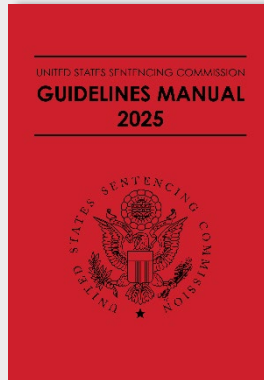


*The sentencing guidelines are promulgated by the United States Sentencing Commission, an independent bipartisan agency in the judicial branch of government.*



## HOW THE GUIDELINES WORK

The sentencing guidelines take into account both the seriousness of the offense and the individual's criminal history.

The sentencing guidelines provide 43 levels of offense seriousness – the more serious the crime, the higher the offense level.

The guidelines also assign each individual to one of six criminal history categories based upon the extent of an individual's past misconduct.

Criminal History Category I is the least serious category and includes many first-time offenders. Criminal History Category VI is the most serious category and includes individuals with serious criminal records.

**Disclaimer:**

*The characterizations of the sentencing guidelines in this overview are presented in simplified form and are not to be used for guideline interpretation, application, or authority.*

## HISTORY



In January 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court decided *United States v. Booker*, 543 U.S. 220 (2005). The *Booker* decision addressed the question left unresolved by the Court's decision in *Blakely v. Washington*, 542 U.S. 296 (2004): whether the Sixth Amendment right to jury trial applies to the federal sentencing guidelines. In its substantive *Booker* opinion, the Court held that the Sixth Amendment applies to the sentencing guidelines. In its remedial *Booker* opinion, the Court severed and excised two statutory provisions, 18 U.S.C. § 3553(b)(1), which made the federal guidelines mandatory, and 18 U.S.C. § 3742(e), an appeals provision.

Under the approach set forth by the Court, “district courts, while not bound to apply the guidelines, must consult those guidelines and take them into account when sentencing,” subject to review by the courts of appeal for “unreasonableness.” The subsequent Supreme Court decision in *Rita v. United States*, 551 U.S. 338 (2007), held that courts of appeal may apply a presumption of reasonableness when reviewing a sentence imposed within the guideline sentencing range.

The Supreme Court has continued to stress the importance of the federal sentencing guidelines in *Molina-Martinez v. United States*, 136 S. Ct. 1338 (2016), in which the Court held that “[u]niformity and proportionality in sentencing are achieved, in part, by the Guidelines’ significant role in sentencing.” *See also* *Peugh v. United States*, 133 S. Ct. 2072 (2013) (“Though no longer mandatory, see [*Booker*], the Guidelines still play an important role in sentencing procedures”); *Gall v. United States*, 128 S. Ct. 586 (2007) (“As a matter of administration and to secure nationwide consistency, the Guidelines should be the starting point and initial benchmark” at sentencing); *Kimbrough v. United States*, 128 S. Ct. 558 (2007) (After *Booker*, “[a] district judge must include the Guidelines range in the array of factors warranting consideration”).

*United States Sentencing Commission*



## OVERVIEW

*of the  
Federal Sentencing Guidelines*



# CALCULATING THE GUIDELINES

## BASE OFFENSE LEVEL

Each type of crime is assigned a base offense level, which is the starting point for determining the seriousness of a particular offenses. More serious types of crimes have higher base offense levels (for example, a trespass has a base offense level of 4, while kidnapping has a base offense level of 32).

## SPECIFIC OFFENSE CHARACTERISTICS

In addition to base offense levels, each offense type typically carries with it a number of specific offense characteristics. These are factors that vary from offense to offense, but that can increase or decrease the base offense level and, ultimately, the sentence an individual receives. Some examples:

### FRAUD

*One of the specific base offense characteristics for fraud (which has a base offense level of 7 if the statutory maximum is 20 years or more) increases the offense level based on the amount of loss involved in the offense. If a fraud involved a \$7,000 loss, there is to be a 2-level increase to the base offense level, bringing the level up to 9. If a fraud involved a \$45,000 loss, there is to be a 6-level increase, bringing the total to 13.*

### ROBBERY

*One of the specific offense characteristics for robbery (which has a base offense level of 20) involves the use of a firearm. If a firearm was brandished during the robbery, there is to be a 5-level increase, bringing the level to 25; if a firearm was discharged during the robbery, there is to be a 7-level increase, bringing the level to 27.*

## ADJUSTMENTS

Adjustments are factors that can apply to any offense. Like specific offense characteristics, they increase or decrease the offense level. Categories of adjustments include: victim-related adjustments, the individual's role in the offense, and obstruction of justice. Examples of adjustments are as follows:

- If the individual was a minimal participant in the offense, the offense level is decreased by 4 levels.
- If the individual knew that the victim was unusually vulnerable due to age or physical or mental condition, the offense level is increased by 2 levels.
- If the individual obstructed justice, the offense level is increased by 2 levels.

