



# SENTENCING RESOURCES **GUIDE**

A Catalog of  
United States Sentencing Commission  
Services and Resources



# ABOUT THE COMMISSION

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The United States Sentencing Commission, an independent agency in the judicial branch of the United States Government, was created by Congress in 1984 to reduce sentencing disparities and promote transparency and proportionality in federal sentencing. Operating through a group of bipartisan Commissioners nominated by the President and confirmed by the Senate, the Commission works to establish sound and equitable sentencing policies and practices for the federal courts; advise and assist Congress and the executive branch in the development of effective and efficient crime policy; and collect, analyze, research, and distribute a broad array of information on federal crime.

As part of its statutory mission, the Commission is responsible for promulgating the Federal Sentencing *Guidelines Manual* for the United States federal courts. The Commission regularly reviews and amends these guidelines based on research, evidence, and sound policy. The Commission also serves as a clearinghouse and information center for the collection, preparation, and dissemination of information on federal sentencing practices, systematically collecting and disseminating data concerning the federal sentencing process to inform the public, Congress, and the courts.

The Commission is committed to public access and transparency, providing training and public information and seeking input from judges, policymakers, and the public on sentencing issues.



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The Commission offers a variety of resources and training opportunities for members of the federal court family. These resources can help to guide judges and court personnel in understanding and applying the federal sentencing guidelines and determining appropriate sentences.

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# LATEST RELEASES

In response to heightened interest in the Commission’s work during recent amendment cycles, in January 2023 the Commission launched a [Public Comment Submission Portal](#) where the public can participate in the amendment cycle during formal public comment periods.

The Commission released six comprehensive research publications and several data reports in the last two years. Find the latest **reports** released online [here](#).

In September 2021, the Commission released the [Judiciary Sentencing INformation \(JSIN\)](#) platform—an online sentencing data resource specifically developed with the needs of judges in mind. The platform provides quick and easy online access to sentencing data for similarly-situated defendants.

The [Interactive Data Analyzer \(IDA\)](#) continues to be used by the courts, criminal justice stakeholders, the press, and the public. Using IDA, you can access fiscal year sentencing data by district or circuit, or even analyze sentencing data by crime type. IDA also reports trend analyses as far back as fiscal year 2015.







# GUIDELINES MANUAL

Generally, the Commission promulgates guidelines on an annual basis. When the guidelines are amended, a subsequent *Guidelines Manual* is published and generally takes effect on November 1.

The Commission offers the manual in a variety of formats with additional helpful features.




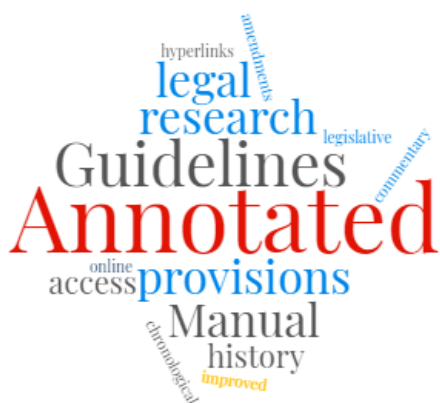
## PRINTED

*Guidelines Manuals* are distributed free-of-charge by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts and U.S. Department of Justice to federal judges, prosecutors, defenders, and probation officers. If you have questions about **how to obtain a copy**, please feel free to contact the Public Affairs team at [PubAffairs@ussc.gov](mailto:PubAffairs@ussc.gov).

*Guidelines Manuals* are also publicly available for purchase through the Government Publishing Office's U.S. Government Bookstore.

## ANNOTATED

The *Guidelines Manual Annotated* is an online HTML version of the *Guidelines Manual* that provides quick access to the history of specific guideline and commentary provisions. Use the  icon next to a provision to access a list of related amendments. The list is arranged in chronological order and provides hyperlinks to the full text of the amendments.



## GUIDELINES APP

The Guidelines App is a web-based app that provides easy access to the full contents of the *Guidelines Manual* on mobile devices, or desktop and laptop computers. Features include:

- quick-search by guideline, amendment, statute, or keyword;
- calculate drug equivalencies and ranges;
- bookmark, highlight text, and take notes; and
- easily share text of the manual.







# TRAINING



Did you know the Office of Education and Sentencing Practice staff conducts training sessions for judges, their law clerks, courtroom deputies and district court clerks as well as probation officers, defense attorneys, and prosecutors? We regularly host virtual training sessions on various topics, or we can travel to your district, at no cost to you. We will train the whole “court family” or conduct separate training sessions for each group according to your preference.

Our educators are former defense attorneys, probation officers, law clerks, and professional educators with years of experience in training guideline application, sentencing procedure, and case law.

## Training Topics

We train guideline users with all levels of experience—from brand-new practitioners to people with decades of federal sentencing experience. Our trainers take the most complex topics and make them easy to understand and apply in your everyday work. Frequently requested training topics include:

- The Categorical Approach (*determining crimes of violence*)
- Criminal History
- Recent Case Law
- Relevant Conduct (*sentencing liability*)

## Attending a Training Session

Attending a training session with the Commission’s training staff is easy. **Click below to register for an upcoming session.**

[Register Here for Sessions](#)

Once registered for a virtual training session, instructors will contact you to confirm registration and provide necessary information about the virtual training platform. After the training session, our staff can be available for a post-training remote meeting with attendees to answer any remaining questions or concerns. We also provide multiple opportunities to evaluate our programs, including an immediate follow-up and two weeks after through an online survey.

