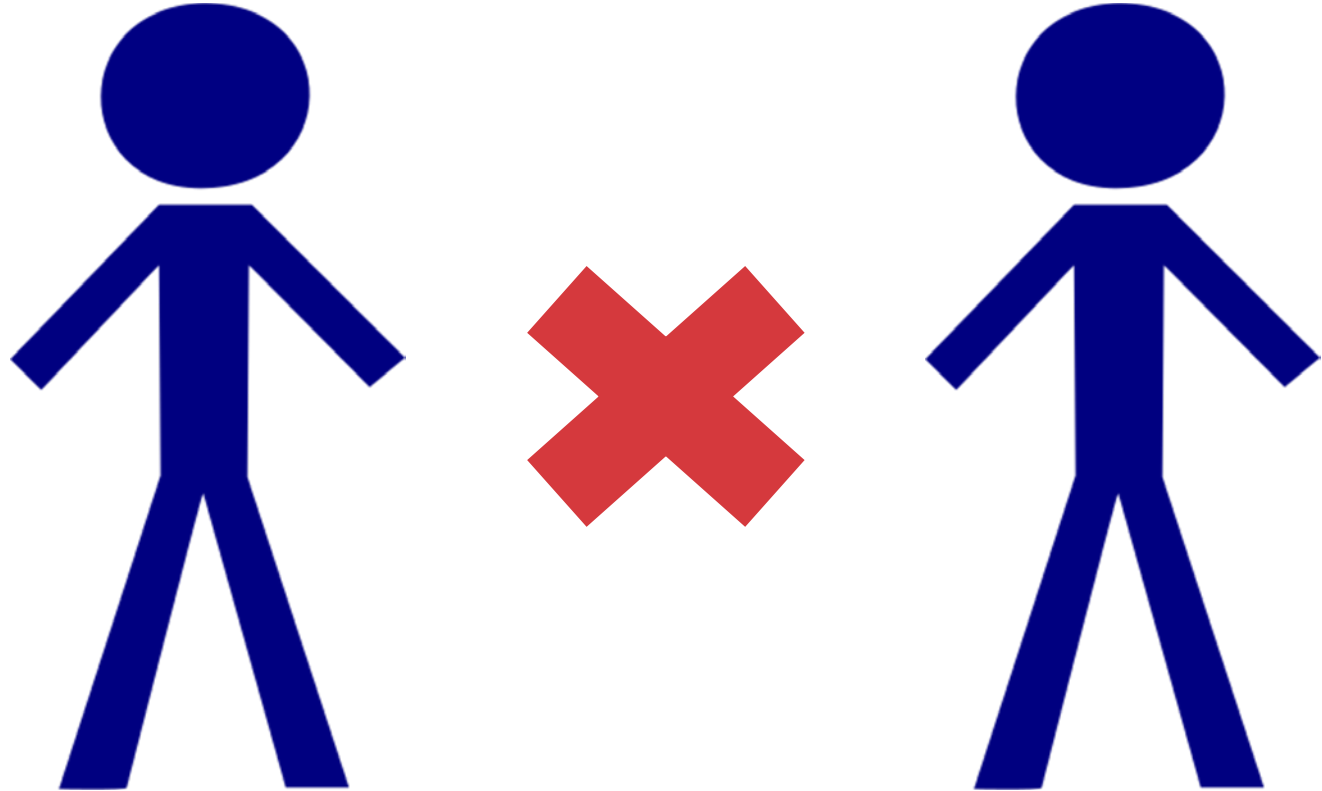


COURT OF APPEALS: A CRASH COURSE

Intro to the court system, the role of an attorney,
your case, and available resources

