

CRIMINAL JURY INSTRUCTIONS
(BEFORE CLOSING ARGUMENTS)

Members of the jury: You have heard the evidence. Now I will instruct you, and next you will hear final arguments of counsel. The Court and the jury have separate functions: you decide the disputed facts, and the Court provides the instructions of law. It is your sworn duty to accept these instructions and to apply the law as it is given to you. You are not permitted to change the law or to apply your own concept of what you think the law should be.

Equality Under the Law

In deciding the facts of this case, you must not be swayed by bias or prejudice as to either party. Our system of law does not permit jurors to be governed by prejudice, sympathy, or public opinion. Both the parties and the public expect that you will carefully and impartially consider all the evidence in the case, follow the law as stated by the Court, and reach a just verdict based on the evidence.

This case should be considered and decided by you as an action between persons of equal standing in the community, and holding the same or similar stations in life. Individuals and the Government stand equal before the law and are to be dealt with as equal in a court of justice.

Indictment

A criminal case begins with the filing of an Indictment. The Indictment informs a Defendant he has been charged with an offense. The fact it was filed may not be considered for any other purpose. A plea of “not guilty” is a denial of the charge and puts in issue all the essential elements of each offense charged.

The Indictment in this case charges the crimes were committed from on or about [DATE] , until on or about [DATE]. The proof need not establish with certainty the exact dates of the alleged crimes. It is sufficient if the evidence in the case establishes beyond a reasonable doubt the crimes were committed on dates reasonably near the alleged date.

Your job is limited to deciding whether the Government has proved the crimes charged against Defendant. Whether anyone else should be prosecuted and convicted for these crimes is not a proper matter for you to consider. The possible guilt of others is no defense to a criminal charge. Do not let the possible guilt of others influence your decision in any way.

Burden of Proof and Reasonable Doubt

Defendant pled not guilty to the crimes charged in the Indictment. Therefore, he starts the trial with a clean slate, with no evidence at all against him, and the law presumes he is innocent. This presumption of innocence stays with him unless the Government presents evidence, here in court, that overcomes the presumption and convinces you beyond a reasonable doubt that he is guilty.

This means Defendant has no obligation to present any evidence at all, or to prove to you in any way he is innocent. It is up to the Government to prove he is guilty, and this burden stays on the Government from start to finish. You must find Defendant not guilty unless the Government convinces you beyond a reasonable doubt that he is guilty.

The Government must prove every element of the crimes charged beyond a reasonable doubt. Proof beyond a reasonable doubt does not mean proof beyond all possible doubt. Possible doubts or doubts based purely on speculation are not reasonable doubts. A reasonable doubt is a doubt based on reason and common sense. It may arise from the evidence, the lack of evidence, or the nature of the evidence.

Proof beyond a reasonable doubt means proof which is so convincing you would not hesitate to rely and act on it in making the most important decisions in your own lives. If you are convinced the Government has proved Defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, say so by returning a guilty verdict. If you are not convinced, say so by returning a not guilty verdict.

Number and Availability of Witnesses

Do not make any decisions based solely on the number of witnesses who testified. What is important is how believable the witnesses were, and how much weight you think their testimony deserves. Concentrate on that, not the numbers.

Evidence

Evidence is all the testimony received from the witnesses, any exhibits admitted during the trial, and any facts stipulated by counsel. You must make your decision based only on the evidence you saw and heard here in court. Do not let rumors, suspicions, or anything else you may have seen or heard outside this Court influence your decision in any way.

Evidence may be direct or circumstantial, or both.

“Direct evidence” is the testimony given by a witness who has seen or heard the facts to which he or she testifies. It includes exhibits admitted into evidence during the trial.

Evidence may also be used to prove a fact by inference. This is referred to as circumstantial evidence. “Circumstantial evidence” is the proof of facts by direct evidence from which you may infer other reasonable facts or conclusions.

