

Sitting on a Jury

Often, even if you are chosen as a juror, you may still be sent home without actually sitting on the jury. This is because the plaintiff and defendant often choose to **settle**¹² instead of going to trial. However, if the case goes to court—buckle up! You may only have to sit on the case for a day or two, but some trials last more than a year! During that time, you won't be able to go to your regular job. Instead, the court pays you a small amount of money to show up and listen to the evidence.



The place where the jury sits in the courtroom is called the jury box. As you can see in these pictures, the jury box in each courtroom looks different, but it has the same job.

After hearing all the evidence, you will be taken to a jury room with your fellow jurors. There, you can review the evidence and **deliberate**¹³. Often, trials require all jurors to agree on the verdict. If jurors have trouble agreeing on a **unanimous**¹⁴ verdict, they can be **sequestered**¹⁵. The jury will have to stay in the jury room and cannot listen to any news reports about the case. This ensures they will be unbiased and that nobody will bribe or threaten them to deliver a specific verdict. Sometimes a jury can even be sequestered during the trial itself, if it is a trial that makes headlines. At night, the jury may be allowed to go home or may be required to sequester in a hotel.

What if the jury can't agree on a verdict? If the jury doesn't agree, they are called a hung jury. Sometimes they are given additional days to deliberate. If they still don't reach a conclusion, the judge will often call a **mistrial**¹⁶. The jury is dismissed, and the lawyers select a new trial. Then they redo the entire trial from the beginning for the new jury! Sometimes the two parties will agree to settle just to avoid a mistrial.

The jury system isn't perfect. There are still the risks of biased jurors and mistrials. But it is definitely a better system than being thrown into a lake to determine if someone is guilty or not. And it gives every American citizen a chance to serve their country and promote justice.

12 **Settle** - to compromise or agree on the outcome of a court case before it goes to trial

13 **Deliberate** - argue, discuss, and debate

14 **Unanimous** - with everyone in agreement

15 **Sequester** - put into isolation during a trial

16 **Mistrial** - an inconclusive or invalid trial