

JURY DUTY

Lexile 680L

Jury duty is a right and a responsibility of the citizens of the United States. A **jury** is a group of people who help in court cases. People are selected at random for jury duty. This means they are chosen by chance. The jury and a judge listen to information about a person on trial for breaking a law. After this, the members of the jury meet to discuss what they have heard. They vote to decide if the person on trial is guilty or innocent. Then they explain their decision to a judge.

Jury duty is an important part of the justice system in the United States. Juries make sure that people on trial are treated fairly. Most people will serve on a jury at some point during their life.

Background

Juries are part of the US **justice system**. The justice system is the part of the government that makes sure people obey laws. If someone breaks a law, or says someone else broke a law, these people may go to court. Going to court is called a **trial**.

During a trial, a judge and jury hear the case. They look at **evidence**, proof that someone may have broken a law. The judge and jury decide whether a law was broken. Then they decide what to do next. They often choose to punish people who break laws. Punishments may be fines or time in jail.

The judge and jury work together in every case. The judge decides which laws may have been broken. The jury looks at the evidence. The judge helps the jury understand the laws. Then the jury decides whether any laws were broken. If someone broke a law, the judge may choose a punishment.

How Juries Began

Long ago, people did not have trials by jury. Instead, a king, a judge, or another strong leader usually made the decision alone. These trials were often unfair. The leader did not have to pay attention to evidence. He or she could even lie and blame people for crimes they did not commit.

In 1215, people in England became tired of unfair trials. They felt the king was treating them badly. The king at that time, King John I, agreed. He signed the Magna Carta. This was a document that gave people more rights. One of the most important rights was to have trials by jury. This is one of the most important rights in any free country. It is protected in the United States by the Constitution.

Types of Juries



Trial Jury

A trial jury is also known as a petit jury.

- Jury of 6-12 people
- Trials are generally public
- Defendants have the right to testify and call witnesses on their behalf
- Final outcome is a verdict

Grand Jury

A grand jury decides if there is enough evidence of a crime to go to trial.

- Jury of 16-23 people
- Jury hearings are not open to the public
- Defendants and their attorneys do not have the right to appear before the grand jury
- Final outcome is choosing to indict or not

Descriptions of trial and grand juries.

Source: uscourts.gov/services-forms/jury-service/types-juries. Photo: Public Domain, via www.pixabay.com.

Who Serves on Juries

Most citizens in the United States can be on a jury. There are only a few rules. Jury members must be able to read, write, and speak English. They must be physically and mentally able to follow the trial. They must also not have been in jail recently.

Some people like to serve on juries. They feel it is their duty as a citizen. They may also think it is interesting and important. Other people feel jury duty is a burden. Sometimes people cannot serve on juries. They may not be able to get the time off work to serve. They may be sick or too busy caring for their family. These people may be **exempted**, or allowed not to serve.

How Juries Work

People are chosen at **random** for jury duty. Random means without a reason. Choosing people at random helps make the trial fair. A random jury means that all kinds of people may be involved. People from many neighborhoods and backgrounds will be able to study the evidence.

When people are chosen for jury duty, they are sent a **summons**. A summons is an order. People must answer the summons. If they are chosen to serve on a jury, they must go to the court on a certain day and time. Courts in big cities may summon 100,000 or more jurors per year.

Jury members may be chosen for several kinds of cases. The main kinds are civil trials and criminal trials. Civil trials are usually about disagreements between people. Six or more people may serve on a civil jury. Criminal trials are usually about broken laws and other more serious crimes. Twelve people usually serve on a criminal jury.

People on a jury should take their job seriously. They must show up on time when they are summoned. They must pay attention to the case. They must think hard about the evidence. They must help keep the justice system fair for all people. People are usually paid for serving on juries.

Bibliography

Books

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- Griesing, David. "Reconsidering Jury Duty." *Newsday*, 18 March 2017, www.newsday.com/opinion/commentary/reconsidering-jury-duty-1.13252441. Accessed 23 March 2017. This article shows why jury duty is interesting and important.

Websites

- "Jury Duty FAQs." *United States District Court, Southern District of New York*, www.nysd.uscourts.gov/jury_faq.php. Accessed 23 March 2017. This website presents and answers many common questions about jury duty.
- "Jury Service." *The Philadelphia Courts, First Judicial District of Pennsylvania*, 2017, www.courts.phila.gov/jury-service/. Accessed 23 March 2017. This website lists important rules and other information for potential jurors.
- "Learn About Jury Service." *Administrative Office of the United States Courts*, www.uscourts.gov/services-forms/jury-service/learn-about-jury-service. Accessed 23 March 2017. This website outlines the role of juries and their work with judges in two main kinds of cases.

■ By Mark Dziak

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COMPREHENSION TEST

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. What is the main reason jury duty is important to a country?

- A. It is a good way to earn money.
 - B. It helps make court trials fair.
 - C. It teaches people about courts.
 - D. It helps voters choose better judges.
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2. What protects the right to jury trials in the United States?

- A. the Constitution
 - B. the Magna Carta
 - C. summonses
 - D. exemptions
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3. How does a court choose people for juries?

- A. The court chooses people who know about law.
- B. The court chooses people in need of a job.
- C. The court chooses people who know the judge.
- D. The court chooses people by random chance.

Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

4. _____ in court might prove that a person broke a law.

5. People receive a _____ when they are chosen for jury duty.

6. If a person does not have to serve on a jury, he or she is _____.

COMPREHENSION TEST ANSWERS

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Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

4. **Evidence** in a trial might prove that a person broke a law.

5. People receive a **summons** when they are chosen for jury duty.

6. If a person does not have to serve on a jury, he or she is **exempted**.