If a witness testified he saw it raining outside, and you believed him, that would be direct evidence it was raining. If someone walked into the courtroom wearing a raincoat covered with drops of water and carrying a wet umbrella, that would be circumstantial evidence from which you could conclude it was raining.

You may not make one inference from another inference, but you may draw more than one inference from the same facts or circumstances.

Direct evidence and circumstantial evidence possess the same probative value, and both must be measured by the same standard of proof -- that is, proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

Exhibits

A number of exhibits and testimony relating to them have been introduced. You will determine what weight, if any, the exhibits should receive in light of all the evidence, no matter who produced the exhibit. The numbering or lettering of the exhibits that you take to the jury room may not follow consecutively. There are several reasons for this. Some exhibits may not have been offered, some may be duplicates, or the Court may have rejected the exhibit because of a legal or other ruling. Do not guess or draw any inference because you do not have a particular numbered exhibit.

Matters Not Evidence

The evidence does not include the Indictment, opening statements, or closing arguments of counsel. The opening statements and closing arguments of counsel are designed to assist you; they are not evidence.

Statements or answers stricken by the Court or that you were instructed to disregard are not evidence and must be treated as though you never heard them. You must not speculate as to why the Court sustained the objection to any question or what the answer to such question might have been. You must not draw any inference or speculate on the truth of any suggestion included in an unanswered question.

Credibility

You are the sole judges of the facts, the credibility of the witnesses, and the weight of the evidence. To weigh the evidence, you must consider the credibility of believability of the witnesses. You will apply the tests of truthfulness which you apply in your daily lives. These tests include the appearance of each witness upon the stand; his or her manner of testifying; the reasonableness of the testimony; the opportunity he or she had to see, hear and know the things about which he or she testified; his or her accuracy of memory; frankness or lack of it; intelligence; interest and bias, if any; together with all the facts and circumstances surrounding the testimony. Applying these tests, you will assign to the testimony of each witness such weight as you deem proper.

You are not required to believe the testimony of any witness simply because he or she was under oath. You may believe or disbelieve all or any part of the testimony of any witness. It is your duty to determine what testimony to believe and what testimony not to believe.

Some guides for evaluating the testimony include:

- Was the witness able to clearly see, hear or understand the events?
- How good was the witness' memory?
- Was there anything that may have interfered with the witness' ability to perceive or remember the events?
- How did the witness act while testifying?
- Did the witness have any relationship to either party, or anything to gain or lose from the case, that might influence his/her testimony?
- Was the testimony supported or contradicted by other evidence that you found believable?
- Was the testimony consistent with prior sworn statements?

Testimony of Defendant

You have heard Defendant testify. You should evaluate Defendant's testimony using the same considerations of credibility and believability that you use for any other witness.

OR

Defendant has an absolute right not to testify or present evidence. The fact that he did not testify or present any evidence cannot be considered by you in any way. Do not even discuss it in your deliberations.

Remember that it is up to the Government to prove Defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. It is not up to Defendant to prove that he is innocent.

Inconsistent Statements by a Witness

You have heard evidence that a witness may have made statements before this trial that may be inconsistent with his or her testimony here in court. If you find the statements are inconsistent, you may consider the earlier statement in deciding the truthfulness and accuracy of that witness' testimony in this trial. If the prior statement was not made under oath, you may not use it as evidence of the truth of the matters contained in that prior statement. However, if that prior statement was made under oath, you may also consider it as evidence of the truth of the matters contained in that prior sworn statement.

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This concludes the general instructions on certain preliminary matters -- including the burden of proof, evidence, and the credibility of witnesses. I will now give you the instructions of law on the specific issues in this case.

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Punishment

If you decide the Government has proved Defendant guilty, then it will be my job to decide what the appropriate punishment should be.

Deciding what the punishment should be is my job, not yours. It would violate your oaths as jurors to even consider the possible punishment in deciding your verdict.

Your job is to look at the evidence and decide if the Government has proved Defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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I have given you the instructions of law applicable to this case. After closing arguments of counsel, I will instruct you on how to conduct your deliberations and prepare the verdict form.