will be heard on the following date , time and
place: _____. (Date and time of motion).

The motion will be heard in the following courthouse and division/department:
_____, located at
_____ [*address*], _____ [*city*].

Defendant will, and hereby does, move to vacate and set aside default judgment entered against
defendant on _____ [*date default judgment was entered*].

The motion will be made on the ground(s) that the default judgment was taken against defendant
through his/her mistake *or* inadvertence *or* surprise *or* excusable neglect *or all or any*
combination of these]. _____.

The motion will be based on this notice of motion, the accompanying declaration(s) of the

1 defendant, and the memorandum of points and authorities served and filed herewith, on the
2 records and file herein, and on such evidence as may be presented at the hearing of the motion.

3 Dated: _____.

Respectfully Submitted,
4 By: _____

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1 **DECLARATION IN SUPPORT OF MOTION TO VACATE DEFAULT JUDGMENT**

2 I, _____, declare: I am the defendant in the above-entitled case.
3 (Enter your Statement of Facts Related to the case)

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24 I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.
25 Executed on _____, at _____, California.

26 Dated: _____

Respectfully Submitted,

27 By: _____
28 Defendant in Pro Per

1 **MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES IN SUPPORT OF MOTION TO**
2 **VACATE DEFAULT JUDGMENT**

3 **THE COURT SHOULD GRANT THE MOTION TO SET ASIDE THE DEFAULT AND**
4 **DEFAULT JUDGMENT UNDER CODE OF CIVIL PROCEDURE SECTION 473(b)**
5 **BECAUSE THE DEFAULT JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AGAINST DEFENDANT**
6 **THROUGH HIS/HER MISTAKE *and/or* INADVERTENCE *and/or* SURPRISE *and/or***
7 **EXCUSABLE NEGLIGENCE, AND JUSTICE REQUIRES DETERMINATION OF THE**
8 **ISSUES AFTER A HEARING ON THE MERITS OF THE CASE.**

9 **A. Grounds for Relief From Judgment, Order, or Other Proceeding.** On application, the
10 court may, on any terms as may be just, relieve a party or his or her legal representative from a
11 judgment, dismissal, order, or other proceeding taken against him or her through his or her
12 mistake, inadvertence, surprise, or excusable neglect (Code Civ. Proc. § 473(b)).

13 **B. Policy of Law Favors Trial on Merits.** The policy of the law is that controversies should be
14 heard and disposed of on their merits (*Fasuyi v. Permatex, Inc.* (2008) 167 Cal. App. 4th 681,
15 694-703, 84 Cal. Rptr. 3d 351; *Berman v. Klassman* (1971) 17 Cal. App. 3d 900, 909, 95 Cal.
16 Rptr. 417).

17 **C. Court Has Wide Discretion in Granting Relief.** A trial court has wide discretion to grant
18 relief under Code of Civil Procedure Section 473 (*Berman v. Klassman* (1971) 17 Cal. App. 3d
19 900, 909, 95 Cal. Rptr. 417).

20 **D. Liberal Construction of Statute.** Code of Civil Procedure Section 473(b) is a remedial
21 measure to be liberally construed, and any doubts existing as to the propriety of setting aside a
22 default thereunder will be resolved in favor of a hearing on the merits (*Berman v. Klassman*
23 (1971) 17 Cal. App. 3d 900, 910, 95 Cal. Rptr. 417).

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25 Dated: _____.

Respectfully Submitted,

By: _____

Defendant in Pro Per

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Defendant in Pro Per

IN THE SAN BERNARDINO SUPERIOR COURT
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

_____) Case No.: _____
Plaintiff,)
) ORDER
)
vs.)
)
_____,)
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Defendant.)
)
_____)

ORDER OF COURT

The motion of the defendant for an order of setting aside and vacating the default (and default judgment) heretofore entered came on for hearing by the court on _____ [date]. Plaintiff appeared by counsel or in pro per _____ [name]; defendant appeared in pro per.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the default Judgment heretofore entered in this action against the defendant _____ [name of defendant], this judgment having been entered on _____ [date] in Volume _____, Page _____, of the Judgment Book be hereby set aside and vacated.

Dated: _____.

Judge of the Superior Court