

## THE LANGUAGE OF LAW

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### The language of law

#### A Legal verbs

- to **abrogate a law/treaty**: to bring a law/treaty to an official end
- to **bend the law/rules**: to break the law/rules in a way that is considered not to be harmful to contravene a law: to break a law
- to **impeach a president/governor**: to make a formal statement saying that a person in public office has committed a serious offence
- to **infringe someone's rights**: to prevent a person doing what they are legally allowed to do
- to **lodge an appeal**: to make an official appeal
- to **uphold/overturn a verdict**: to say that a previous decision was correct/incorrect
- to **pervert the course of justice**: to put obstacles in the way of justice being done
- to **quash a decision/conviction**: to change a previous official decision/conviction
- to **set a precedent**: to establish a decision which must, in English law, be taken into account in future decisions
- to **award/grant custody to**: to give one parent or adult the main responsibility for a child, especially after separation or divorce
- to **annul a marriage/agreement/law**: to declare that it no longer exists and never existed

#### B Crimes

<i>crime</i>	<i>meaning</i>	<i>verb</i>	<i>criminal</i>
<b>discrimination</b>	unfair treatment on grounds of sex, race or nationality	discriminate (against)	
<b>embezzlement</b>	stealing money that is in your care or belongs to an organisation that you work for	embezzle	embezzler
<b>harassment</b>	making a person feel anxious and unhappy (sometimes for sexual reasons, sometimes to get, say, a debt repaid)	harass	
<b>insider trading/dealing</b>	illegal buying and selling of shares by someone who has specialist knowledge of a company	do/practise insider dealing/trading	insider trader/dealer
<b>joyriding</b>	driving around for enjoyment in a car you have stolen	joyride	joyrider
<b>money laundering</b>	moving money obtained illegally so that its origin cannot be traced	launder money	money launderer
<b>perjury</b>	lying when under oath	commit perjury	perjurer
<b>trespass</b>	go onto someone else's land without permission	trespass	trespasser

#### C Legal adjectives

Matters relating to, say, divorce are of course dealt with in a **civil** court rather than a criminal court. More serious criminal offences are said to be **indictable** /ɪn'daɪtəbl/, i.e. they are tried by indictment /ɪn'daɪtmənt/ in a higher level of court, while **summary** offences are less serious and can be tried in a lower level of court. If a worker feels that his or her **statutory** rights have been infringed, then he or she may take the case to a tribunal, where an arbitrator has **discretionary** powers to rule on the dispute. The arbitrator's decision is **binding** on both sides – they have to abide by his or her decision.

## Exercises

### 47.1 Choose the correct verbs from A to fill the gaps. Put the verb in the correct form.

- 1 Presidents Nixon and Clinton of the USA were both .....
- 2 The prisoner decided to ..... an appeal against the court's decision.
- 3 The appeal court ..... the verdict of the lower court and the prisoner was released.
- 4 In English law any previous legal decision ..... a precedent for future decisions.
- 5 Judges almost always ..... custody to the mother rather than the father.
- 6 I'm not asking you to break the rules, just to ..... them a little.
- 7 You ..... my legal rights by not allowing me to vote.
- 8 Witnesses charged with perjury are accused of ..... the course of justice.
- 9 The marriage was ..... because the man had never properly divorced his first wife.
- 10 The Supreme Court ..... the murder conviction and the man was freed.

### 47.2 Which of the crimes in B might each of these people be charged with?

- 1 A camper who spent a night on a farmer's land without asking permission.
- 2 A businessman who diverted funds from the account of the company he worked for into his own personal account.
- 3 Two boys who hot-wired a car and drove it around town before abandoning it. [to hot-wire means to start without using a key]
- 4 A witness who gave false evidence in court.

### 47.3 Answer these questions about the adjectives in C.

- 1 If someone sues you because they tripped on the stairs in your house, would the case be heard in a criminal or a civil court?
- 2 Would murder be an indictable or a summary offence?
- 3 If a contract is binding what does that mean for the signatories, i.e. the people who signed it?
- 4 How could a fine or other punishment be described if a magistrate is free to decide whether to award it or not?

### 47.4 What are the nouns associated with these words? Use a dictionary to help you.



From these verbs – abrogate contravene impeach infringe pervert  
From these adjectives – indictable discretionary statutory

### 47.5 Choose one of the nouns you found in exercise 47.4 to complete each of these sentences.

- 1 The ..... is read out to the accused at the beginning of a trial.
- 2 The magistrates can choose the most appropriate penalty at their own .....
- 3 Some people consider ..... of others' rights as being as serious a crime as theft.
- 4 Many rules relating to employment are set by .....
- 5 The trial was criticised by many as a ..... of justice.

**FOLLOW UP**

Find out more about the law in the UK at this website: [www.leeds.ac.uk/law/hamlyn/toc.htm](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/law/hamlyn/toc.htm).  
Note down at least ten more useful legal words and expressions.

**B. Language Focus The Courts and Conventions**

1. Match the legal term with a suitable definition.

to sue	a. the person who files a lawsuit
a legal case	b. to bring someone to justice
trial	c. to be accused of having committed a crime
to be charged with a crime	d. to institute legal proceedings (a lawsuit) against someone
to prosecute	e. court which is formed to deal with a particular case, and will be disbanded after the issue is resolved
hearings	f. a dispute between opposing parties resolved by a court, or by some equivalent legal process. This may be either civil or criminal.
court ruling	g. any decision a judge makes during the course of a lawsuit
sentence	h. punishment after conviction, can range from a fine and community service to life imprisonment or death
charges	i. person against whom legal action has been brought
plaintiff	j. a formal accusation of criminal activity
defendant	k. legal proceeding held before a tribunal to determine whether the accused is innocent or guilty
ad hoc tribunal	l. meetings during which evidence and arguments are presented in an effort to resolve a disputed factual or legal issue, generally prior to the trial
to breach a law	m. reportedly, supposedly
allegedly	n. to break or violate a law