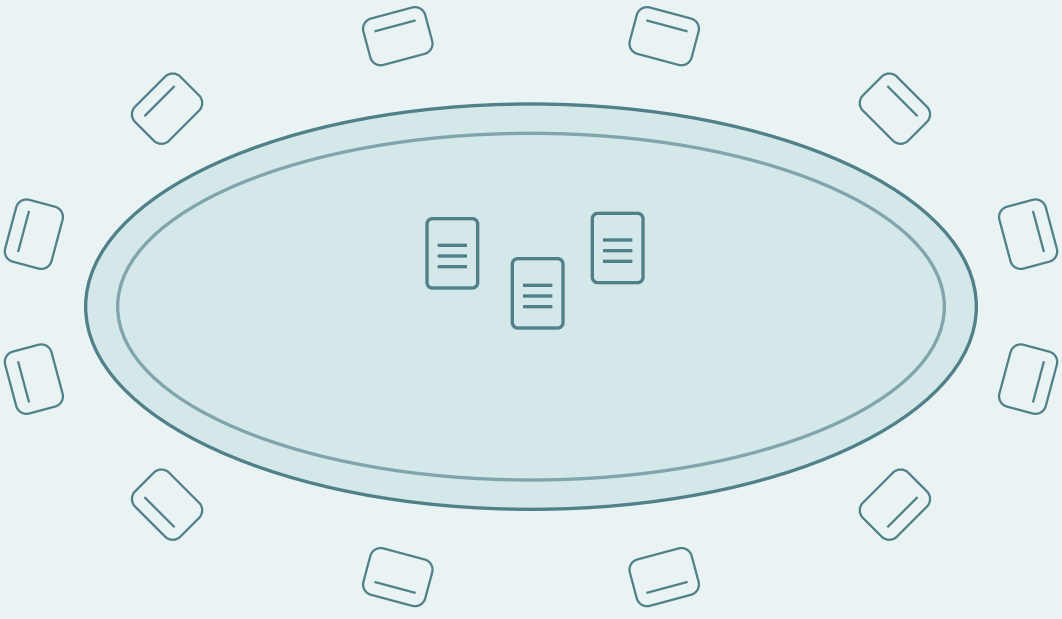
LEGAL EXPLAINER

Inside the Jury Room

Legal companion to the 15-month calendar
January 2027 through March 2028



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How to use this guide

Open to the month you are using in the ***Inside the Jury Room™*** calendar. Each section follows the monthly graphic, explains the dated milestones and the court process, and carries the calendar's Jury Lens™ question into a short discussion.

CONTENTS

January 2027	IJR 001	03
February 2027	IJR 003	04
March 2027	IJR 005	05
April 2027	IJR 008	06
May 2027	IJR 009	07
June 2027	IJR 010	08
July 2027	IJR 014	09
August 2027	IJR 018	10
September 2027	IJR 019	11
October 2027	IJR 020	12
November 2027	IJR 012	13
December 2027	IJR 022	14
January 2028	IJR 023	15
February 2028	IJR 016	16
March 2028	IJR 025	17

For public legal education. Court procedures vary by jurisdiction. If you are serving on a jury, follow the instructions of your court.

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IJR 001

January 2027

The Trial Doesn't Begin with Opening Statements—It Begins With Jury Selection.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

January 9, 1979 · Duren v. Missouri

The Supreme Court reinforced the fair-cross-section requirement and rejected a jury-selection system that substantially underrepresented women. 439 U.S. 357

January 21, 1975 · Taylor v. Louisiana

Systematic exclusion of women from jury pools violated the Sixth Amendment fair-cross-section requirement. 419 U.S. 522

INSIDE THE PROCESS

From community to courtroom

Federal courts randomly draw prospective jurors from community source lists. A summons starts the process, followed by qualification and, for a particular case, voir dire. The fair-cross-section requirement applies to the jury pool. It gives defendants a way to challenge systematic exclusion during the process that brings prospective jurors to court. It does not require the seated jury to mirror the community's demographics. *Duren* asks whether a distinctive group is underrepresented relative to the community and whether the selection system accounts for that underrepresentation.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> Before anyone hears the evidence, what has already shaped who is sitting in the jury box?

For reflection

Trace the path from source list to summons to courtroom. At which stage might an otherwise eligible group be consistently underrepresented? The answer determines what records would help explain the disparity.

