

Rule 12. Defenses and Objections: When and How Presented; Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings; Consolidating Motions; Waiving Defenses; Pretrial Hearing

(a) TIME TO SERVE A RESPONSIVE PLEADING. Unless another time is specified by an applicable statute, the time for serving a responsive pleading is as follows:

(1) *In General.*

(A) A defendant must serve an answer within 21 days after being served with the summons and complaint.

(B) A party must serve an answer to a counterclaim or crossclaim within 21 days after being served with the pleading that states the counterclaim or crossclaim.

(C) A party must serve a reply to an answer within 21 days after being served with an order to reply, unless the order specifies a different time.

(2) *The United States or the District of Columbia and the Agencies, Officers, or Employees of Either Sued in an Official Capacity.* The United States or the District of Columbia or an agency, officer, or employee of either sued only in an official capacity must serve an answer to a complaint, counterclaim, or crossclaim within 60 days after service on the United States attorney (in suits involving the United States) or the Attorney General for the District of Columbia (in suits involving the District of Columbia).

(3) *United States or District of Columbia Officers or Employees Sued in an Individual Capacity.* A United States or District of Columbia officer or employee sued in an individual capacity for an act or omission occurring in connection with the duties performed on the United States' or the District of Columbia's behalf must serve an answer to a complaint, counterclaim, or crossclaim within 60 days after service on the officer or employee or service on the United States attorney (in suits involving the United States) or the Attorney General for the District of Columbia (in suits involving the District of Columbia), whichever is later.

(4) *Effect of a Motion.* Unless the court sets a different time, serving a motion under this rule alters these periods as follows:

(A) if the court denies the motion or postpones its disposition until trial, the responsive pleading must be served within 14 days after notice of the court's action; or

(B) if the court grants a motion for a more definite statement, the responsive pleading must be served within 14 days after the more definite statement is served.

(5) *Entry of Default.* Unless the time to respond to the complaint has been extended as provided in Rule 55(a)(3) or the court orders otherwise, failure to comply with the requirements of this rule will result in the entry of a default by the clerk or the court sua sponte.

(b) HOW TO PRESENT DEFENSES. Every defense to a claim for relief in any pleading must be asserted in the responsive pleading if one is required. But a party may assert the following defenses by motion:

(1) lack of subject-matter jurisdiction;

(2) lack of personal jurisdiction;

(3) [Omitted];

(4) insufficient process;

(5) insufficient service of process;

(6) failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted;

(7) failure to join a party under Rule 19.

A motion asserting any of these defenses must be made before pleading if a responsive pleading is allowed. If a pleading sets out a claim for relief that does not require a responsive pleading, an opposing party may assert at trial any defense to that claim. No defense or objection is waived by joining it with one or more other defenses or objections in a responsive pleading or in a motion.

(c) **MOTION FOR JUDGMENT ON THE PLEADINGS.** After the pleadings are closed—but early enough not to delay trial—a party may move for judgment on the pleadings.

(d) **RESULTS OF PRESENTING MATTERS OUTSIDE THE PLEADINGS.** If, on a motion under Rule 12(b)(6) or 12(c), matters outside the pleadings are presented to and not excluded by the court, the motion must be treated as one for summary judgment under Rule 56. All parties must be given a reasonable opportunity to present all the material that is pertinent to the motion.

(e) **MOTION FOR A MORE DEFINITE STATEMENT.** A party may move for a more definite statement of a pleading to which a responsive pleading is allowed but which is so vague or ambiguous that the party cannot reasonably prepare a response. The motion must be made before filing a responsive pleading and must point out the defects complained of and the details desired. If the court orders a more definite statement and the order is not obeyed within 14 days after notice of the order or within the time the court sets, the court may strike the pleading or issue any other appropriate order.

(f) **MOTION TO STRIKE.** The court may strike from a pleading an insufficient defense or any redundant, immaterial, impertinent, or scandalous matter. The court may act:

- (1) on its own; or
- (2) on motion made by a party either before responding to the pleading or, if a response is not allowed, within 21 days after being served with the pleading.

(g) **JOINING MOTIONS.**

(1) *Right to Join.* A motion under this rule may be joined with any other motion allowed by this rule.

(2) *Limitations on Further Motions.* Except as provided in Rule 12(h)(2) or (3), a party that makes a motion under this rule must not make another motion under this rule raising a defense or objection that was available to the party but omitted from its earlier motion.

(h) **WAIVING AND PRESERVING CERTAIN DEFENSES.**

(1) *When Some Are Waived.* A party waives any defense listed in Rule 12(b)(2)–(5) by:

- (A) omitting it from a motion in the circumstances described in Rule 12(g)(2); or
- (B) failing to either:
 - (i) make it by motion under this rule; or
 - (ii) include it in a responsive pleading or in an amendment allowed by Rule 15(a)(1) as a matter of course.

(2) *When to Raise Others.* Failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, to join a person required by Rule 19(b), or to state a legal defense to a claim may be raised:

- (A) in any pleading allowed or ordered under Rule 7(a);
- (B) by a motion under Rule 12(c); or
- (C) at trial.

(3) *Lack of Subject-Matter Jurisdiction*. If the court determines at any time that it lacks subject-matter jurisdiction, the court must dismiss the action.

(i) HEARING BEFORE TRIAL. If a party so moves, any defense listed in Rule 12(b)(1)–(7)—whether made in a pleading or by motion—and a motion under Rule 12(c) must be heard and decided before trial unless the court orders a deferral until trial.

COMMENT TO 2025 AMENDMENTS

Section (a) of this rule has been amended consistent with the 2024 amendments to *Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12*, which was amended to make clear that a statute that specifies another time supersedes the times to serve a responsive pleading set by subsections (a)(2) and (3).

COMMENT TO 2017 AMENDMENTS

This rule is identical to *Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12*, as amended in 2007 and 2009, except for: 1) the substitution of “applicable statute” for “federal statute” in subsection (a)(1); 2) the deletion of inapplicable federal limitation periods in subsection (a)(1)(A); 3) the addition of references to “the District of Columbia” in subsections (a)(2) and (a)(3); 4) the retention of subsection (a)(5) regarding the automatic entry of default against a defendant who does not timely respond to the complaint; and 5) the omission of subsection (b)(3), which deals with improper venue and is not applicable in the District of Columbia.

COMMENT

SCR-Civil 12(a) is rearranged to reflect the format established by the federal rule revisions of December 1993. Federal limitation periods are altered to comport with those in the existing Superior Court rule. Additionally, a paragraph (5) has been added to preserve the existing Superior Court rule of automatic entry of default against a defendant who does not timely respond to the complaint.