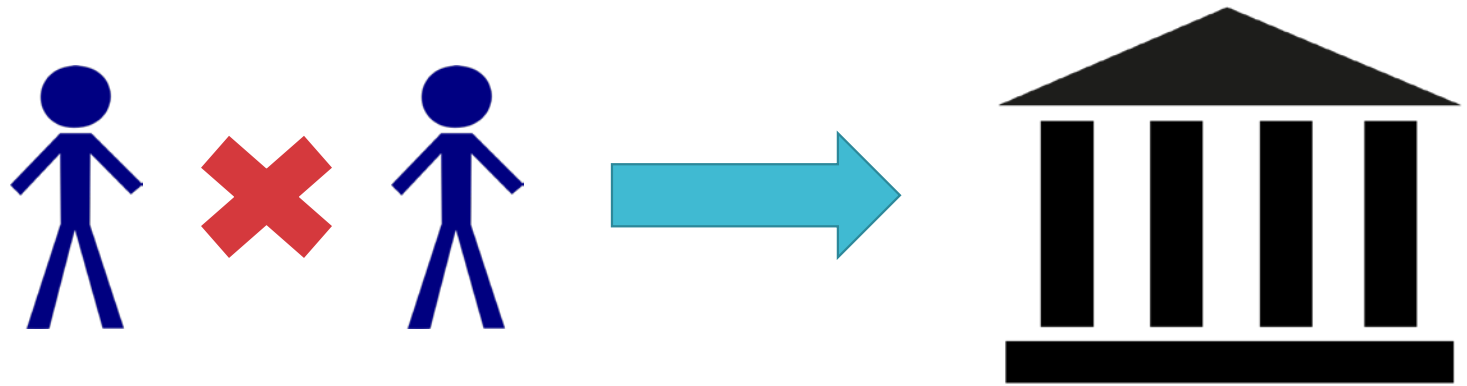
The life of a
court case

It all starts with a "dispute"



The life of a court case

When parties to a dispute can't resolve their differences, they can turn to the courts



The life of a court case

When a dispute becomes a “case,”
it starts at the trial court.



The life of a
court case

In Minnesota, there are three
“levels” of courts. . .



Supreme Court



Court of Appeals



Trial Court

The life of a court case

The trial court's job is to figure out
"what happened"



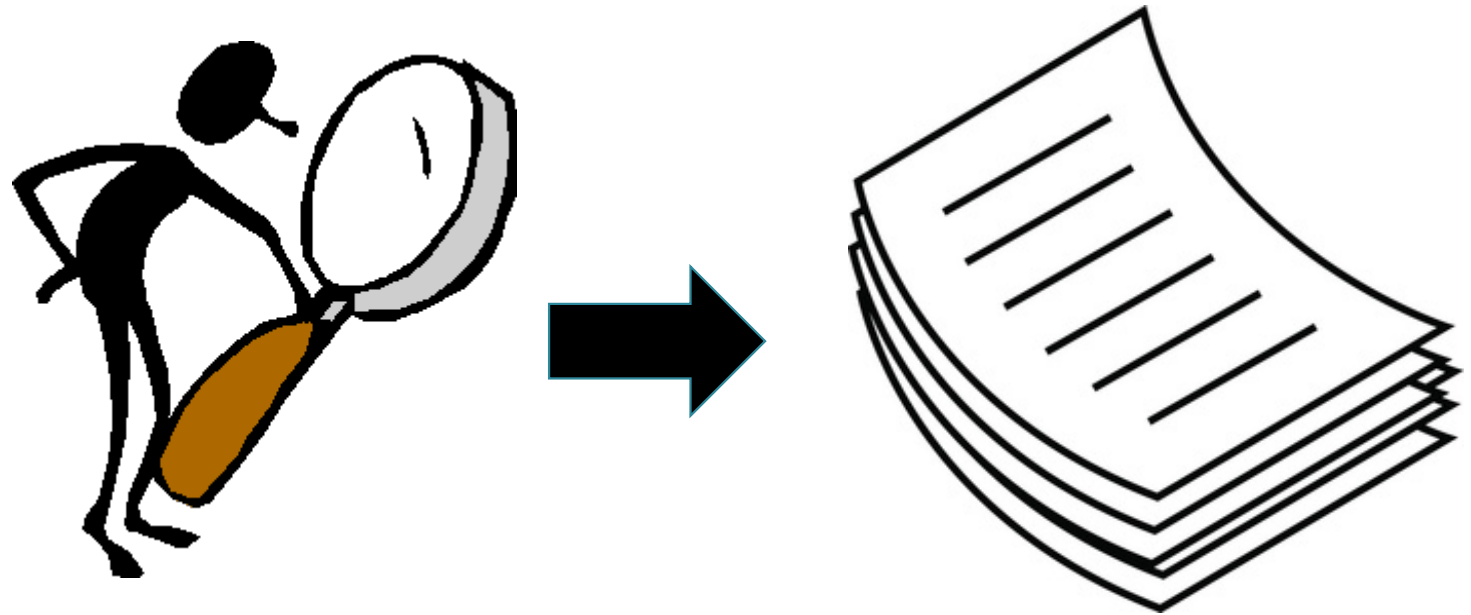
The life of a court case

At the trial court, the lawyers for each side try to “tell a story,” and a judge or jury decides whose side of the story is right or is more believable.



