

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ALABAMA  
Choose an item. DIVISION

Plaintiff(s),	)	
	)	
Choose an item.,	)	
	)	
v.	)	Case No. Case Number.
	)	
Defendant(s),	)	
	)	
Choose an item..	)	

**COURT'S INSTRUCTIONS TO THE JURY**

**3.1 Introduction**

Members of the Jury:

It's my duty to instruct you on the rules of law that you must use in deciding this case.

A jury trial has, in effect, two judges. I am one of the judges; the other judge is the jury. My duty is to preside over the trial and to decide what evidence is proper for your consideration. My duty at the end of the trial is to explain to you the rules of law that you must follow and apply in arriving at your verdict.

First, I will give some general instructions that apply in every case; for example, instructions about burden of proof and how to judge the believability of witnesses. Then I will give you some specific rules of law about this particular case, and finally I will explain to you the procedures you should follow in your

deliberations.

When I have finished you will go to the jury room and begin your discussions, sometimes called deliberations.

### **3.2 The Duty to Follow Instructions—No Corporate Party Involved**

Your decision must be based only on the evidence presented here. You must not be influenced in any way by either sympathy for or prejudice against anyone.

You must follow the law as I explain it—even if you do not agree with the law—and you must follow all of my instructions as a whole. You must not single out or disregard any of the instructions on the law.

#### **3.2.2 The Duty to Follow Instructions—Corporate Party Involved**

[ADD TO 3.2] The fact that a corporation is involved as a party must not affect your decision in any way. A corporation and all other persons stand equal before the law and must be dealt with as equals in a court of justice. When a corporation is involved, of course, it may act only through people as its employees; and, in general, a corporation is responsible under the law for the acts and statements of its employees that are made within the scope of their duties as employees of the company.

#### **3.2.3 The Duty to Follow Instructions—Government Entity or Agency Involved**

[ADD TO 3.2] The fact that a governmental entity or agency is involved as a party must not affect your decision in any way. A governmental agency and all other

persons stand equal before the law and must be dealt with as equals in a court of justice. When a governmental agency is involved, of course, it may act only through people as its employees; and, in general, a governmental agency is responsible under the law for the acts and statements of its employees that are made within the scope of their duties as employees of the governmental agency.

### **3.3 Consideration of Direct and Circumstantial Evidence; Argument of Counsel; Comments by the Court**

As I said before, you must consider only the evidence that I have admitted in the case. Evidence includes the testimony of witnesses and the exhibits admitted. But, anything the lawyers say is not evidence and isn't binding on you.

You shouldn't assume from anything I've said that I have any opinion about any factual issue in this case. Except for my instructions to you on the law, you should disregard anything I may have said during the trial in arriving at your own decision about the facts.

Your own recollection and interpretation of the evidence is what matters.

In considering the evidence you may use reasoning and common sense to make deductions and reach conclusions. You shouldn't be concerned about whether the evidence is direct or circumstantial.

"Direct evidence" is the testimony of a person who asserts that he or she has actual knowledge of a fact, such as an eyewitness.

“Circumstantial evidence” is proof of a chain of facts and circumstances that tend to prove or disprove a fact. There’s no legal difference in the weight you may give to either direct or circumstantial evidence.

### **What is not evidence/Objections (1.1 reprise/court’s charge)**

Again, the lawyers’ questions and objections aren’t evidence. Only the witnesses’ answers are evidence. Don’t decide that something is true just because a lawyer’s question suggested that it is. A question is not evidence unless the witness agreed with it.

Similarly, during the trial, I ruled on objections by the lawyers about whether certain evidence could be presented. It is a lawyer’s job to make objections if the lawyer believes an objection is proper. Do not concern yourself with why I ruled as I did, because my rulings are based on rules of law. If I sustained an objection, you must not guess about what the possible testimony or exhibits may have been. And if I overruled an objection and allowed the evidence, my ruling does not indicate whether you should believe that evidence. You should consider that evidence along with all of the other evidence in the case and must not consider any evidence that I excluded.

