

# Testifying

Witnesses naturally feel apprehensive about their first appearance in court because they don't know what to expect. However, it is usually a very calm and quiet event. The following suggestions should help make your appearance a satisfying experience.

- A neat appearance is important.
- Remember, jury members are ordinary people just like yourself. Don't be embarrassed. Speak frankly and loudly enough for them to hear you.
- Don't memorize what you are going to say.
- Do not lose your temper. Be courteous.
- Do not exaggerate.
- Do not hedge questions, or try to argue with the defense attorney or judge.
- Listen carefully to questions. If improper, your attorney will object. Never answer a question you don't understand without thinking. Have the questions repeated if necessary.
- If you can't truthfully answer a question with a yes or no, you have the right to explain your answer.
- Directly and simply answer only the question asked. Do not volunteer information that was not asked for.
- Before testifying, get an accurate picture of the scene in your mind. If you can only give estimates of times, distances, etc., be sure to say they are estimates.
- Stop instantly when the judge interrupts you, or when an attorney objects to a question.
- Don't nod your head for a "yes" or "no" answer.
- If your answer was not correctly stated, correct it immediately.
- Do not give your opinions or conclusions unless asked. Testify only to facts you observed or know, not what you think about those facts.
- Don't be absolute about your recollections. Instead say, "That's all I can recall," of your observation. With one or two more questions, you may well remember something else.
- When you leave the witness stand, wear a confident expression no matter how you feel. Your attitude may affect the jury's evaluation of your testimony.