LAW CLASS
How Courts Work

Steps in a Trial

Evidence

The heart of the case is the presentation of evidence. There are two types of evidence -- direct and circumstantial.

•Direct evidence usually is that which speaks for itself: eyewitness accounts, a confession, or a weapon.

•Circumstantial evidence usually is that which suggests a fact by implication or inference: the appearance of the scene of a crime, testimony that suggests a connection or link with a crime, physical evidence that suggests criminal activity.

Both kinds of evidence are a part of most trials, with circumstantial evidence probably being used more often than direct. Either kind of evidence can be offered in oral testimony of witnesses or physical exhibits, including fingerprints, test results, and documents. Neither kind of evidence is more valuable than the other.

Strict rules govern the kinds of evidence that may be admitted into a trial, and the presentation of evidence is governed by formal rules.