

A wooden gavel with a smooth, polished finish lies diagonally across the frame. In the background, a scroll of parchment is unrolled, displaying elegant cursive handwriting. The scene is set against a deep blue background, with a single white star visible in the lower-left corner. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the wood and parchment.

The Judicial Branch

Three Levels of Courts in the U.S.

The Motto

- Written on the front of the Supreme Court is the motto, “**Equal Justice Under Law**”



What do courts do?

- Use different kinds of law to **settle disputes**
- Ensure that laws are **fairly enforced**

The Right to a Fair Trial

- The right to have a **lawyer**
- The right to bail
 - **money** paid to be released from jail until court date
 - must be reasonable
- Indictment is when enough **evidence** is gathered to bring a person to **court**

Right To A Jury

- Jurors are people who **serve on a jury**
- Jury duty is when people **serve on a jury**
- Verdict is the **decision** made by a jury deciding the fate of the accused
- Hung jury is a jury that cannot reach a **unanimous decision** when all jurors are in agreement



Other Rights When Going to Trial

- Innocent until proven guilty-case must be proved **beyond a reasonable doubt**
- Testimony-witnesses evidence **given in court**
- Accused persons can't be forced to **testify** against themselves
- Right to hear and question all **witnesses**
- Right to appeal-request for a review of the

Innocent Until Proven Guilty

[Video](#)

The Federal Court System



Supreme Court

- Highest court in the federal system
- Nine Justices, meeting in Washington, D.C.
- Appeals jurisdiction through certiorari process
- Limited original jurisdiction over some cases



Courts of Appeal

- Intermediate level in the federal system
- 12 regional "circuit" courts, including D.C. Circuit
- No original jurisdiction; strictly appellate



District Courts

- Lowest level in the federal system
- 94 judicial districts in 50 states & territories
 - No appellate jurisdiction
- Original jurisdiction over most cases

What Cases Are Tried in Federal Courts?

- Anyone who violates the U.S. Constitution or **federal laws**
- Crimes committed on U.S. **ships**
- U.S. Ambassadors breaking laws in other countries
- Crimes committed on **federal property**
- Disagreements between **states**

Jurisdiction of Federal Courts

- Jurisdiction is the authority to administer **law**
 - It's who has the power to try the case in court
- Two types of jurisdiction:
 - Original jurisdiction-first court to hear a **case**
 - Appellate jurisdiction-reviews other **court's** cases

District Courts

- Lowest courts in the country
- Total of **94** district courts in the country
- Trials with **juries**
- Only **one** judge per case
- U.S. Marshalls arrest and subpoena people
- Subpoena is a document requiring someone to **appear** in court

Three Levels of Federal Courts



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Court of Appeals

- Middle level court
- Reviews cases from other **courts**
- Total of **12** courts in the country
- **6** to 28 judges depending on the size of the trial
- No **jury** in these courts
- Panel of three judges to make **decisions**

Court of Appeals

- These courts decide if people have been given a **fair** trial
- Decisions of Appeals Courts:
 - Verdict is **upheld** and it is decided that there were no problems with the first trial
 - A remand is decided and the court orders a new **trial**

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The Supreme Court



The Supreme Court

- There is only one Supreme Court in the U.S.
- Highest court in our country
- Total of **9** justices
- Justices is a fancy word for **judges**
- They hear cases from the lower courts
- Decide if court decisions are **constitutional**

About Judges

- The following applies to judges at all three levels of courts
- Appointed by **the President**
- Approved by **the Senate**
- Serve **life** terms
- Salaries cannot be **lowered**
- Average salaries are around **\$150,000** per year

More About the Supreme Court

- There are **9** judges on the Supreme Court
- President's pick judges that share their same **political views**
- The Supreme Court can declare laws **unconstitutional** that are passed by **Congress** and/or the President

Supreme Court Cases

- The Supreme Court only hears about **100** cases per year
- “Rule of Four”-at least four of the **nine** justices must agree to want to hear a case for it to be **heard**
- Types of Verdicts (decisions):
 - Decision of the lower court is **upheld**
 - Remand-case gets a new **trial**

The Supreme Court in Action

- The Supreme Court begins to hear cases the first Monday in **October** and ends in **June**
- This means they do not hear cases from July until October each year

Supreme Court Lingo For Procedures

- Brief-a written statement about a **case**
- Public Session-both sides in the case appear in court to give their **oral arguments**
- Justices then deliberate, or vote in private to make their decision

Supreme Court Opinions

- Majority Opinion-the final decision of the majority of the justices and their **reasons** behind their decision
- Concurring Opinion-majority of justices agree on a decision but for **different reasons**
- Dissenting Opinion-**don't** agree with the majority of the justices

How does the Supreme Court check the other branches?

- The Supreme Court can have Congress rewrite laws to be **constitutional**
- The Supreme Court can suggest changes, or **amendments**, to the Constitution

Famous Supreme Court Cases

- Marbury vs Madison (1803)
 - Established the process of **judicial** review
 - This lets the judicial branch make sure the other two branches are doing **constitutional** things
- Plessy vs Ferguson (1896)
 - States that segregation was ok as long as it was **equal**
 - Allowed **segregation** to continue in the U.S.

Images of Segregation



Famous Supreme Court Cases

- Brown vs The Board of Education (1954)
 - Reversed the Plessy vs Ferguson ruling
 - Ruled that separate was **not equal**
 - This was the first major legislative action to end **segregation**
 - Promoted **integration**

Supreme Court Cases

- Miranda vs Arizona (1966)
 - Criminals must be read their rights when they are **arrested**
 - Created the **Miranda Rights**
 - You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be held against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney one will be provided for you. Do you understand?

Supreme Court Cases

- Tinker vs Des Moines School District (1969)
 - Established that **symbolic** speech was protected by the first amendment



Supreme Court Cases

- Gideon vs Wainwright (1963)
 - Upheld the right to a **lawyer** even if you can't afford on

