

After the shock fades and the adrenaline drops, what you write down and preserve in those early hours can determine the strength of your claim. I have seen well-founded cases stall because a driver tossed a torn receipt that proved mileage to medical visits, and I have seen tough liability fights turn around because a client kept a quiet, consistent pain diary. Evidence is not just dramatic photos and skid marks, it is the small, ordinary details that insurance adjusters and juries trust. If you can't collect something [slip and fall legal help](#) yourself, ask a family member, friend, or even a tow operator to help. A good personal injury lawyer can fill gaps, but no one can recreate what was never saved.

This guide reflects the practical, field-tested documentation a car accident lawyer or personal injury attorney hopes to see when you walk in the door. Whether the collision involved a delivery truck, a bus, an 18-wheeler, a rideshare vehicle, a motorcycle, a bicycle, or a pedestrian, the core evidence needs overlap. The details you keep will shape how a truck accident lawyer or auto accident attorney negotiates with insurers, reconstructs the crash, and proves your losses.

The golden window: what to collect at the scene if you can

Safety and medical care come first. Once you are stable and law enforcement is on the way, gather what is available. Even a few photos or names can be the difference between a quick settlement and a long fight. If you are too injured, hand your phone to a witness and ask for help. In many cases, body camera footage and dash cams exist, but you cannot assume it will be preserved without a prompt request.

- Photograph the vehicles, the wider scene, and your injuries. Capture the final rest positions, damage to all sides, license plates, VIN plates or stickers, tire marks, debris fields, deployed airbags, seatbelt fraying, shattered glass, and roadway features like construction cones or faded lane markings. Take wide shots to show context, then closer shots for detail. Get the traffic signals in frame, thermostat/weather display if visible, and any stop lines. If the crash occurred at night, photograph lighting conditions and reflective signage.
- Document the environment. Snap the sky, wet pavement, flooding, icy patches, sun glare angles, and any obstructions like overgrown hedges or parked delivery trucks blocking sight lines. Look for cameras on nearby buildings, buses, and intersections. One photo of a dome camera can later support a preservation request.
- Gather identities. Exchange full names, phone numbers, emails, insurance companies, policy numbers, and the driver's license state and number. Photograph insurance cards instead of copying them. Get the employer's name if a commercial vehicle or delivery truck is involved. For rideshare crashes, capture the app screen showing the trip details, driver name, and timestamp.
- Save witness information. Ask anyone who stops for a quick voice memo with their name and a brief description of what they saw. Many witnesses move on quickly, and a phone number is invaluable when a hit and run accident attorney later tries to track them down.
- Note statements and behavior. If the other driver apologizes, says they were late for a shift, admits they were looking at GPS, or complains their brakes felt soft, jot it down. Observe signs of impairment or distraction: odor of alcohol, slurred speech, an open container, a glowing phone on the driver's lap, fast-food wrappers around the footwell. These details often fade from memory by the next day, yet they matter for a drunk driving accident lawyer or distracted driving accident attorney.

The official backbone: reports and records you should request

The police report frames the narrative insurers read first. It is not gospel, and officers can miss things, but it often sets the tone. Get the report number at the scene, and follow up online or at the station to obtain the full report

and any supplemental documents. If citations were issued, learn which statutes were cited. When a head-on collision lawyer argues liability, knowing the precise code section helps align crash reconstruction with legal standards.

Emergency response records strengthen the medical timeline. Save paramedic run sheets, hospital intake forms, diagnostic imaging on disc, and discharge instructions. If you declined an ambulance due to cost worries, see a clinic as soon as possible. Insurers love gaps in treatment, and the longer the wait, the more they argue your injuries came from something else.

For commercial or public carriers, documentation expands. If a bus was involved, a bus accident lawyer will ask for driver logs, route schedules, maintenance reports, and onboard camera footage. With an 18-wheeler or delivery truck, a truck accident lawyer will move to preserve electronic control module data, dash cam video, hours-of-service logs, dispatch texts, and pre- and post-trip inspections. The sooner your personal injury lawyer sends a preservation letter, the better the odds critical data is not overwritten.

In rideshare cases, screenshots matter. Save the ride receipt, trip map, time stamps, and any in-app chat. A rideshare accident lawyer will use these to tie the trip status to insurance coverage, which can change depending on whether the app was on, a ride was accepted, or a passenger was onboard.

