



2025/09/09

MIRROR ON THE WALL: PRIMA FACIE

Legal terms are often filled with Latin phrases that carry immense weight. One of the frequently used terms is "*prima facie*". Literally translating to "at first sight" or "on the face of it," this concept is the key that unlocks the door to a legal challenge.

Legal Definition: "On Its Face"

In legal terms, *prima facie* evidence is evidence that, on the face of it or at first glance, is sufficient to support a claim. A *prima facie* case is one where a case is established by *prima facie* evidence such that, unless it is rebutted, i.e. left uncontested or unexplained, it is adequate and sufficient to prove the claim. This does not mean the case has been proved beyond all doubt, it means the initial burden of proof (he who alleges, must prove) has been met. In other words, the facts, as presented, are legally adequate to support the claim and demand a response. The burden then shifts to the opposing party to rebut, or challenge (respond to) the evidence.

In law, surfaces can be deceiving. A story that seems open and shut at first glance often reveals hidden complexities upon closer examination. This is the very heart of the legal concept of "*prima facie*". It is a common occurrence that initial evidence only tells part of the story, and its true purpose is to begin a process of deeper inquiry.



The Old Fable of The Evil Queen and her Magic Mirror

The Mirror's Declaration: Establishing a *Prima Facie* Case

Each day, the Evil Queen stands before her magic mirror and demands validation: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?".

The mirror, bound by magical programming to state a surface level, observable truth, replies: "My Queen, you are the fairest of them all."

This declaration is a *prima facie* truth. Based on the available evidence, the Queen's appearance, her royal gown and her commanding presence, the statement holds. To any observer in the throne room, the claim seems valid. It is a truth "on its face," sufficient to maintain the Queen's status and dismiss any immediate challenges. In a legal sense, the Queen has, through the mirror's testimony, established a *prima facie* case for her title. The burden would be on any challenger to prove otherwise.

The Deeper Inspection: Rebutting the Evidence

But we, the audience, know a darker truth. The Queen's beauty is not entirely natural. It is a façade maintained by potions, spells, and a toxic vanity. The mirror's statement is factually correct on a superficial level, but it obscures a more profound reality, that this "fairest" status is artificially sustained and morally bankrupt.

This is where the *prima facie* case shows its true legal purpose, it is not an end, but a beginning. It creates a platform for the opposing party to present a rebuttal.



When Snow White grows into her own natural beauty and the mirror is finally forced to acknowledge her, the Queen's *prima facie* case isn't destroyed; it is challenged. Snow White's existence introduces new evidence that contradicts the initial claim. She represents contradictory facts, i.e. genuine and inner beauty *versus* manipulated and artificial beauty.

The Queen employs desperate actions by sending the Huntsman and using the poisoned apple, these are not legitimate rebuttals. They are an attempt to destroy the evidence rather than refute it. In a court of law, this would be the equivalent of witness tampering or destroying documents, which only weakens one's own position.

The Final Judgment: Justice Prevails

The story's conclusion provides the perfect legal resolution. Snow White does not defeat the Queen by simply being more beautiful. She wins through a process of exposure and consequence.

The Queen is ultimately forced to confront the truth of her own artifice. Her defeat comes when her superficial *prima facie* case is completely stripped away, revealing the ugly reality beneath. The magic that maintained her beauty is broken, and her true form is revealed. The "fact" that the mirror stated for years is finally and irrevocably rebutted by overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

The Prince's role is that of the judge, who, after seeing all the evidence (the Queen's treachery, Snow White's innocence, the Dwarfs' testimony), delivers the final verdict. The Queen's initial, *prima facie* claim to the title is forever voided.

1. **A Prima Facie Case is Superficial:** It is based on the evidence as it initially appears. It does not determine ultimate truth, only sufficiency. The mirror's daily statement was legally adequate, but not deeply true.
2. **Its Purpose is to Trigger Scrutiny:** The value of establishing a *prima facie* case is that it forces the other side to respond. It moves the process from allegation to investigation, just as the mirror's eventual admission forced the Queen's story into its final, dramatic act.
3. **Truth is Uncovered Through Rebuttal:** Justice is served not by accepting the first answer, but by rigorously testing it. Snow White's natural beauty and virtue served as the living rebuttal evidence that dismantled the Queen's fraudulent claim.



In the end, "*prima facie*" is the legal system's version of the mirror's first answer. It is a necessary starting point, a statement that something *appears* to be true. But in law, real justice requires looking deeper than the surface, challenging the evidence, and ultimately, revealing the truth.

***Prima Facie* in Law**

- **Civil Cases:** In a negligence claim, a plaintiff establishes a *prima facie* case by proving: 1) the defendant had a duty of care, 2) they breached that duty, 3) this breach caused an injury, and 4) actual damages resulted. If proven, the defendant must then explain why they were not negligent.
- **Criminal Cases:** A prosecutor establishes a *prima facie* case by presenting evidence that suggests a crime was committed and that the accused probably committed it. This is the standard required for a valid charge or for a case to survive a motion to acquit and go to trial.
- **Procedural Tool:** Lawyers file "motions for summary judgment" arguing that the other side has failed to establish a *prima facie* case. This essentially means, even if all the opponent's evidence is true, they still haven't made a legally valid claim or defence.

The concept of *prima facie* ensures that the legal system is both efficient and just. It prevents frivolous litigation from clogging the courts while guaranteeing that every claim with a legitimate foundation is adjudicated. It is the crucial first "yes" that allows the process to continue.

By [Adv. Sannah Pooe](#) 2025/09/09