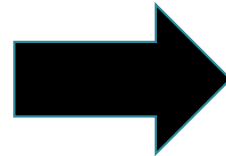
The life of a court case

In this process, the trial court “finds facts,” which create the “record” in the case.



The life of a court case

In order to decide which party “wins,” the trial court “applies” the law of the state to the facts in the record.



The life of a court case

There are three “sources” of law that courts apply.

CONSTITUTIONS

STATUTES

(laws passed by the state legislature)

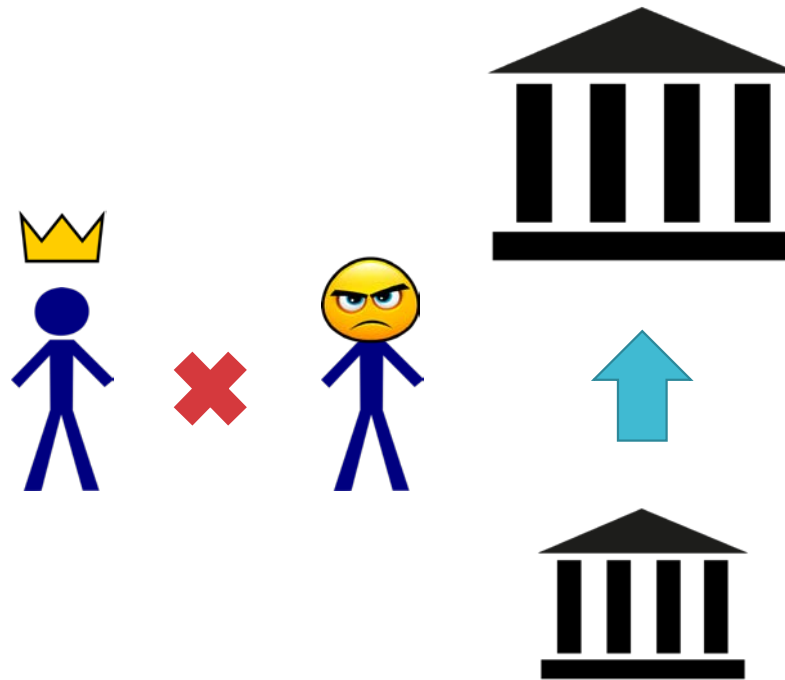
PRECEDENT CASES

(previous decisions of the supreme court and court of appeals interpreting the law)



The life of a court case

If a party is unhappy about the result at the trial court, they can “appeal” the trial court’s decision to the Court of Appeals.



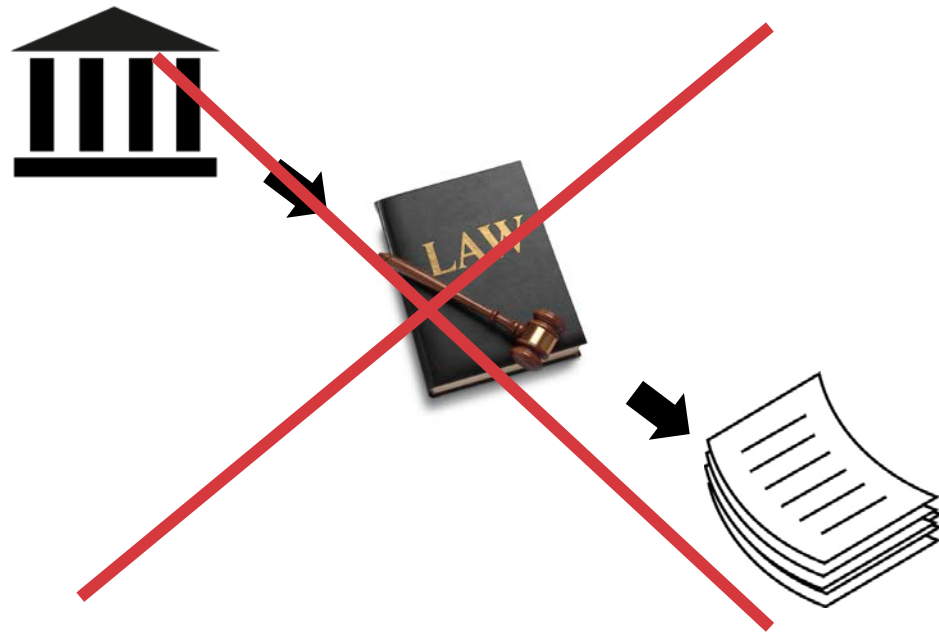
The life of a court case

At the Court of Appeals, the “facts” in the “record” are settled, meaning that the parties can no longer dispute or argue about “what happened.”



