



STRUCTURE OF THE FEDERAL COURTS

★ *What is a District Court? What is a Circuit Court?* ★

★ It is a trial court where cases start. Facts are established and law is applied.

★ It is an appellate court where decisions of trial courts are reviewed.

DISTRICT COURTS

What You'll See in the Courtroom

1 judge on the bench.
A witness stand. A jury box.

1 Judge ★ Yes Witnesses ★ 6-12 Jurors

CIRCUIT COURTS OF APPEALS

What You'll See in the Courtroom

3 or more judges on the bench.
No witness stand. No jury box.

3 or More Judges ★ No Witnesses ★ No Jurors

TRIAL COURTS ★ 94 DISTRICTS

1 - 4 Districts Per State

1 District



This is a teaching tool that simplifies information for students. Find more classroom-ready and courtroom-ready materials and activities in the educational resources section of uscourts.gov

APPELLATE COURTS ★ 13 CIRCUITS

Source uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources

Typically 3-Judge Panels

Sometimes En Banc: All Judges



For more information, contact the national educational outreach manager for the federal courts Rebecca Fanning at rebecca_fanning@ao.uscourts.gov

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Comparing

Federal and State Courts

Simplified

This is a teaching tool that simplifies key points for students. Find more information in the educational resources section of uscourts.gov

Federal Courts



State Courts

Created by

U.S. Constitution



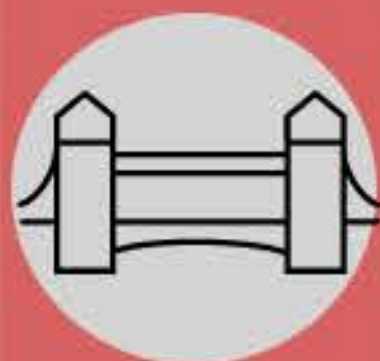
State Constitution

Structure

U.S Supreme Court

13 Circuit Courts of Appeals

94 District Trial Courts



52 Courts of Last Resort

~46 Intermediate Courts of Appeals

~16,000 Trial Courts

Judge Selection

President Nominates

Senate Confirms



Combinations of:
Governor Appoints

Legislature Confirms

Voters Elect

Term of Service

Typically Lifetime Appointment



Different Tenure Lengths

Types of Cases

U.S. Constitution

■ **Cross State/Country Lines**

■ **Federal Crimes**

■ **Bankruptcy**



State Constitution

■ **In the Same State**

■ **State Crimes**

■ **Family Law**

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Cases Handled in Federal Courts



Simplified

What Kinds of Legal Issues Come to Federal Courts?

Constitutional Questions



Individual Rights

Federal Issues



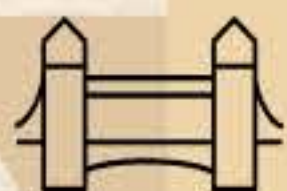
U.S. Constitution

Criminal Laws Made by Congress

Federal Laws and Regulations

Crimes on Federal Land

Habeas Corpus Petitions



Cases That Cross State Lines



State v. State

Individuals and Businesses in Different States

Transportation and Business Transactions Across State Lines



Cases That Cross International Lines



International Commerce Regulations

International Trade Laws

Foreign States and Foreign Nationals

Admiralty Laws

Cases Involving

Finance



Stock Market

Intellectual Property



Bankruptcy

Stock Market-Related Issues

Patent, Copyright, Intellectual Property

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Pathways to the Supreme Court of the United States

Cases Come from Federal and State Courts

Federal Court System

State Court System

13

Number of Federal Courts of Appeals.

The final deciders in all but ~ 100 appeals taken by the U.S. Supreme Court annually.

U.S. Courts of Appeals

When parties think the trial court made an error in their case, they, usually, can ask a U.S. Court of Appeals to examine the proceedings, the law(s) used, and the decision.

Typically, three judges on the bench review the trial record to see if there was unfairness in the process and/or errors in what law was selected and how it was applied.

At an appeal, there is:

- No jury.
- No witnesses.
- No new evidence.

94

Number of Federal Trial Courts

U.S. District Courts

A judge presides over a trial to make sure the process is fair. The judge decides what law(s) to apply. When there is no jury, the judge listens to the witnesses, weighs the evidence, applies the law, and makes the final decision.

In a jury trial, the judge does not make the final decision. Jurors analyze the evidence -- the testimony and the exhibits. They decide the facts based on what evidence is credible and relevant. The judge decides what law(s) to apply. The jury makes the final decision.

What is Evidence?

- +Witness testimony
- +Exhibits

52

Number of State Courts of Last Resort

State Courts of Last Resort

State Courts of last resort have different titles in different states. In some states they are called the State Supreme Court. However, all review cases appealed from intermediate courts of appeals and trial courts.

Some of their decisions can be appealed to the Supreme Court of the United States.

46

Number of Intermediate Courts of Appeals

Intermediate Courts of Appeals

Many states have an intermediate court that handles most of the appeals from the trial courts. These courts usually work in three-judge panels. Decisions can be appealed to the highest court in the state -- the court of last resort.

~16,000

Number of Trial Courts

State Trial Courts

State trial courts handle the vast majority of legal cases in the nation. They hear criminal, civil, domestic relations, juvenile, and traffic matters. Problem-solving courts deal with issues such as drugs and mental health.

This is a teaching tool to simplify key points for students. For courtroom- and classroom-ready resources, go to uscourts.gov Search: Education Resources

Start Here

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