

Executor First Steps Checklist

A Printable Guide for Newly Appointed Executors

Purpose of This Checklist

If you have been appointed Executor or Administrator of an estate, you have legal responsibilities. This checklist outlines the practical first steps to help you protect the estate and yourself. Use this sheet to track progress and stay organized.

1: Establish Legal Authority

Before you access accounts or move funds, you must be legally appointed by the court.

- Locate the original Will (if applicable)
- Determine whether probate or administration is required
- Petition the court for appointment
- Obtain Letters Testamentary / Letters of Administration
- Order certified death certificates (recommended: 10+)
- Apply for an estate tax ID (EIN)
- Open a separate estate bank account

Notes

2: Secure and Preserve Estate Property

At the beginning, your role is preservation, not distribution. Your priority is protecting assets from loss or misuse.

- Secure residence (locks, alarms, utilities)
- Confirm homeowner's insurance coverage
- Safeguard valuables and financial records
- Forward or monitor mail
- Cancel or secure credit cards
- Identify recurring bills that protect property
- Open a separate estate bank account

Important: Do not begin paying all debts immediately. Payment order matters.

Notes

3: Identify and Take Inventory of Assets

You cannot manage what you have not identified. This phase builds a clear picture of the estate.

- List all bank accounts
- List all investment accounts
- Identify retirement accounts
- Identify life insurance policies
- Locate deeds and vehicle titles
- Obtain date-of-death balances
- Arrange appraisals if needed

Notes

4: Review Debts and Legal Obligations

Not all debts are treated equally. Paying in the wrong order can expose you to personal liability.

- List known creditors
- Review outstanding bills
- Confirm proper priority of payment
- Track all estate-related payments
- Review tax filing requirements (final income tax return; possible estate return)

Notes

5. Prepare for Distribution

Assets should only be distributed after debts and tax matters are properly addressed.

- Confirm creditor claims are resolved
- Confirm tax obligations are reviewed or satisfied
- Prepare a formal accounting of estate activity
- Obtain signed Receipt & Release forms from beneficiaries
- Distribute remaining assets
- Close the estate formally (if required)

Notes

Important Reminders

- Do not mix estate funds with personal funds
- Do not make early distributions
- Do not sell assets without understanding tax consequences
- When unsure, seek guidance before acting
- Close the estate formally (if required)

For guidance before taking major action, contact:

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