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 003

February 2027

Voir Dire: The Purpose Behind the Questions.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

February 26, 1992 · Georgia v. McCollum argued

The case later established that criminal defendants, like prosecutors, may not use peremptory challenges to intentionally discriminate based on race. 505 U.S. 42

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Voir dire

Questioning can surface whether a prospective juror knows a participant, has heard about the case, or has experiences that may affect impartiality. A challenge for cause asks the court to excuse someone on a recognized ground. A peremptory challenge generally needs no reason upfront, but a court can examine the reason when a discriminatory strike is properly challenged.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> Is the goal of voir dire to find jurors without opinions—or jurors who can recognize and manage them?

For reflection

Consider how a person describes a prior experience and whether they can engage with the evidence as presented. The answers to follow-up questions can matter more than a simple assurance of fairness.

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 005

March 2027

Unconscious Bias: The Silent Influence in the Jury Room.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

March 1, 1880 · Strauder v. West Virginia

Race-based statutory exclusion from jury service violated equal protection. 100 U.S. 303

March 6, 2017 · Peña-Rodriguez v. Colorado

The Court recognized a constitutional exception to ordinary deliberation secrecy when clear evidence shows racial animus significantly affected a juror's decision. 580 U.S. 206

March 21, 1978 · Ballew v. Georgia

The Court concluded that a criminal jury of fewer than six members was constitutionally inadequate. 435 U.S. 223

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Impartial does not mean experience-free

Bias may affect which witness a juror trusts, which details seem important, or which inferences feel obvious. *Strauder* addressed exclusion written into law. *Peña-Rodriguez* addressed a clear statement showing that racial stereotypes or animus significantly motivated a vote to convict. *Ballew* addressed what can be lost when a criminal jury is too small.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> What is the difference between having a perspective and allowing that perspective to decide the case for you?

For reflection

Name a first impression, then identify the admitted facts that support it. Ask whether you would make the same inference if a witness with different personal characteristics gave the same account.

IJR 008

April 2027

Seeing People, Not Labels: The Danger of Stereotypes in Jury Selection.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

April 1, 1991 · Powers v. Ohio
A defendant may challenge race-based exclusion of prospective jurors even when the defendant and excluded jurors are of different races. 499 U.S. 400

April 1, 1935 · Norris v. Alabama
Systematic racial exclusion from jury lists violated equal protection. 294 U.S. 587

April 19, 1994 · J.E.B. v. Alabama
Gender-based peremptory strikes were held unconstitutional. 511 U.S. 127

April 20, 2020 · Ramos v. Louisiana
Serious criminal convictions require unanimous jury verdicts in state as well as federal court. 590 U.S. 83

April 30, 1986 · Batson v. Kentucky
Prosecutors may not intentionally exclude prospective jurors because of race. 476 U.S. 79

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Peremptory challenges have limits

The April cases separate three safeguards. *Norris* concerns access to jury lists. *Batson*, *Powers*, and *J.E.B.* concern discriminatory strikes during selection and who may challenge them. *Ramos* governs agreement at the end of a serious criminal trial. Each safeguard applies at a different stage.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> When does a “gut feeling” about a prospective juror become an assumption that deserves closer examination?

For reflection

A strike described as intuition deserves scrutiny when similar answers receive different treatment. Comparing how counsel questioned and treated similarly situated jurors can help a court evaluate the stated reason.

IJR 009

May 2027

Honesty and Self-Awareness: The Foundation of Fair Deliberation.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

May 3, 1954 · Hernandez v. Texas

Systematic exclusion of persons of Mexican descent from jury service violated equal protection. 347 U.S. 475

May 20, 1946 · Thiel v. Southern Pacific Co.

Systematic exclusion of daily-wage workers from federal jury panels was improper; the Court described jury service as both a duty and privilege of citizenship. 328 U.S. 217

May 20, 1968 · Duncan v. Louisiana

The jury-trial right was recognized as fundamental and applicable to serious state criminal prosecutions. 391 U.S. 145

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Qualification is different from selection

Eligibility rules determine whether a person qualifies to serve. Selection for a specific trial can turn on conflicts, hardship, or impartiality. *Hernandez* and *Thiel* illustrate how exclusion can operate through local practices and occupational categories. *Duncan* addresses when the defendant has a constitutional right to a jury trial in state court.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> Can a juror be fair without first being honest about what may influence them?

