



A JUROR'S JOURNEY COMPANION GUIDE

April 2026

**Civics
@Work**
by the U.S. Chamber of
Commerce Foundation

What is the Juror Education Project?

The [Juror Education Project](#) is a nonpartisan initiative of the [Civic Trust](#)[®] of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. The Project envisions a democracy where employees are informed, engaged, and recognize jury service as both a privilege and a civic duty. Through the Juror Education Project, employers can provide resources to help their employees better participate in the jury process and, in doing so, play an active role in our American democratic system.

Our country's jury system is more than just a courtroom tradition. Jury duty is one of the most direct ways citizens engage in governance and participate in our democratic process. It empowers regular citizens to influence legal outcomes, and reinforces the idea that justice is a shared civic responsibility. **Thank you for taking the time to prepare yourself for jury service—it's democracy in action, one verdict at a time.**

The Juror Education Project has been developed in consultation with subject matter experts from across the legal system. The information provided and skills imparted are designed to educate potential jurors about the way the American jury system works. The materials provided do not constitute legal advice, nor are they intended to advocate for a particular perspective or outcome.



A Juror's Journey

“A Juror’s Journey”, a 35-minute online simulation, is the first initiative of The Juror Education Project. It leverages the moment employees receive a jury summons as an opportunity to enhance their understanding of the American justice system and the critical role they play in it.

In this packet, you will find supplemental content to “A Juror’s Journey” and additional resources for further learning. To start, here’s a fun, animated version of the [history of our jury system](#) created by the State Bar of Georgia.

Federal vs. State Courts

Court Structure & Jurisdictions

Article III of the U.S. Constitution establishes the U.S. Supreme Court and empowers Congress to create lower federal courts. State courts are created according to each state's constitution. State court systems vary from state to state. In the example from the Judicial Learning Center below, you can see that the Missouri Court structure mirrors the Federal Court structure. In general, the State and Federal courts do not overlap. However, there are [rare cases when the U.S. Supreme Court reviews a state court decision](#).

Federal System

Supreme Court

- Supreme Court of the United States
- Reviews cases from Federal and State Appellate Courts

Court of Appeals

- 13 Appellate Courts
- Review decisions from District Courts

District Courts

- 94 District (A.K.A Trial) Courts
- Hear criminal and civil cases
- Specialized courts for bankruptcy, international trade, federal claims

State System*

Supreme Court

- State Supreme Court
- Reviews cases from Appellate Courts (and on occasion, Judicial Courts)

Court of Appeals

- 3 Appellate Courts
- Review decisions from Judicial Courts

Judicial/Trial Courts

- 45 Judicial (A.K.A Trial) Courts
- Hear criminal and civil cases
- Specialized courts family and juvenile

** Using Missouri Court System as an example of a state court system. Each state court system differs based on its state constitution. Look up your state to find out their court system!*

LEARN MORE

[Comparing State and Federal Courts](#) | The Judicial Learning Center (Video)
[Understanding Federal Law vs. State Law: Jurisdiction Explained](#) | GovFacts

Civil vs. Criminal Trials

Civil Trials

Criminal Trials

Types of cases (non-exhaustive)

- Personal Injury claims
- Contract disputes Family
- law cases (divorce, custody, etc.)

- Drug crimes
- Sexual offenses
- Assault and battery Murder
- Weapons-related offenses
- Fraud
- Larceny
- Burglary
- Financial crimes
-

Parties involved

- A Plaintiff:
 - An individual
 - A corporation or non-profit
 - The U.S. government
- A Defendant (same as above)

- A Prosecutor representing the government
- A Defendant
 - An individual
 - An organization, corporation, or nonprofit

Burden of proof

- Preponderance of the evidence (meaning more likely than not)

- Beyond a reasonable doubt

Possible verdicts

- Liable
- Not liable*

- Guilty
- Not Guilty*

Penalties

- Monetary Particular
- action as a remedy

- Incarceration or death penalty
- Community service
- Fines
- Counseling

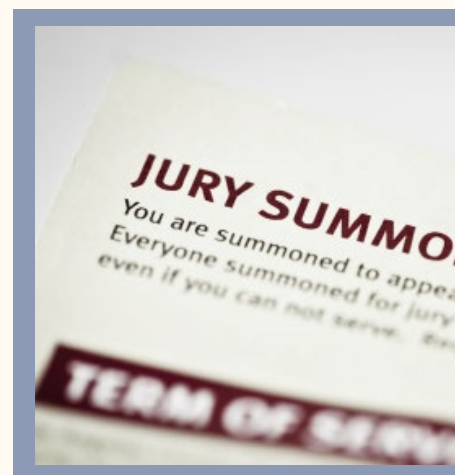
**Courts never return a verdict of "innocent"; the legal system recognizes only guilty/not guilty or liable/not liable.*

Before the Trial Begins

Receiving a Jury Summons

A jury summons is a **court order for potential jury service** you receive via the U.S. Postal Service. It contains information specifying the date, time, and location where you must report. A few key pieces of information about jury summons:

- It is illegal to ignore a jury summons and doing so can result in penalties, including fines, or, in some cases, jail time.
- Being summoned does not necessarily mean you will serve on a jury.
- In some cases, you may be instructed to call a designated number the night before your scheduled report date to confirm whether your service is required.