Your injuries: document the painful, ordinary truth

The most persuasive injury evidence is not dramatic; it is consistent. It shows up in a steady pattern of medical visits, photographs of bruising progression, and notes of daily limitations. A catastrophic injury lawyer will still ask for the same basics, just more of them and across a longer arc.

Create a medical paper trail from day one. Keep every record: urgent care notes, orthopedist plans, physical therapy charts, pharmacy printouts, and imaging reports. Ask for the actual images on disc, not just the summary. If a doctor recommends a brace or assistive device, save receipts and take a photo of you using the device. These concrete artifacts translate pain into evidence.

A simple pain and function diary supports damages far more than people expect. Each day, record where it hurts, pain level ranges, what activities you could or could not perform, sleep quality, medications taken, and side effects. Keep entries short. Write in plain language. For example: "Lower back stiff, 5 to 7 in afternoon, couldn't lift toddler, missed rec league game, woke twice at 2 a.m. and 4 a.m." Juries believe routine observations that feel real. Adjusters read patterns and compare them to treatment gaps.

Photograph visible injuries every few days with consistent lighting and a familiar object for scale, like a coin or a ruler. Track bruises as they change color, stitches as they heal, and swelling as it rises or falls. For scars, take periodic photos over months. If you needed help bathing or dressing, ask the person helping you to write a brief note dated and signed. When a rear-end collision attorney argues for pain and suffering, this kind of detail demonstrates impact on daily life beyond the medical jargon.

Psychological harm counts. Anxiety in traffic, nightmares, jumpiness at honks, avoidance of driving routes, or panic in parking structures that triggers sweating or dizziness are all compensable when tied to the crash. Share these symptoms with your provider so they are charted, and note them in your diary. A car crash attorney can then address both physical and emotional damages with clarity.

The money map: wage loss, out-of-pocket costs, and household impact

Economic damages carry weight because they are easy to verify when documented properly. A personal injury lawyer will want proof that is boring in the best way: paystips, tax records, supervisor letters, and bank statements.

For employed workers, preserve pre-injury pay stubs covering at least 3 to 6 months before the crash and all stubs afterward. Keep timesheets, PTO ledgers, and any HR correspondence about work restrictions, modified duties, or leave approvals. If you missed shifts or lost overtime opportunities, ask your manager for a letter stating dates missed and typical overtime frequency. The letter should be factual, not argumentative.

For self-employed clients, we rely on tax returns, profit-and-loss statements, invoices, accounts receivable ledgers, and canceled checks. If you had to turn down jobs, save the emails or text threads. A bicycle accident attorney trying to quantify lost gigs for a contractor will push for specifics: client names, scheduled dates, quoted amounts, and the messages showing cancellation.

Track out-of-pocket costs with receipts and a log that includes date, purpose, amount, and payment method. Common items include co-pays, deductibles, over-the-counter medications, medical devices, parking at clinics, rideshare or taxi fares to appointments, childcare during therapy, and household services like lawn care or cleaning you had to hire because you could not perform them. If you drove to treatment, log mileage. A simple note such as "3/12, PT visit, 14.6 miles roundtrip" adds up. Insurers rarely quibble with consistent logs.

Do not forget the value of household contributions. If you normally handle cooking, pet care, minor repairs, or elder support, and someone else stepped in, document those changes. A pedestrian accident attorney can present a realistic picture of life disrupted when the person who used to walk to pick up groceries now cannot carry a bag more than a block.

Vehicle damage: beyond the estimate

Property damage claims can support injury claims. Severity of damage is not a perfect proxy for injury, but it helps explain the forces involved. Photograph the vehicle before repairs and keep all estimates, supplement approvals, repair orders, parts lists, and final invoices. If the car was totaled, save the valuation report, comparable vehicles used, and any notes on options such as advanced driver assistance systems.

Request the event data recorder download when appropriate. Modern vehicles often store speed, brake application, throttle, and seatbelt status for a short window. If a motorcycle was involved, helmet damage photos and gear receipts matter. For bicycles, keep the broken components, especially the helmet and any snapped carbon parts. A motorcycle accident lawyer or bicycle accident attorney will use component failures and deformation to corroborate impact mechanics.

Store the damaged items. Do not toss cracked phone mounts, shattered child seats, or bent strollers. A head-on collision lawyer may use these artifacts with an expert to illustrate the energy transfer in a way adjusters cannot ignore.

