

TEXT SUMMARY

The inferior courts, the federal courts under the Supreme Court, handle most federal cases. Each State, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico has at least one district court or federal trial court.

The 94 U.S. district courts have original jurisdiction over most federal criminal cases and federal civil cases. A federal **criminal case** is filed when a person violates a federal law.

A federal **civil case** involves some noncriminal matter, such as a contract dispute.

When the Supreme Court's **docket**—its list of cases to be heard—grew too

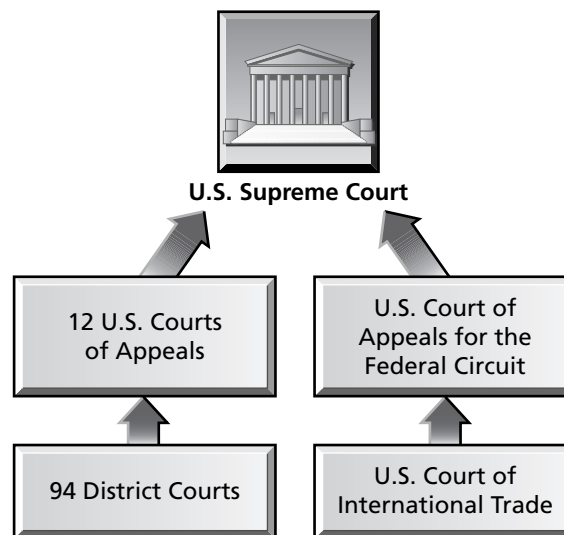
long, Congress created the courts of appeals to hear appeals from district courts. The United States now has 12 courts of appeals serving 12 judicial circuits. Altogether, 179 circuit judges sit on these appellate courts, with a justice of the Supreme Court assigned to each of them.

Congress has created two other federal courts. The U.S. Court of International Trade hears civil cases involving trade-related laws. The Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit hears appeals cases from across the country. Its purpose is to speed up appeals in certain kinds of civil cases.

THE BIG IDEA

Most federal cases are tried in the inferior courts—those under the Supreme Court.

GRAPHIC SUMMARY: How Federal Cases Are Appealed



Congress created the courts of appeals to relieve the Supreme Court of hearing so many appeals cases.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What defines the federal inferior courts?
2. **Diagram Skills** From which type of court may cases advance to the Supreme Court?