

Key Terms in Criminal Law

- Presumption of innocence: The idea that all people accused of a crime are innocent until proven guilty.
- Burden of proof: The duty of the prosecution to prove that the defendant committed the crime for which he or she has been charged.
- Standard of proof: The level of evidence needed to convince the court of a person's guilt. This level can vary based on the degree of the alleged crime. The standard for a murder case is "Beyond a reasonable doubt."
- Reasonable doubt: In a criminal case, prosecutors must present sufficient evidence to overcome the presumption of innocence and prove a defendant's guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt." In other words, no reasonable doubt about the defendant's guilt could exist in the mind of the judge or jury based on the evidence presented.
- Hearsay evidence: A statement provided by someone who did not witness an event. Instead, someone else told him or her what happened. Such evidence is not usually allowed in court.
- Evidence presented in court: For a conviction to be legitimate, it must be based on the evidence presented in court and directly related to the crime.
- Circumstantial evidence: A collection of details that can point to a specific conclusion but does not provide conclusive proof. Other explanations are possible.