The life of a court case

At the Court of Appeals, the losing party (“the Appellant”) argues that the trial court incorrectly interpreted or applied the law to the facts in the case



The life of a court case

This raises the question. . .
What is the law?



The life of a court case

Remember, there are three sources of law. . .

CONSTITUTIONS

STATUTES

(laws passed by the state legislature)

PRECEDENT CASES

(previous decisions of the supreme court and court of appeals interpreting the law)



The life of a court case

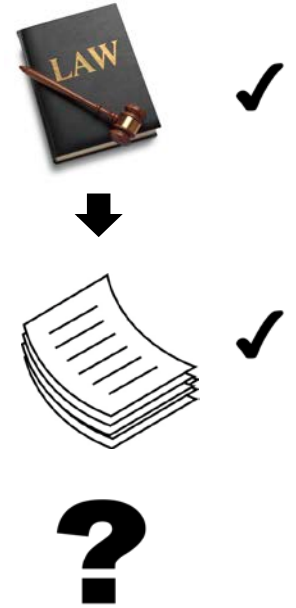
Sometimes the law is. . .

- **Ambiguous** – There is more than one way to interpret it.
- **In conflict** – One source doesn't agree with another
- **Unsettled** – No source of law provides an answer to the question in the case

The life of a court case

So, the job of the Court of Appeals is to . . .

1. Interpret the law/decide what the law is
2. Apply its interpretation of the law to the facts in the record
3. Decide whether the trial court got it right or not



The life of a court case

Trial Court	Court of Appeals	Supreme Court
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One judge, sometimes a jury	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usually three judges (panel)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Usually seven justices
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Finds” facts and creates “the record”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses facts “in the record”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Uses facts “in the record”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Applies the law” as interpreted by the court of appeals and supreme court	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interprets the law (says what the law is)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interprets the law (says what the law is)• Has the final say on disputed areas of law

So what happens at the Court of Appeals?

- Three judges,
- Hear arguments,
- From both sides
 - Appellant (losing party at the trial court)
 - Respondent (winning party at the trial court)



Respondent



Appellant

The role of an
attorney at
the Court of
Appeals

Argue that the trial court got it
wrong (appellant) or got it right
(respondent) *based on the law
applied to the facts in the
record.*

Law versus Facts

Facts	Law
What happened	The “rules” that apply in certain situations
Example: “The light was red;” “She did not stop at the light.”	Example: “Drivers must stop at red lights.”

**LAW + FACTS =
LEGAL CONCLUSION →
LEGAL ARGUMENT**

Ingredients of an Argument

Remember “IRAC”

- I – The issue or question raised by the appeal
- R – An interpretation of the rule of law that applies in the case
- A – Application of the rule of law to the facts in the case
- C – A conclusion based on the application of the rule of law to the facts; an answer to the issue/question of the case

Example

<u>I</u>ssue	Was the driver supposed to stop at the intersection?
<u>R</u>ule of Law	Drivers must stop at red lights
<u>A</u>pplicable Facts	The light was red
<u>C</u>onclusion	The driver was supposed to stop at the red light.

Building on the argument. . .

<u>I</u>ssue	Was the driver responsible for the accident?
<u>R</u>ule of Law	Drivers must stop at red lights
<u>A</u>pplicable Facts	The light was red; the driver did not stop; there was an accident
<u>C</u>onclusion	The driver was responsible for the accident.

Your goals as a Court of Appeals attorney

- Read and understand the facts in the record.
- Read and understand the law that applies to your case.
- Consider different ways you could interpret the law; identify the interpretation of the law most favorable to each side.
- Apply your interpretation of the law to the facts in the record
→ ask, what facts help each side and what facts hurt each side?
Is there more than one way to interpret individual facts?
- Form legal arguments by drawing conclusions based on your interpretation of the law and application of the facts.
- Deliver an oral argument which convinces the panel of judges that your interpretation of the law and fact application is better than the other side's.

What is in your case packet

- **The issues presented in the case** – Each case presents two issues, one for each partner
- **The trial court record** – the facts and a summary of the decision of the trial court
- **A general summary of the law** – Each issue has its own rule of law
- **Questions to consider** – some guiding questions to get you started thinking about the facts and the law
- **Precedent case briefs** – summaries of prior cases before Minnesota state courts or United States courts which you can use to support your interpretation of the law, the facts, or both.

Resources available

- Today's sessions:
 - Case breakdown sessions
 - How to complete your case analysis sheet
 - Court of Appeals simulation
- At Model Assembly:
 - Thursday training
 - The "Law Library"
 - Your youth judges