We also work closely with all members of the court family to develop training programs for groups according to preference or expertise. **Click [here](#) to request customized training.**

# NATIONAL SEMINARS

Each year the Commission holds a national training seminar for a broad array of members of the federal criminal justice system. More than 850 federal probation officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and judges attended our last annual national training seminar. The Commission also conducts annual national training exclusively for federal judges as they have unique training needs.

If you have a specific question about the National Seminar, please email us at [NationalSeminar@ussc.gov](mailto:NationalSeminar@ussc.gov).



# VIRTUAL TRAINING

## Video Conferencing



We conduct remote training sessions via Adobe Connect video conferencing technology. Our virtual sessions are interactive and tailored to fit your training needs.

[Learn More](#)

## eLearning Courses



The Commission also offers self-guided eLearning modules. Learn more about **course offerings on the next page.**

[View All Courses](#)

# CONTACT

## Judges Training



*Are you a federal judge seeking training?*

Reach out directly to Alan Dorhoffer, Acting Director of the Office of Education and Sentencing Practice at [ADorhoffer@ussc.gov](mailto:ADorhoffer@ussc.gov).

## HelpLine

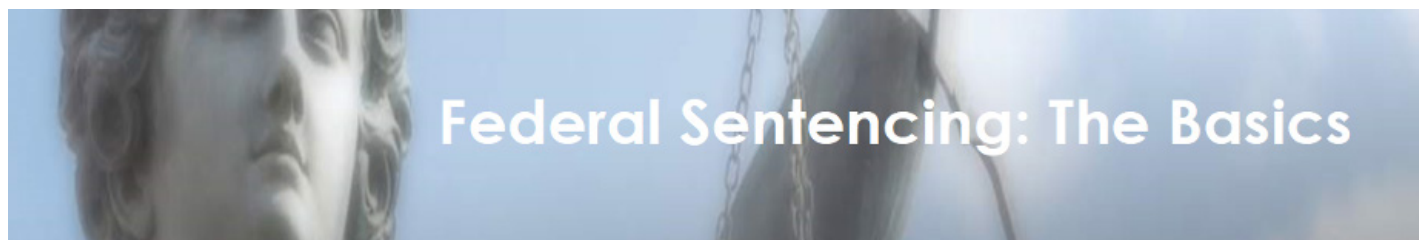


The HelpLine assists **practitioners** on the spot in **applying the guidelines.** The HelpLine accepts questions submitted online or over the phone.

**Contact:** (202) 502-4545  
**Hours:** 8:30 a.m.- 5:00 p.m. (ET) Monday – Friday

[Ask Question Online](#)

# CORE eLEARNING CURRICULUM



This eLearning series provides an overview of the federal sentencing system in four parts.

## The Basics: Module I

### **Learning Objectives**

- Explain the reasoning behind the passage of the Sentencing Reform Act (SRA) and the subsequent creation of the U.S. Sentencing Commission;
- Discuss the role of the U.S. Sentencing Commission in determining penalties for federal sentencing;
- Summarize the process for promulgating amendments to the guidelines;
- Describe how the Supreme Court's decision in *United States v. Booker* impacted the federal sentencing system;
- Describe the seven statutory factors in 18 U.S.C. § 3553(a) relevant to sentencing;
- Identify key goals and objectives of the federal sentencing guidelines; and
- Summarize each chapter of the *Guidelines Manual*.

## The Basics: Module II

### **Learning Objectives**

- Define statutory requirements that may affect sentencing outcomes;
- Describe basic principles for financial penalties and supervised release;
- Describe the information the court must provide when the defendant has pleaded guilty;
- Explain the functions and characteristics of the Presentence Report (PSR);
- Summarize the basic process of a sentencing hearing; and
- Describe how the U.S. Sentencing Commission collects data.

## The Basics: Module III

### **Learning Objectives**

- Describe the three steps in sentencing that the courts must conduct;
- Explain relevant conduct and its implications for sentencing;
- Execute the steps involved in the guideline application process;
- Explain the differences between departures and variances;
- Identify the two ways a court can sentence below a statutory mandatory minimum; and
- Define characteristics of the two types of reasonableness review administered by appellate courts.

## The Basics: Module IV

### **Learning Objectives**

- Describe the information the court needs to conduct a revocation hearing of probation or supervised release;
- Describe the sentencing options of the court when revoking a term of probation or supervised release;
- Explain the purpose and role of the Chapter Seven policy statements in revocation of supervision; and,
- Summarize the court's responsibility in consideration of Chapter Seven.



