

Courtroom Management, Administrative Functions and Professional Well-Being

By: Samjata Pradhan
Reader, High Court of Sikkim

INTRODUCTION

A. Reader (Court Master)

Reader is a court staff who assists Hon'ble Judges and acts as a bridge between Judges, Registry, and advocates.

Ensures smooth functioning of court work including:

- Listing of cases
- Record management
- Coordination during hearings

In other High Courts, they also known as Court Masters or Bench Officers.

In the Supreme Court court master are:

- Skilled in shorthand dictation
- Records dictation
- Prepares accurate transcripts
- Maintains confidentiality of judicial records

B. Law Clerk-cum-Research Assistant

- A law graduate appointed on a contractual basis to assist Hon'ble Judges.
- Assists Hon'ble Judges in daily judicial and administrative work as and when required.
- Key responsibilities:
 - To prepare case summaries
 - To conduct legal research
 - Taking down notes during court hearings
 - Assisting in preparing speeches and academic papers.
- Must maintain strict confidentiality.

Pre-Court Duties / Responsibilities (Reader / Court Master)

1. Cause List Verification

- Verify daily cause list before listing
- Ensure all scheduled cases are correctly listed and ordered
- Should be in Sequence:
 - New Matters
 - Admission Matters
 - Order Matters
 - Final Hearing Matters
- Ensure next day's cause list is published on the High Court website

2. Case File Management

- Ensure all listed case files are available and complete
- Read the facts of the case and check compliance of previous orders
- Verify documents and compliance notes
- Ensure courtroom readiness
- Seek permission for listing of new matters and coordinate with Registry

Pre-Court Duties / Responsibilities (Reader / Court Master)

3. Case Briefing

- Place case files before Hon'ble Judge in proper sequence
- Brief the Judge on case status and documents filed
- Highlight compliance of earlier orders

4. Coordination with Court Staff

- Ensure presence of stenographers and library staff in the court room
- Arrange relevant Acts, statutes, in court
- For Division Bench matters, ensures two sets of required books

Duties during Court Proceedings (Reader / Court Master)

1. Calling Out Cases

- Call out matters listed before the Bench in proper sequence
- Coordinate virtual hearings and manage CIS proceedings
- Assist Hon'ble Judge by Locating page numbers and documents
- Aiding with the citations referred by advocates during arguments

2. Maintaining Decorum & Ensuring smooth Functioning of court

- Ensure discipline and decorum in court
- Ensure that only authorized person, such as advocates, litigants when permitted are allowed to approach the Bench.
- By Coordinating between Hon'ble Judge, Advocates, Litigants ,Court staff Reader ensures smooth functioning of court.

3. Facilitating Virtual Court Proceedings

- Assist technical staff to arrange for virtual hearings
- Manage virtual courtroom access and participant control
- Prevent entry of unauthorized participants

Duties after the court proceedings (Reader / Court Master)

1. Case Information System (CIS) Entries

- Make timely and accurate entries in the Case Information System (CIS)

This involves:

- Updating the next date of hearing, and the stage of the case.
- Recording the appearance of advocates before the court.
- Entering the information regarding Disposal of Interlocutory Applications.
- Verifying the accuracy of all entries to avoid errors.
- Aids lawyers, litigants, and court staff to access digital records of the case.

Duties after the court proceedings (Reader / Court Master)

2. Ensuring that judgments, orders are correctly uploaded

- Ensure timely uploading of judgments, orders, and court directions in the Case Information System (CIS)
- Coordinate with the stenographer after pronouncement of judgment/order
- Verify that the final and correct version is uploaded under the appropriate case number and cause title.

3. Custodian of case files

- After the judgment is reserved, the readers are the custodian of the case files and records if any.

B. Law Clerk-cum-Research Assistant – Duties & Responsibilities

(Pre-Court Duties)

1. Preparation of Case Briefs

- Check the cause list and identify matters listed before the Hon'ble Judge
- Read the pleadings, petitions, written statements, affidavits, applications, annexures, and previous court orders.
- Prepares concise case briefs summarizing the facts, issues, moot questions involved, and the chronology of events.

2. Conduct Legal Research & Updates on recent Legal Developments

- Conduct detailed legal research on applicable Statutes, Rules, and Constitutional provisions
- Identify and analyze legal issues / moot questions in the case
- To apprise Hon'ble judge with any recent judgments, legislative amendments and notifications applicable if any, to the matters listed before the bench.
- Undertake additional research and tasks as assigned by the Hon'ble Judge from time to time

Law Clerk-cum-Research Assistant (Duties during and after Court Proceedings)

1. Taking Down points of Arguments & Preparing Notes

- Carefully listen to arguments submitted by advocates during hearings
- Takes down points of arguments
- Note relevant legal provisions, statutes, and rulings cited
- Prepare brief notes for reference and further research by the Hon'ble Judge
- Assist Hon'ble Judge while drafting judgments by providing relevant case laws, statutes and verifying citations etc.

Administrative and Judicial duties of Readers:

1. Ensuring proper record of court proceedings:

- Verifying that the correct and final version of the judgment or order has been uploaded.
- Checking that all pages are complete, and properly arranged.
- Confirming that the document has been uploaded under the correct case number and cause title.
- Coordinating with the stenographer to rectify any error.
- Maintaining the confidentiality of judicial records during the uploading process.

2. Preparation of Decree

- Prepares decree after pronouncement of judgment in civil cases
- Decree to be prepare strictly in accordance with the judgment
- Include essential details such as:
 - Case number and cause title
 - Names of parties
 - Operative portion of judgment
 - Relief granted and costs awarded

3. Miscellaneous Duties

- Perform additional duties assigned by Hon'ble Judge or senior officers
- Assist in judicial and administrative work as and when assigned

Administrative and Judicial duties of Law Clerk-cum-Research Assistant :

1. Assist in preparing Speeches & Academic Papers

- Assist Hon'ble Judge in preparation of speeches, lectures, and academic papers
- Provide well-researched legal inputs, including Relevant case laws and statutory provisions
- Collect and compile legal research materials such as: Judicial precedents and landmark judgments etc.

2. Judicial Duties of Law-Clerks

- preparing case briefs, conduct legal research and take down the points of arguments during court proceedings.

3. Other Assigned Duties

- To Perform any other duties assigned by the Hon'ble Judge from time to time
- Assist in administrative and court-related tasks, including Correspondence handling, Data compilation as and when required

Conclusion

The Reader/Court Master and Law Clerk-cum-Research Assistant play important roles in the smooth functioning of the judiciary

- The Court Master ensures efficient court management through:
 - Case listing and coordination
 - Record maintenance and CIS updates
 - Smooth conduct of court proceedings

The Law Clerk-cum-Research Assistant supports the Hon'ble Judge through:

- Legal research and preparation of case briefs
- maintaining records of judgments
- assisting in academic and administrative work.

Together, they assist Hon'ble Judge by ensuring:

- Accuracy and timely availability of all the information required for decision-making
- Both plays important role in ensuring professional excellence within judicial institutions.