

Jury

The jury trial, is a common law process by which the "peers of the accused" are responsible for listening to a dispute, evaluating the evidence presented, deciding on the facts, and making a decision in accordance with the rules of law and their jury instructions. Trial by jury tends to occur only when a crime is considered serious. People qualify to serve as jurors if they are registered to vote and have a Texas driver's license or identification card.



Jury Pool

Small group of jurors are selected to decide a verdict at trial

Jury Panel

Smaller group of potential jurors are sent to courtroom

Jury

District clerk assembles large group of potential jurors in assembly room

As shown in the graphic above, prospective jurors are first part of a large pool. Then, they are assigned to panels, which are smaller groups from which jurors are selected. Prospective jurors that are put on a jury panel or "impaneled" are briefed by the judge and questioned by attorneys for both sides. This questioning is called "voir dire," which means to speak the truth. After voir dire, jurors who will hear the case are chose and placed on the jury.

Quiz

- 1. What does the district clerk office do?**
 - A. Keeps track of all court records that are part of civil and criminal cases
 - B. Writes new laws
 - C. Punishes criminals by sending them to jail
- 2. Which of these is not a duty of the court?**
 - A. Decide what laws mean
 - B. Process passport applications
 - C. Help people who have problems
- 3. Which courts handle felony cases?**
 - A. Municipal Courts
 - B. County-Level Courts
 - C. District Courts
- 4. Which court has the final say so on all appealed civil and criminal cases?**
 - A. District Courts
 - B. Court of Appeals
 - C. Supreme Court & Court of Criminal Appeals
- 5. What are jury trials responsible for?**
 - A. Evaluating the evidence presented in a case
 - B. Giving out marriage licenses
 - C. Helping people become American citizens



The Texas Judicial System



presented by

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The Hidalgo County District Clerk Office

The district clerk office is located at the Hidalgo County Courthouse, a place where judges and sometimes juries decide if someone has broken the law. Just like your school librarian keeps a catalog of books in the library, the district clerk office keeps track of all court records that are part of civil and criminal cases. We ensure the court records are handled properly and easily checked out by attorneys, judges and the general public.



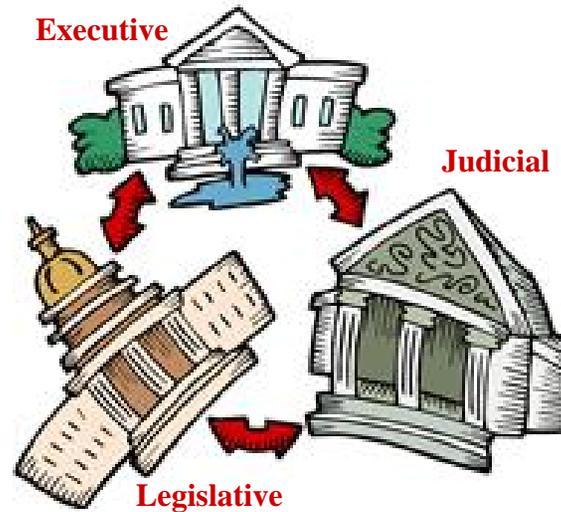
In addition to maintaining the court's records, the district clerk office is also responsible for

- Recording the acts and proceedings of the courts;
- Making sure people from the community show up for jury duty (you will learn more about jury in the "jury section" of this brochure);
- Processing passport applications



Texas Government

Texas' government has three parts: the Executive branch, which includes the Governor; our state representatives and senators, which make up the Legislative branch; and our court system, which is called the Judiciary, or Judicial branch.



Court System

Judges and the court system do a lot of important work, like:

- Deciding what laws mean (but not writing new laws);
- Punishing criminals by sending them to jail or making them pay for what they did to hurt somebody; and
- Helping people who have problems, like moms and dads who need a divorce.

People use the court system for lots of other reasons, too. For example, courts give out marriage licenses and help families to adopt kids.

Levels of Courts

Texas has four levels of trial courts. The lowest level are **Justice Courts and Municipal Courts** which handle minor cases, like speeding tickets in addition to criminal misdemeanors punishable by fine only. Misdemeanors are crimes or offenses less serious than a felony such as disorderly conduct.

Next are **County-Level Courts** which handle misdemeanors that may require greater fines or jail sentence and other civil cases which are not criminal in nature such as divorces or law suits to collect money that one person may owe another.

Then we have the **District Courts** which handle all types of cases including felony criminal matters. A felony is a serious crime such as murder or arson.

If a person is not happy with what the judge says, they can "appeal" to the **Court of Appeals**. This court looks at what happened all over again, and decides if the first judge's answer was right. This is sort of like going to your dad if your mom gives you a punishment you don't think was fair.

The State's highest courts are the **Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeals**. They have final say so in all appealed civil and criminal cases. Additionally, they have the authority to make rules that all the other courts need to follow.

