

What is the Job of Federal Judges?

This is a teaching tool that simplifies key points for students. Find more information at uscourts.gov Educational Resources.

Settle Cases

Try Cases



Ensure the Process is Fair

Make and Write Decisions



Article III of the U.S. Constitution establishes the Three Branches of Government. The Third Branch is the Judiciary.

Justices on the U.S. Supreme Court

Consider ~7,000 appeals per year and select ~100 cases for oral arguments

Hear ~100 oral arguments every year

Write opinions

ROLE

The ultimate interpreter of the Constitution

Judges on U.S. Courts of Appeals

Hear appeals in panels of 3 or more appellate judges in each Circuit

Review the record of the trial court below for errors in procedures and/or application of laws

Examine the trial transcripts

No witness testimony; no new evidence

ROLE

The error-correcting court for the trial courts. Last stop for all but ~ 100 cases taken by the Supreme Court.

Judges on U.S. District Courts

U.S. District Court Judges

Settle or try criminal & civil cases from 1st appearance through sentencing

U.S. Magistrate Judges

Hear cases authorized by law and/or assigned by District Court Judges

U.S. Bankruptcy Court Judges

Handle matters related to individual and corporate debtors and creditors

ROLE

The court where cases start -- either settled or tried

Witnesses testify -- Evidence is presented

The Judge decides the law

If there is a jury, jurors determine the facts