## Basic Criminal History



This eLearning module introduces the criminal history rules used to apply the federal sentencing guidelines.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Explain the function and import of determining the Criminal History Category for a particular defendant;
- Calculate the length of a defendant's prior sentence;
- Determine if a defendant's prior sentence falls within the applicable time frame to count for criminal history points;
- Describe special rules used to score particular prior sentences; and
- Apply the criminal history rules to calculate criminal history points using real-world scenarios.

## Basic Relevant Conduct

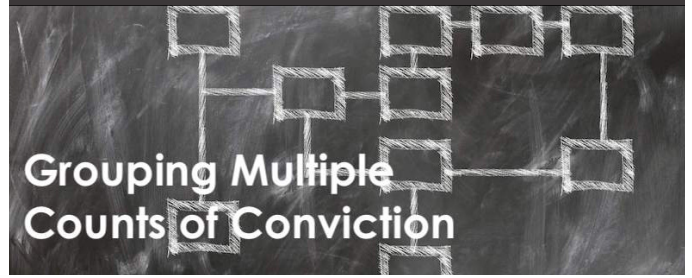


This eLearning module introduces the Relevant Conduct analysis used to apply the federal sentencing guidelines emphasizing real-world scenarios to illustrate the application of the analysis.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Explain why the Commission adopted a relevant conduct analysis;
- Describe how relevant conduct impacts application of Chapters Two and Three of the federal sentencing guidelines;
- Determine which acts of the defendant are considered relevant conduct in an offense;
- Determine if acts of others in a jointly undertaken criminal activity can be attributed to the defendant as relevant conduct in an offense;
- Explain when "expanded" relevant conduct applies in application of the federal sentencing guidelines; and
- Apply the relevant conduct analysis to real-world scenarios.

## Grouping Multiple Counts



This eLearning module demonstrates application of the grouping rules following the process outlined in the Decision Tree.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Use the Decision Tree to determine a single offense level for a case involving multiple counts of conviction;
- Define the criteria for applying the four grouping rules in §3D1.2;
- Identify the difference between grouping multiple counts of conviction under §3D1.2(d) and grouping multiple counts under §3D1.2(a), (b), and (c);
- Describe the process of assigning units under §3D1.4;
- Distinguish between "grouping" multiple counts of conviction under §3D1.2 and the "assignment of units" to multiple counts of conviction under §3D1.4;
- Apply the multiple counts rules under Chapter Three, Part D to real-world scenarios; and
- Determine a single offense level for real-world scenarios involving multiple counts of conviction.

# RESEARCH & DATA



## Documents Submitted

The Chief Judge of each district shall ensure that, within 30 days following entry of judgment in every criminal case, the sentencing court submits to the following documents to the Commission:

- the judgment and commitment order (J&C);
- the statement of reasons (SOR);
- any plea agreement;
- the indictment or other charging document;
- the presentence report (PSR); and
- any other information the Commission finds appropriate.

## Information Collected

Information collected from the submitted documents includes:

- demographic information;
- statutes of conviction;
- complete guideline application information;
- sentencing information;
- criminal history points and additional information about prior convictions; and
- information about the sentence relative to the guideline range.

## Resulting Work

The Commission collects data from these documents using both optical character recognition (OCR) technology and in-house manual data collection to create datafiles. From these datafiles, the Commission prepares and disseminates public reports on a wide variety of sentencing issues. The Commission also uses this data in its consulting capacity to the courts, Congress, and the Executive Branch.

## QUESTIONS

### Special Data Requests



The Director of the Office of Research & Data will respond to **special data requests from federal judges**. We can provide statistics for your district on specific sentencing issues, such as the average sentence

imposed for similarly situated defendants who are sentenced in your district.

Contact Glenn Schmitt at [GSchmitt@ussc.gov](mailto:GSchmitt@ussc.gov).

### Research Help



Research staff can answer general **questions from the public** about Commission data or data sets.

Contact [AskORD@ussc.gov](mailto:AskORD@ussc.gov).

# SOURCEBOOK OF FEDERAL SENTENCING STATISTICS



The annual *Sourcebook of Federal Sentencing Statistics* contains descriptive statistics on the application of the federal sentencing guidelines and provides selected district, circuit, and national sentencing data. Published in early spring of each year, the *Sourcebook* reports information on for the previous fiscal year (October - September).

## INTERACTIVE DATA ANALYZER (IDA)

Launched in June 2020, the Interactive Data Analyzer (IDA) is an online tool that can be used to explore, filter, customize, and visualize federal sentencing data for research, policymaking, and sentencing purposes. IDA offers prebuilt data dashboards for common areas of interest and a filtering menu to select data by fiscal year, jurisdiction, demographics, and more.



- Watch tutorial on navigating IDA.
- Watch tutorial on exporting files in IDA.

## JUDICIARY SENTENCING INFORMATION (JSIN)



Launched in September 2021, the Judiciary Sentencing Information (JSIN) platform is an online sentencing data resource specifically developed with the needs of judges in mind. The platform provides quick and easy online access to five years of cumulative sentencing data for similarly-situated defendants. JSIN expands upon the Commission's longstanding practice of providing sentencing data at the request of federal judges by making some of the data provided through these special requests more broadly and easily available.

- Watch tutorial on navigating JSIN.





UNITED STATES SENTENCING COMMISSION

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