For reflection

An honest answer about a connection to the case, a prior experience, or a hardship helps the court make an informed decision. A juror need not decide alone whether the issue is disqualifying.

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 010

June 2027

Open Minds, Open Justice: Why Curiosity and Humility Matter in the Jury Room.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

June 3, 1968 · Witherspoon v. Illinois

Restrictions were placed on excluding prospective jurors merely because they expressed general objections to capital punishment. 391 U.S. 510

June 3, 1991 · Edmonson v. Leesville Concrete

Race-based peremptory strikes were prohibited in civil litigation. 500 U.S. 614

June 18, 1992 · Georgia v. McCollum

Criminal defendants may not use race-based peremptory challenges. 505 U.S. 42

June 21, 2019 · Flowers v. Mississippi

The Court emphasized that history and patterns of strikes matter when evaluating discriminatory jury selection. 588 U.S. 284

June 22, 1970 · Williams v. Florida

The Constitution does not require every criminal jury to consist of twelve members. 399 U.S. 78

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Jury size is not universal

Jury size depends on the court, the type of case, and governing law. *Williams* upheld a six-person state criminal jury. Read it alongside *Ballew* in March and *Ramos* in April. The number of jurors and the agreement required for conviction are separate legal questions.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> Does open-mindedness mean abandoning your beliefs—or being willing to test them against the evidence?

For reflection

An open mind allows a juror to reconsider an inference after hearing a different reading of the record. Ask what evidence would support either reading and what would make one inference more persuasive.

IJR 014

July 2027

Mindful Listening Is Power: How Attention and Focus Shape Understanding.

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Listening is part of the job

Listen for what each witness personally observed, what the witness inferred, and where the account is uncertain. Connect testimony with admitted exhibits and follow the judge's instructions about what may be considered. If the court permits notes, follow its rules on how they may be used.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> Am I listening to understand the evidence—or waiting for something that confirms what I already believe?

For reflection

After a witness finishes, identify one point that supports your initial view and one detail that complicates it. Give both the same attention before deciding how much weight the testimony deserves.

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 018

August 2027

Attention Is Your Greatest Tool: Focus, Observe, and Make Connections.

INSIDE THE PROCESS

No independent investigation

A street-view image, an online definition, a social-media profile, or an AI answer can introduce information the parties had no chance to test. If you encounter outside material about the case, follow the court's reporting instructions. Seek clarification through the court's approved procedure.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> In an age of instant information, can you resist the urge to "look it up" when the rules require you not to?

For reflection

If testimony leaves the distance between two locations unclear, identify what the admitted record says about the distance and ask the court about any permitted way to clarify the question.

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 019

September 2027

Your Mind Is Active—Use It: Think Critically, Not Automatically.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

September 24, 1789 · Judiciary Act of 1789

Established the federal judiciary and helped structure the early federal court system in which jury trials would operate. National Archives

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Judge and jury have different jobs

The judge rules on legal issues and tells jurors which law governs. The jury decides what facts the admitted evidence establishes and applies those instructions. A reasonable inference draws a conclusion from record evidence. A guess fills a gap without enough support from that record.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> Can you question an inference without becoming cynical about every piece of evidence?

For reflection

Ask which exhibit or testimony supports an inference and whether a different inference also fits. A juror can accept part of a witness's account while finding that another part leaves a question open.

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 020

October 2027

Perspective Shapes Perception: Every Juror Brings Their Own Lens to the Case.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

October 11, 2016 · Peña-Rodriguez v. Colorado argued

The case forced the Court to confront the tension between jury-room secrecy and evidence of racial bias in deliberations. Oral argument transcript

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Deliberation is private for a reason

Federal Rule of Evidence 606(b) generally limits juror testimony about deliberations when a verdict is challenged. It specifies exceptions involving extraneous prejudicial information, outside influence, and a mistake in entering the verdict on the form. *Peña-Rodriguez* recognizes a separate, narrow constitutional exception for a clear statement indicating racial animus or stereotypes significantly motivated a vote to convict.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> How do jurors acknowledge their own perspective without allowing it to replace the evidence?

For reflection

During deliberations, ask a fellow juror which evidence supports a conclusion. If a concern about improper bias or outside information arises, follow the court's directions for bringing it to the judge.

