

WHO'S WHO IN THE COURTROOM

Judge

A public officer appointed to preside over the court and administer the law. In a jury trial, it is the judge's responsibility to instruct the jury about the laws that apply to the case.

Court Clerk

A court officer who files pleadings, motions, judgements, and keeps records of evidence and court proceedings.

Bailiff

A court officer who maintains order in the courtroom and has custody of the jury and the prisoners. The bailiff announces the opening and closing of court, calls witnesses, and maintains security for the judge and court staff. The bailiff also is in charge of the jury and sees that there are no interferences with their deliberations.

Court Reporter

A person who documents all testimony during court proceedings, or at trial related proceedings such as pre-motions and depositions.

Plaintiff

A person or party who brings a legal action, or files a complaint, for the purpose of obtaining a legal remedy. In a criminal case, the plaintiff is the government.

Defendant

A person or party being sued or accused of a crime. The defendant is presumed to be innocent unless the evidence proves that she or he is guilty.

Plaintiff's Attorney

An attorney who represents the party who complains or brings suit in a legal action. In a criminal case, the plaintiff's attorney is the government prosecutor.

Defense Attorney

An attorney who represents and acts in the defendant's best legal interest. In criminal cases, persons or parties may have the right to a public defender.

Witness

A person who takes an oath to tell the truth, and then answers questions about the case. Witnesses might be asked about what they saw, heard, or know. They might also be asked to identify pictures, documents, or other exhibits entered in the trial.

Jury

A group of citizens who are at least eighteen years of age and represent a cross section of the community. It is the jury's responsibility to listen and carefully consider the evidence, follow the judge's instructions about the laws that apply to the case, and render a fair and impartial decision based on the facts of the case.

Observers

Most trials are open to observers. Generally the people that attend a trial have an interest in the case... either in the people involved or if they care about the issues raised. Courtroom decorum is important for those watching. They can be asked to leave if they are not respectful of the court.