Courts gather names from sources that cover a large and diverse group of citizens, aiming to have a jury pool that fairly represents the community. Once your name is in that pool, the court system randomly selects people to receive jury notices. Most commonly, they use:

- voter registration records
- driver's license or state ID records
- records from the Department of Motor Vehicles
- state tax filings
- utility records

Want to know the laws governing jury duty in your state? Workforce.com has a simple breakdown regarding legal policies governing jury duty in each state to get you started: [Jury duty laws in every US state \(2025\)](#).

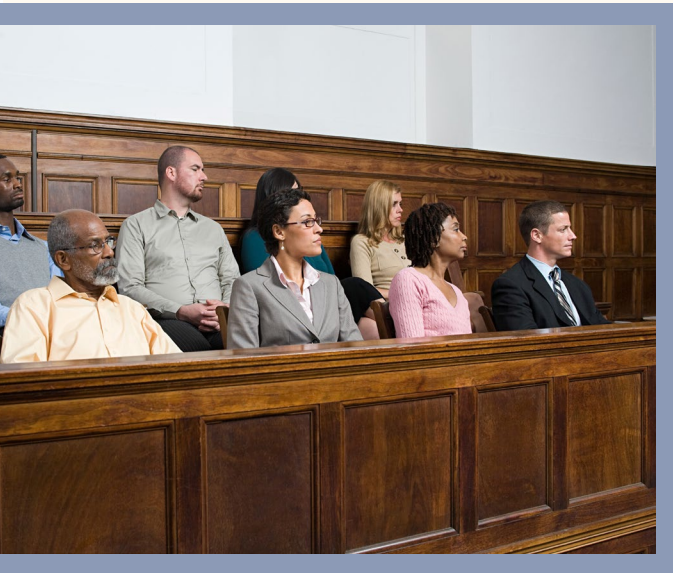
Beware of Jury Scams

There are consequences for missing jury duty and scammers take advantage of this fact to try to get money or your personal information. Here's how you can tell it's a scam:

- Courts, or any government agency, will never ask for payment over the phone.
- Courts never ask for sensitive personal information, like your Social Security number or date of birth, over the phone.
- Only scammers insist that you can only pay with gift cards, cryptocurrency, or via wire transfer because it's very hard to track and to get your money back.

Jury Selection Process

The judge often begins jury selection by introducing the case in very general terms, explaining who the parties are and what kind of trial it will be. The next step involves questioning by both the judge and the attorneys. Jurors may be asked about their jobs, families, prior experiences with the legal system, or attitudes about certain issues.



During jury selection, also known as **voir dire** (pronounced vwahr-DEER), you and other potential jurors are questioned to ensure you can be fair, impartial, and follow the law. Two ways jurors can be dismissed are a challenge for cause or a peremptory challenge.

A challenge for cause is a dismissal if a juror clearly shows that they cannot be impartial. Attorneys have an unlimited number of challenges for cause.

Example: a doctor may have actual or implied bias in a malpractice case.

A peremptory challenge allows an attorney to excuse a juror without giving a specific reason. They have a limited number of peremptory challenges during jury selection, and peremptory challenges cannot be used to exclude jurors based on race or gender alone (see [Batson v. Kentucky](#)).

Example: A juror indicates that they believe police officers always tell the truth, though they feel that they can be impartial in a case where a police officer will be a key witness. In this scenario, a peremptory challenge may be appropriate.

You could be elected and named as an alternate juror. They are extra jurors selected during the jury selection process to step in if one of the regular jurors cannot finish serving. Their role is to ensure that the trial can continue smoothly without being delayed or restarted if a juror becomes unavailable.

