

Inside the Courts

Trace how federal courts are organized and how a case can move through them.

SS.7.CG.3.9 "Explain the structure, functions, and processes of the judicial branch of government."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, write 1, 2, and 3 beside the three sentences in the last paragraph that begin First, Next, and Last. These marks trace a federal case through the court system.

How Federal Courts Work

- ① The judicial branch interprets laws and settles cases under the Constitution. Federal courts include district courts, courts of appeals, and the Supreme Court. Most federal cases begin in a district court, where a judge manages the case and a jury may decide disputed facts. Courts of appeals review decisions from district courts. The Supreme Court is the nation's highest court and chooses a small number of cases to review. Each level has a different job, which helps courts handle cases in an organized way.
- ② Courts also protect constitutional limits through judicial review. In this process, a court decides whether a law or government action conflicts with the Constitution. If the court finds a conflict, it can prevent that law or action from being enforced. Judges do not write new laws when they make this decision. Instead, they apply the Constitution to the case before them. This power can affect people, government agencies, and lawmakers because government actions must follow constitutional rules.
- ③ First, a federal case is heard in a district court, where evidence and witnesses may be presented. Next, a party that believes the trial court made a legal error may appeal. At the court of appeals, several judges review the trial record and legal arguments. They usually do not hear the witnesses again. Last, the Supreme Court may review a case only if it agrees to take it. Its decision on a constitutional question guides lower federal courts.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Name the three levels of federal courts described in the passage, from the usual starting level to the highest level.

2 What is judicial review, and what can a court do if it finds that a law or government action conflicts with the Constitution?

3 How does a court of appeals handle a case differently from a district court?

4 What must happen before the Supreme Court reviews a case, and how can its decision affect other federal courts?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write four sentences about an invented dispute involving a government rule. Explain how the case could begin in a district court, move to a court of appeals, and possibly reach the Supreme Court. Include one constitutional question the courts would consider.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

As you read, write 1, 2, and 3 beside the three sentences in the last paragraph that begin First, Next, and Last. These marks trace a federal case through the court system. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Name the three levels of federal courts described in the passage, from the usual starting level to the highest level.	District courts, courts of appeals, and the Supreme Court.
2	What is judicial review, and what can a court do if it finds that a law or government action conflicts with the Constitution?	Judicial review is the process in which a court decides whether a law or government action conflicts with the Constitution. If it finds a conflict, the court can prevent the law or action from being enforced.
3	How does a court of appeals handle a case differently from a district court?	A district court may hear evidence and witnesses. A court of appeals reviews the trial record and legal arguments and usually does not hear witnesses again.
4	What must happen before the Supreme Court reviews a case, and how can its decision affect other federal courts?	The Supreme Court must agree to take the case. Its decision on a constitutional question guides lower federal courts.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A student challenges a public school rule that bans all political buttons. The case begins in a district court, where a judge considers the evidence and constitutional arguments. If either side believes the judge made a legal error, it may appeal, and appellate judges review the trial record. The Supreme Court may choose to review the case and decide whether the rule conflicts with the Constitution.

Accept equivalent descriptions that accurately distinguish trial courts from appellate courts and explain judicial review. For the open response, accept reasonable invented disputes if the court sequence and constitutional question are accurate.