

Appeals Courts

“I'm Justice Judith Ann Lanzinger of the Ohio Supreme Court.

In the last 30 years I've had the privilege of being elected to all court levels in Ohio. Let me tell you about the Court of Appeals.

Appellate courts are different from trial courts—they don't hear witnesses or evidence. After a case is tried, settled or dismissed, a municipal or common pleas judge enters a judgment saying who has won or lost. And then the losing party has at least one right to appeal to one of twelve district courts of appeals. The case will be assigned to a panel of 3 judges.

The appellant, the one appealing, files a written brief setting out points of dispute called 'assignments of error.' The appellee – who is happy with the existing result – files another brief and then the appellant has the last word. The attorneys may present oral arguments.

Afterward, a majority of the panel decides whether the judgment should be affirmed, reversed or modified. One judge writes the appellate opinion, which can be overturned by the Ohio Supreme Court. But most cases end here because the Supreme Court chooses certain cases only.

Each level of our state courts calls for different skills. Appellate judges need to be well-read in the law, able to deliberate with colleagues, and capable of writing understandable opinions.

And of course, all judges must be fair and impartial in handling their duties.”