

A will is a written declaration by an individual (testator) of how to distribute assets after the testator's death. If the will was prepared and executed in accordance with legally required formalities, and if the testator was competent and not under duress, the probate court will generally order that the testator's plan be carried out by the [executor](#) (also called a personal representative).

A will usually does not exclusively direct the disposition of all of a person's property. The most common examples of property that do not pass by will are jointly held property and life insurance payable to a named beneficiary. While a will is an essential part of almost any estate plan, it should be viewed as only one part of the total picture.