

BROADEN YOUR VOCABULARY : COURT

allegation: something that someone says happened.

appeal: A request made after a trial, asking another court (usually the court of appeals) to decide whether the trial was conducted properly. To make such a request is "to appeal" or "to take an appeal." One who appeals is called the appellant.

bail: Security given for the release of a criminal defendant or witness from legal custody (usually in the form of money) to secure his/her appearance on the day and time appointed.

bench trial: Trial without a jury in which a judge decides the facts.

chambers: A judge's office.

capital offense: A crime punishable by death.

charge: The law that the police believe the defendant has broken.

circumstantial evidence: All evidence except eyewitness testimony.

complaint: A written statement by the plaintiff stating the wrongs allegedly committed by the defendant.

conviction: A judgement of guilt against a criminal defendant.

counsel: Legal advice; a term used to refer to lawyers in a case.

court: Government entity authorized to resolve legal disputes. Judges sometimes use "court" to refer to themselves in the third person, as in "the court has read the briefs."

cross examine: Questioning of a witness by the attorney for the other side.

defendant: In a civil suit, the person complained against; in a criminal case, the person accused of the crime.

deposition: An oral statement made before an officer authorized by law to administer oaths. Such statements are often taken to examine potential witnesses, to obtain discovery, or to be used later in trial.

evidence: Information presented in testimony or in documents that is used to persuade the fact finder (judge or jury) to decide the case for one side or the other.

felony: A crime carrying a penalty of more than a year in prison.

grand jury: A body of citizens who listen to evidence of criminal allegations, which are presented by the government, and determines whether there is probable cause to believe the offense was committed. As it is used in federal criminal cases, "the government" refers to the lawyers of the U.S. attorney's office who are prosecuting the case.

impeachment: (1) The process of calling something into question, as in "impeaching the testimony of a witness." (2) The constitutional process whereby the House of Representatives may "impeach" (accuse of misconduct) high officers of the federal government for trial in the Senate.

interrogatories: Written questions asked by one party of an opposing party, who must answer them in writing under oath; a discovery device in a lawsuit.

interview: A meeting with the police or prosecutor.

issue: (1) The disputed point in a disagreement between parties in a lawsuit. (2) To send out officially, as in to issue an order.

judge: Government official with authority to decide lawsuits brought before courts. Other judicial officers in the U.S. courts system are Supreme Court justices.

judgement: The official decision of a court finally determining the respective rights and claims of the parties to a suit.

jurisdiction: (1) The legal authority of a court to hear and decide a case. Concurrent jurisdiction exists when two courts have simultaneous responsibility for the same case. (2) The geographic area over which the court has authority to decide cases.

juror: A person who is on the jury.

jury: Persons selected according to law and sworn to inquire into and declare a verdict on matters of fact.

oath: A promise to tell the truth.

objection: A reason that an attorney interrupts a witness to talk to the judge.

plaintiff: The person who files the complaint in a civil lawsuit.

plea: In a criminal case, the defendant's statement pleading "guilty" or "not guilty" in answer to the charges, a declaration made in open court.

pleadings: Written statements of the parties in a civil case of their positions. In the federal courts, the principal pleadings are the complaint and the answer.

probation: A sentencing alternative to imprisonment in which the court releases convicted defendants under supervision as long as certain conditions are observed.

prosecute: To charge someone with a crime. A prosecutor tries a criminal case on behalf of the government.

public defenders (or defense attorney): Represent defendants who can't afford an attorney in criminal matters.

sentence: The punishment ordered by a court for a defendant convicted of a crime.

testify: Answer questions in court.

testimony: Evidence presented orally by witnesses during trials or before grand juries.

trial: A hearing that takes place when the defendant pleads "not guilty" and witnesses are required to come to court to give evidence.

verdict: The decision of a petit jury or a judge.

witness: A person called upon by either side in a lawsuit to give testimony before the court or jury.