

Sample File Closing Checklist

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Meet Mark:

Mark Bassingthwaighte, Esq., serves as Risk Manager at [ALPS](#), a leading provider of insurance and risk management solutions for law firms. Since joining ALPS in 1998, Mark has worked with more than 1200 law firms nationwide, helping attorneys identify vulnerabilities, strengthen firm operations, and reduce professional liability risks.

He has presented over 700 continuing legal education (CLE) seminars across the United States and written extensively on the topics of risk management, legal ethics, and cyber security.

A trusted voice in the legal community, Mark is a member of the State Bar of Montana and the American Bar Association and holds a J.D. from Drake University Law School. His mission is to help attorneys build safer, more resilient practices in a rapidly evolving legal environment.



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Sample File Closing Checklist

Note: Not every item will apply to every matter. Staff may assist with administrative steps, but the responsible attorney should review the file before closure.

1. Confirm Representation Has Concluded

Substantive work completed

Ensure all tasks within the agreed scope are finished, and no further action is expected from the firm.

Closing / disengagement letter sent (**mandatory**)

Provide written confirmation that the representation has ended. The letter should:

- confirm the matter is concluded
- summarize the outcome
- identify any remaining client responsibilities
- clarify that the firm will not monitor future deadlines unless re-engaged

Post-representation responsibilities communicated

Clearly identify any deadlines, filings, renewals, or other obligations the client must monitor after the representation ends.

Third-party obligations resolved

Confirm that all liens, expert fees, mediator fees, and court-ordered financial obligations have been satisfied or that the responsibility has been transferred to the client.

2. Final Calendar and Deadline Sweep

Final "deadline sweep" completed

Confirm there are no open time-sensitive court-imposed, regulatory, contractual, or internal obligations that remain active.



- Remove matter from active calendar/docket system

Ensure the matter is removed from the active docket once all obligations are addressed.

3. Billing, Trust Accounting, and Financial Wrap-Up

- Final billing completed

Confirm that all services have been invoiced and a final bill sent.

- Trust account reviewed and reconciled

Confirm that a written accounting of all trust funds received and disbursed has been provided and verify that no client funds remain in trust.

- If funds remain in trust, provide a final accounting to the client and refund any unearned fees or unused funds.

- Outstanding balances addressed

Determine whether unpaid balances will be pursued or written off.

4. File Review and Organization

- File reviewed for completeness

Confirm the file includes all documents relevant to the representation.

- All materials consolidated into the file

Gather and include any materials that may have been stored outside the file, including:

- Substantive email
- Text messages (exported or captured in readable format)
- Voicemail records
- Client-portal uploads
- Documents and communications stored on collaborative platforms such as Teams, Zoom, Slack, SharePoint or Google Docs
- Loose or unfiled documents

- Duplicate or unnecessary materials removed

Remove clearly duplicative materials unless retention serves a legal purpose. (Drafts, research, attorney notes, and work product should be retained.)



Electronic file properly organized and stored
Confirm that electronic records are stored in the firm's document management system.

Confidential or privileged third-party materials segregated
Protect sensitive materials for future reference.

5. Return of Client Property and Original Documents

Client property identified
Identify original client materials such as deeds, contracts, judgments, wills, or corporate records.

Original documents returned to client when appropriate
Return originals unless the firm has agreed to store them.

Return of documents documented
Prepare a list of all materials returned and record the date and method of delivery.
Retain copies of documents returned when appropriate.

Client notified of file retention period and destruction policy

6. Legal and Practice-Specific Closing Tasks

Litigation Matters

- Judgment entered and docket reviewed**
- Appeal deadlines addressed or communicated to client**
- Settlement funds distributed and documented**
- If representation has ended, withdraw as attorney of record where required**
- E-filing accounts updated or closed**

Collection / Judgment Matters

- If judgment remains unpaid, docket dates for asset review**
- Calendar deadline to revive judgment if applicable**



Transactional Matters

- Confirm that deeds, security instruments, or other documents have been filed or recorded
- Confirm that UCC filings or security interests have been perfected
- Calendar continuation or renewal dates
- Post-closing obligations identified and assigned (tax filings, escrow releases, compliance tasks)

Real Estate / Contract Matters

- If file involves lease, option, or renewal rights, calendar relevant deadlines

Criminal Matters

- Evaluate expungement or record-sealing eligibility and calendar reminders if applicable
- Collateral consequences explained and documented
Immigration, licensing, firearm rights, etc.

7. Internal Administration and Risk Management

- Potential malpractice concerns reviewed
If any potential error, missed issue, or client dissatisfaction exists, follow firm risk management procedures before closing.
- Matter marked closed in case management system
Update the firm's systems to reflect the closed status.
- Closed file register updated
Record the file number, client name, matter description, and date closed.
- Client portal access reviewed
Disable or archive client portal access when appropriate.
- Disable or revoke external document-sharing links
Remove access to shared folders or documents once representation ends.



Review file for forms or precedents (Optional but valuable)
Add valuable templates or language to the firm's forms library.

Document lessons learned (Optional but Valuable)
Note procedural improvements or practice insights that could benefit future matters.

8. File Retention and Storage

Retention period assigned
Determine how long the file will be retained under the firm's file retention policy.

File destruction date recorded
Record the destruction date or review date in the closed file register.

File securely archived
Confirm that digital files are securely stored, access restricted, properly backed up, and protected through encryption where appropriate.

9. Optional Client Follow-Up

Client satisfaction questionnaire sent (Optional)
Send a client survey to evaluate client service and identify opportunities for improvement.