Federal Rule of Evidence 606

IJR 012

November 2027

Emotions Are Human: How to Recognize and Manage Them in Deliberation.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

November 25, 1940 · Smith v. Texas

Intentional racial exclusion from grand-jury service violated equal protection. 311 U.S. 128

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Emotion is not evidence

A grand jury considers whether probable cause supports a charge. A trial jury decides the questions submitted after a trial under the applicable burden of proof. *Smith* concerned racial discrimination in selecting a grand jury. The month's process note concerns the discipline required when trial jurors weigh emotionally difficult evidence.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> Can you recognize an emotional reaction without mistaking that reaction for proof?

For reflection

Separate the reaction from the finding. Identify the legal question the jury must answer, then point to the testimony, exhibit, or agreed fact that bears on that question. U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 022

December 2027

Look Beyond What's Obvious: Details Matter. Context Counts.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

December 9, 2014 · Warger v. Shauers

Reinforced the general rule protecting the confidentiality of deliberations from later juror testimony used to attack a verdict. 574 U.S. 40

December 15, 1791 · Bill of Rights ratified

The Sixth Amendment includes the right to trial by an impartial jury in criminal prosecutions. National Archives

INSIDE THE PROCESS

What counts as evidence?

Admitted testimony, exhibits, and stipulated facts can support a finding. Lawyers' questions and arguments help frame the issues, while the witness's answers and admitted record supply the evidence. Follow instructions that restrict how particular evidence can be used. *Warger* concerns later challenges to a verdict, while the Sixth Amendment addresses impartiality at trial.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> What detail might seem insignificant on its own but change meaning when placed in context?

For reflection

A time stamp might carry little weight standing alone. Read alongside admitted testimony about when a person arrived, it may support or undermine the sequence a party argues occurred.

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 023

January 2028

Questions Guide Justice: Curious Minds Seek the Truth.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

January 27, 1975 · Daniel v. Louisiana

The Court addressed the reach of the newly announced Taylor fair-cross-section rule, holding it would not apply retroactively to juries empaneled before Taylor. 420 U.S. 31

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Juror questions follow court rules

Where witness questions are permitted, a judge can screen a written question for relevance, admissibility, and proper form before deciding whether to ask it. Questions during deliberations likewise go through the procedure the judge provides. *Daniel* illustrates a different kind of procedural limit by asking which juries a newly announced rule reached.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> What is the difference between seeking clarity and trying to become an investigator?

For reflection

A useful question points to a specific uncertainty in the record or the instructions. Follow the court's procedure for asking whether and how that uncertainty can be addressed.

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors

IJR 016

February 2028

Accountability Builds Trust: Juror Responsibility Makes Justice Stronger.

INSIDE THE PROCESS

Your job is protected

Federal law protects permanent employees from discharge, threats of discharge, intimidation, or coercion because of federal jury service or scheduled attendance. Pay while serving is a separate question that may depend on the employer and applicable law. Verify a suspicious summons or demand through the court using contact details you obtain independently.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> What responsibility does the system owe citizens when it asks them to leave work, family, and routine to serve?

For reflection

Consider whether clear scheduling information, hardship procedures, and reliable summons verification could make it easier for citizens to serve and harder for scammers to exploit uncertainty. 28 U.S.C. § 1875

U.S. Courts · Juror Scams

IJR 025

March 2028

Perspective + Process = Better Decisions. Stronger Justice.

JURY SERVICE MILESTONES

March 1 · Strauder anniversary

Citizen participation in jury service cannot be restricted by race under discriminatory state law. 100 U.S. 303

March 6 · Peña-Rodriguez anniversary

Racial bias inside deliberations can trigger constitutional scrutiny notwithstanding ordinary jury-room secrecy. 580 U.S. 206

March 21 · Ballew anniversary

Jury structure itself can affect constitutional fairness. 435 U.S. 223

INSIDE THE PROCESS

The verdict is the product of a process

A trustworthy verdict depends on the work that precedes it. Jurors evaluate admitted evidence under the court's instructions, consider competing interpretations, and record the required findings. When unanimity is required, deliberation may change a juror's view, but agreement does not relieve any juror of the responsibility to reach an individual judgment.

> **Jury Lens™**
>
> What makes a verdict trustworthy: agreement alone—or the quality of the process that produced it?

For reflection

Use March's three earlier cases to examine three stages. Who had access to service? What safeguards governed deliberations? How did the structure of the jury support a fair decision?

U.S. District Court · Handbook for Trial Jurors