# Civil Case Flowchart In Federal Court

**Complaint:** The written document that begins a lawsuit in which the plaintiff describes claims against the defendants. The complaint is filed with the clerk of the court.

**Service of Process:** The complaint is delivered to the defendant as notification that a lawsuit has been filed. The defendant usually has 21 days after service to file a response with the court.

**Answer:** The defendant files a written response to the complaint which admits or denies the plaintiff's claim. The defendant also describes affirmative defenses to the complaint.

**Default:** If the defendant fails to answer or otherwise respond to the complaint then the defendant is in default.

**Rule 16 Conference and Scheduling Order:** After the answer is filed, the judge holds a conference to identify the issues and set a schedule for discovery.

**Default Judgment:** A judgment may be entered against the defaulting defendant awarding the plaintiff the relief sought in the complaint.

**Discovery:** The parties develop evidence for trial by methods including out of court sworn statements called depositions, written interrogatories, inspections, and the production of documents.

**Dispositive Motions:** If discovery shows that the facts are not disputed, one or both parties may move for summary judgment asking the judge to decide the case without a trial.

**Trial:** A trial allows the parties to formally present their cases in court by offering testimony and evidence supporting their positions. If demanded the parties in a civil case will have a jury.

**Judgment:** After a verdict at the trial, the court enters a judgment that states the result and which identifies the specific relief to which the prevailing party is entitled.

**Notice of Appeal:** The non-prevailing party may appeal the summary judgment or judgment to the Court of Appeals by filing a notice of appeal. Reversal is usually only for errors of law.