Communication discipline: what to say, what not to say

Insurance adjusters are trained interviewers. Their questions feel friendly. Their scripts are designed to elicit concessions that later minimize your claim. Keep statements short and factual. Avoid speculation. Decline recorded statements until you consult a personal injury attorney. If you have already given one, make a note of the date and the adjuster's name, and request a copy.

Be cautious on social media. Even innocent vacation photos posted months later can be mischaracterized. If you must post, avoid discussing the crash or your injuries, and tighten privacy settings. Better yet, take a break from posting until your claim resolves. Screenshots last longer than memories, and a distracted driving accident attorney does not want to spend deposition time explaining your curated moments to a skeptical jury.

Keep a copy of every letter and email. Photograph mailed envelopes with postmarks before you open them. If an adjuster calls, log the date, time, and summary of the conversation. When disputes arise about offers or approvals, your call log turns into leverage.

Special contexts that change the documentation game

Not every crash fits the same mold. A few scenarios require extra vigilance because the responsible parties move quickly, and evidence evaporates.

Commercial trucking. For an 18-wheeler accident lawyer, time is everything. Many carriers recycle driver logs and overwrite telematics data within weeks. A prompt spoliation letter seeks to preserve dash cam video, electronic control module data, lane departure warnings, collision avoidance triggers, dispatch communications, and post-crash drug and alcohol testing results. If you have photos of the USDOT number, fleet markings, or trailer ownership, share them. Liability can hinge on whether the driver was an employee, owner-operator, or leased to another company.

Public transit and municipalities. Deadlines are shorter. A bus accident lawyer may need to file a notice of claim within a tight window, sometimes within 60 to 90 days, depending on jurisdiction. Document the route number, stop location, fare receipts, and any posted service alerts. Photograph signage and schedule boards. Track down other riders' contact information if possible.

Rideshare collisions. Insurance coverage can flip depending on the app status. Keep every app screen you can: driver profile, trip acceptance, route map, and end-of-trip receipt. If you were a passenger, have a friend request the same driver around the same time in the next day or two to preserve the profile if it disappears. A rideshare accident lawyer can subpoena records, but your screenshots speed up the analysis.

Hit and run. Speed matters. Note direction of travel, vehicle color and type, partial plate if you caught it, and any unique features like a missing hubcap or ladder rack. Ask nearby businesses for permission to note camera locations and operating hours. Some systems overwrite within 24 to 72 hours. A hit and run accident attorney can send preservation requests, but your early legwork often saves the day.

Two-wheel and pedestrian cases. For pedestrians and cyclists, the impact area on the vehicle tells a story. Photograph bumper heights, hood dents, and mirror damage. Save clothing and footwear, unwashed, in a bag. For cyclists, capture the exact position of the bike relative to the lane, door zone, or gutter. A bicycle accident attorney can map sight lines and lane widths using your photos and a measuring tape later.

Fault fights: small facts that move liability

Liability rarely turns on a single smoking gun. It often comes from small, corroborated facts.

Improper lane change disputes benefit from lane marker photos, blinker status if visible on video, and context like delivery trucks blocking a turn bay. An improper lane change accident attorney will also look for paint transfers along doors at an angle, which can hint at the direction of movement.

Rear-end collisions seem straightforward, yet defendants argue sudden stops or cut-ins. A rear-end collision attorney will mine brake light functionality, skid lengths, dash cam timing, and traffic signal sequences. If your brake lights malfunctioned recently, disclose it; candor now prevents credibility damage later.

Intersection crashes live and die by timing. Preserve signal cycle data if you can, or at least note the intersection name and direction of travel. Some cities keep logs. Include the exact lane you used, not just "left turn lane," but

“second left turn lane from the median.” When a car crash attorney works with a reconstruction expert, lane choice can shift right-of-way analysis.

Medical follow-through: consistency beats intensity

You do not need to see a dozen specialists to prove injury. You do need to follow reasonable medical advice and keep appointments. Gaps longer than a few weeks give insurers ammunition to argue you improved and then got hurt again doing something else. If you must miss a visit, reschedule and note why. If treatment is too expensive, tell your provider. Many will adjust frequency or recommend home programs. A personal injury lawyer can also help arrange medical liens or letters of protection when appropriate.

Be honest about prior conditions. If you had a cranky lower back before the crash, say so. Distinguish between baseline and aggravation. “I used to have stiffness after mowing. Now I have numbness down the left leg after 15 minutes of sitting.” Jurors reward accuracy, not perfection. A catastrophic injury lawyer often wins cases by showing how a manageable condition became disabling because of the collision, not by pretending the past did not exist.