### MULTIPLE COUNTS

*When there are multiple counts of conviction, the sentencing guidelines provide instructions on how to achieve a "combined offense level." These rules provide incremental punishment for significant additional criminal conduct. The most serious offense is used as a starting point. The other counts determine whether and how much to increase the offense level.*

### ACCEPTANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY

*The final step in determining an individual's offense level involves the individual's acceptance of responsibility. The judge may decrease the offense level by two levels if, in the judge's opinion, the individual accepted responsibility for his offense. In deciding whether to grant this reduction, judges can consider such factors as:*

- *whether the individual truthfully admitted his or her role in the crime,*
- *whether the individual made restitution before there was a guilty verdict, and*
- *whether the individual pled guilty.*

## CRIMINAL HISTORY

The guidelines assign each individual to one of six criminal history categories based upon the extent of an individual's past misconduct. Criminal History Category I is the least serious category and includes many first-time offenders. Criminal History Category VI is the most serious category and includes individuals with serious criminal records.

# DETERMINING THE GUIDELINE RANGE

The final offense level is determined by taking the base offense level and then adding or subtracting from it any specific offense characteristics and adjustments that apply. The point at which the final offense level and the criminal history category intersect on the Commission's sentencing table determines the defendant's sentencing guideline range.



## SENTENCING TABLE

		(In months of imprisonment)					
		Criminal History Category (Criminal History Points)					
Offense Level		I (0 or 1)	II (2 or 3)	III (4, 5, 6)	IV (7, 8, 9)	V (10, 11, 12)	VI (13 or more)
1		0-6	0-6	0-6	0-6	0-6	0-6
2		0-6	0-6	0-6	0-6	0-6	1-7
3		0-6	0-6	0-6	0-6	2-8	3-9
4	Zone A	0-6	0-6	0-6	2-8	4-10	6-12
5		0-6	0-6	1-7	4-10	6-12	9-15
6		0-6	1-7	2-8	6-12	9-15	12-18
7		0-6	2-8	4-10	8-14	12-18	15-21
8		0-6	4-10	6-12	10-16	15-21	18-24
9		4-10	6-12	8-14	12-18	18-24	21-27
10	Zone B	6-12	8-14	10-16	15-21	21-27	24-30
11		8-14	10-16	12-18	18-24	24-30	27-33
12	Zone C	10-16	12-18	15-21	21-27	27-33	30-37
13		12-18	15-21	18-24	24-30	30-37	33-41
14		15-21	18-24	21-27	27-33	33-41	37-46
15		18-24	21-27	24-30	30-37	37-46	41-51
16		21-27	24-30	27-33	33-41	41-51	46-57
17		24-30	27-33	30-37	37-46	46-57	51-63
18		27-33	30-37	33-41	41-51	51-63	57-71
19		30-37	33-41	37-46	46-57	57-71	63-78
20		33-41	37-46	41-51	51-63	63-78	70-87
21		37-46	41-51	46-57	57-71	70-87	77-96
22		41-51	46-57	51-63	63-78	77-96	84-105
23		46-57	51-63	57-71	70-87	84-105	92-115
24		51-63	57-71	63-78	77-96	92-115	100-125
25		57-71	63-78	70-87	84-105	100-125	110-137
26		63-78	70-87	78-97	92-115	110-137	120-150
27		70-87	78-97	87-108	100-125	120-150	130-162
28	Zone D	78-97	87-108	97-121	110-137	130-162	140-175
29		87-108	97-121	108-135	121-151	140-175	151-188
30		97-121	108-135	121-151	135-168	151-188	168-210
31		108-135	121-151	135-168	151-188	168-210	188-235
32		121-151	135-168	151-188	168-210	188-235	210-262
33		135-168	151-188	168-210	188-235	210-262	235-293
34		151-188	168-210	188-235	210-262	235-293	262-327
35		168-210	188-235	210-262	235-293	262-327	292-365
36		188-235	210-262	235-293	262-327	292-365	324-405
37		210-262	235-293	262-327	292-365	324-405	360-life
38		235-293	262-327	292-365	324-405	360-life	360-life
39		262-327	292-365	324-405	360-life	360-life	360-life
40		292-365	324-405	360-life	360-life	360-life	360-life
41		324-405	360-life	360-life	360-life	360-life	360-life
42		360-life	360-life	360-life	360-life	360-life	360-life
43		life	life	life	life	life	life

*In the sentencing table, an individual with a Criminal History Category of I and a final offense level of 20 would have an advisory guideline range of 33 to 41 months of imprisonment.*