LEARN MORE

[Jury Duty Frequently Asked Questions](#) | U.S District Court
[Learn about juror eligibility and disqualification](#) | Mass.gov
[What is voir dire?](#) | KPRC 2 Houston (video)
[challenge for cause](#) | Cornell Law School | LII / Legal Information Institute
[Mastering Voir Dire Sample](#) | American Bar Association



All civil and criminal trials follow the same order of events:

1 Jurors are sworn in & given preliminary instructions by the judge.

2 Opening Statements - Prosecution/ Plaintiff, then Defense.

3 Prosecution/ Plaintiff present case with evidence and witnesses.

4 Defense cross-examines the Prosecution/ Plaintiff's witnesses.

5 Defense presents case with evidence and witnesses.

6 Prosecution/ Plaintiff cross-examines the Defense's witnesses.

7 Prosecution/ Plaintiff may rebut arguments made by the Defense.

8 Closing Statements - Prosecution/ Plaintiff, then Defense.



The Role of a Juror

Once the final jury has been chosen and sworn in, the judge gives the jurors preliminary instructions meant to help guide them throughout the trial. This includes the role of the judge, jury, and attorneys, as well as expected juror conduct.

Expected juror conduct can include, but is not limited to:

- Arriving on time
- Not discussing the case with anyone – the only time you may discuss the case is with other jurors during jury deliberation
- Reporting any improper conduct by a fellow juror
- Reporting incidents of anyone trying to talk to you about the trial
- Not conducting independent research into the case
- Not publicly sharing an opinion on any legal matters pertaining to the case

LEARN MORE

[The Trial Process](#) | The Judicial Learning Center
[Jurors' Code of Conduct](#) | Franklin Court of Common Pleas
[Jury Handbook](#) | Judicial Branch of California

Types of Juries You May Serve On: Petit Juries vs. Grand Juries

Grand Juries

Grand juries focus on preliminary criminal matters only and assess evidence presented by a prosecutor to determine if someone should be put on trial.

In some states, grand juries can also be used for civil matters.

- Typically have between 16 and 23 members – the largest kind of jury in our judicial system.
- Service can last between 5 weeks and 24 months, though grand juries do not typically meet every day.
- All proceedings are private.
- Consider multiple cases over the course of their term of service.

Petit Juries

Petit juries, also known as trial juries, decide both criminal and civil cases.

- Typically have between 6 and 12 jurors.
- The trial may be public, but jury deliberation is private.
- Service term lasts the length of the trial deliberation.
- Consider only one case.

Jury Deliberation

Once closing statements have been delivered, the jury will receive a final set of instructions from the judge prior to their deliberations. During jury deliberation you will be expected to:

- Elect a foreperson who will lead deliberations and provide the verdict to the judge
- Consider the evidence put forth by the prosecution/plaintiff and the defense
- Determine whether the prosecution or plaintiff met their necessary burden of proof
- Provide a unanimous verdict of (not) guilty or (not) liable based on your determination

In the event that you cannot come to a unanimous decision the judge may:

- Direct the jury to continue deliberations until a verdict is reached
- Declare a mistrial due to a hung jury, meaning that since no verdict could be reached the trial is over and the prosecution/plaintiff can decide to retry the case at a later date



When considering the evidence and making a determination, you are able to ask:

Clarifying questions about legal definitions and instructions, or uncertainties regarding the evidence presented during trial.

Fact-finding questions to provide additional details such as timelines, or relationships between parties involved.

Opinion-seeking questions to other jurors involved in deliberations.

LEARN MORE

[Behind Closed Doors - A Guide to Jury Deliberation](#) | American Judicature Society & Wisconsin Courts
[Duty to Deliberate - Model Jury Instructions](#) | United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit [Protocols: Jury Deliberations](#) | The Civil Jury Project at NYU School of Law
[What is a mistrial? Meaning of the court term, plus what happens after](#) | USA Today

Learn More About the Judicial System

Additional Courses

[Civics Break](#) | Bolch Judicial Institute of Duke Law

Civics Break is a non-partisan course that examines the rule of law, how courts fit into the American democratic system, what judges do, and how courts and judges affect our lives.

- Can be taken as a self-paced individual course or have a member of the Bolch Judicial Institute present to your team
- Broken down into three easy-to-digest modules
- Provides course completion certificate upon request

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the absolute basics I need to know about the U.S. judicial system?

[Legal System Basics | Crash Course Government and Politics #18](#)

How do U.S. Supreme Court justices get appointed?

[How do US Supreme Court justices get appointed? | Peter Paccone](#)

What is Judicial Review?

[Judicial Review | Crash Course Government and Politics #21](#)

How does the U.S. Supreme Court Work?

[Supreme Court of the United States Procedures | Crash Course Government and Politics #20](#)

Can You Get in Trouble for Not Showing Up for Jury Duty?

Yes, check out our section on [Jury Summons](#)

Do I get paid while I'm on Jury Duty?

[Do You Get Paid for Jury Duty? And How Much? | LegalClarity.org](#)

What are the valid excuses from having to serve on a Jury?

Yes, check out our section on [Jury Selection](#)