Preserving digital trails: dash cams, phones, and vehicle data

Today, many stories are told through pixels and packets. If you have a dash cam, back up the footage immediately. Keep the original card untouched and share a copy. If the other vehicle was a bus, school bus, or corporate fleet, photograph the camera housings so your attorney can tailor preservation letters. For your phone, avoid deleting photos or messages, even if unrelated. Wholesale deletion invites discovery fights you do not want.

Modern vehicles capture more than most drivers realize. Lane keep assist and emergency braking events often leave breadcrumbs in proprietary systems. An auto accident attorney can coordinate with specialists to download data properly. Again, speed matters. If the car is heading to salvage, notify your lawyer so a hold can be placed.

Timing, deadlines, and why calendars matter

Statutes of limitation vary. In many states you have two to three years for injury claims, shorter for claims against government entities. Property damage deadlines may differ. Insurance policy requirements can be even tighter, with notice provisions measured in days. Put reminders on your calendar: police report pickup, first follow-up with your primary care provider, window to appeal a total loss valuation, proof-of-loss deadlines for certain coverages. A pedestrian accident attorney will track these, but your personal reminders help you avoid unnecessary risk.

How lawyers use what you collect

When you bring a folder, a phone album, and a tidy expense log to your first consult, a personal injury attorney can start strong. We organize your materials into liability, damages, and coverage. Liability gets the scene photos, witness details, police report, and any video. Damages gets medical records, imaging, pain diaries, photos of injuries, wage proof, and expense logs. Coverage analyzes all insurance policies: yours, the other driver’s, any household policies, employer policies if on the job, and in rideshare cases the tiered coverages. A car accident lawyer then identifies investigative gaps and assigns tasks: request footage, send spoliation letters, retain an expert, or schedule a recorded statement with preparation.

The cleaner your early documentation, the faster a fair settlement becomes possible. Insurers respond to specificity. When a distracted driving accident attorney can point to a 3:47 p.m. text on the driver’s phone, a traffic

camera facing eastbound, and a timestamped photo of sun glare on wet asphalt, negotiations move from vague arguments to concrete numbers.

A simple, high-yield evidence routine you can follow

Use this compact routine to capture what matters without overthinking it.

- Scene kit: photos from far, medium, close; IDs and insurance; witnesses; weather and road; any cameras; quick notes on admissions or distractions.
- Injury kit: prompt medical visit; save records; daily pain and function notes; periodic photos; keep receipts and mileage; tell providers about mental health symptoms.

If you follow that rhythm, even imperfectly, you give your attorney the raw materials to build a strong case. The rest can be filled in with subpoenas, expert analysis, and negotiation.

When the crash is complex or severe

Multi-vehicle pileups, fatalities, or severe orthopedic and neurologic injuries require early legal involvement. A catastrophic injury lawyer will quickly move to shield you from insurer tactics, coordinate specialists, and build a life care plan if future treatment and home modifications are necessary. In truck cases, the trucking company's rapid response team may be on scene within hours. Do not wait for the adjuster's call to seek counsel. In my experience, calling a truck accident lawyer within days helps preserve data that can vanish in a week.

Severe cases also demand patience. Maximal medical improvement often takes months, sometimes longer than a year. Settling before your prognosis stabilizes risks leaving future surgeries and lost earning capacity uncompensated. Good documentation reduces that risk by showing not just where you are today, but how you got here and what doctors expect next.

Final thoughts from the trenches

You do not need to be perfect. You do need to be consistent. Save first, sort later. Small, ordinary proofs add up: the 18-dollar parking receipt for the neurologist, the scuffed knee brace photo, the email turning down a weekend shift. If you feel overwhelmed, hand the job to a trusted friend or family member or ask your car crash attorney's office for a template. I often give clients a shared folder with simple labels: Scene, Medical, Work, Expenses, Vehicle. When in doubt, drop it in.

Every case rests on credibility. Documentation is credibility on paper. Do the quiet work now, and you will thank yourself when negotiations start, or when a jury weighs your story against the insurer's. Whether you eventually work with a personal injury lawyer, a motorcycle accident lawyer, a pedestrian accident attorney, or a delivery truck accident lawyer, the same truth holds: strong cases are built from the ground up, one solid piece of evidence at a time.