You should not consider any rulings I made or anything that I have said or done as an indication from me about how you should decide the case. Under our system, I am the judge of the law. You are the only judges of the facts. I cannot give

you my opinion of the case or comment on the evidence.

### **3.4 Credibility of Witnesses**

When I say you must consider all the evidence, I don't mean that you must accept all the evidence as true or accurate. You should decide whether you believe what each witness had to say, and how important that testimony was. In making that decision you may believe or disbelieve any witness, in whole or in part. The number of witnesses testifying concerning a particular point doesn't necessarily matter.

To decide whether you believe any witness I suggest that you ask yourself a few questions:

1. Did the witness impress you as one who was telling the truth?
2. Did the witness have any particular reason not to tell the truth?
3. Did the witness have a personal interest in the outcome of the case?
4. Did the witness seem to have a good memory?
5. Did the witness have the opportunity and ability to accurately observe the things he or she testified about?
6. Did the witness appear to understand the questions clearly and answer them directly?
7. Did the witness's testimony differ from other testimony or other evidence?

#### **3.5.1 Impeachment of Witnesses Because of Inconsistent Statements**

You should also ask yourself whether there was evidence that a witness testified falsely about an important fact. And ask whether there was evidence that at

some other time a witness said or did something, or didn't say or do something, that was different from the testimony the witness gave during this trial.

[INSERT 3.5.2 Felony Conviction IF APPLICABLE] To decide whether you believe a witness, you may consider the fact that the witness has been convicted of a felony or a crime involving dishonesty or a false statement.

But keep in mind that a simple mistake doesn't mean a witness wasn't telling the truth as he or she remembers it. People naturally tend to forget some things or remember them inaccurately. So, if a witness misstated something, you must decide whether it was because of an innocent lapse in memory or an intentional deception. The significance of your decision may depend on whether the misstatement is about an important fact or about an unimportant detail.

### **3.6.1 Expert Witness**

When scientific, technical or other specialized knowledge might be helpful, a person who has special training or experience in that field is allowed to state an opinion about the matter.

But that doesn't mean you must accept the witness's opinion. As with any other witness's testimony, you must decide for yourself whether to rely upon the opinion.

[INSERT 3.6.2 Fees Represent a Significant Portion of the Witness's Income WHEN APPLICABLE]

When a witness is being paid for reviewing and testifying concerning the evidence, you may consider the possibility of bias and should view with caution the testimony of such witness where court testimony is given with regularity and represents a significant portion of the witness's income.

## **2.1 Stipulations**

Sometimes the parties have agreed that certain facts are true. This agreement is called a stipulation. You must treat these facts as proved for this case.

## **2.2 Use of Depositions**

A deposition is a witness's sworn testimony that is taken before the trial. During a deposition, the witness is under oath and swears to tell the truth, and the lawyers for each party may ask questions. A court reporter is present and records the questions and answers.

The deposition of [name of witness], taken on [date], [is about to be/has been] presented to you [by a video/by reading the transcript]. Deposition testimony is entitled to the same consideration as live testimony, and you must judge it in the same way as if the witness was testifying in court.

[Do not place any significance on the behavior or tone of voice of any person reading the questions or answers.]

**Essential Elements of Plaintiff’s Claim/Definitions/Affirmative Defenses:**

[INSERT]

**Damages (actual, emotional, punitive, statutory, etc.):**

[INSERT]

**3.7.1 Responsibility for Proof—Plaintiff’s Claim[s], Cross Claims, Counterclaims—Preponderance of the Evidence**

In this case it is the responsibility of the [Plaintiff] [party bringing any claim] to prove every essential part of [his/her/its] claim[s] by a “preponderance of the evidence.” This is sometimes called the “burden of proof” or the “burden of persuasion.”

A “preponderance of the evidence” simply means an amount of evidence that is enough to persuade you that [the Plaintiff’s] [the party’s] claim is more likely true than not true.

If the proof fails to establish any essential part of a claim or contention by a preponderance of the evidence, you should find against the [Plaintiff] [party making that claim or contention].

[When more than one claim is involved, you should consider each claim separately.]

In deciding whether any fact has been proved by a preponderance of the evidence, you may consider the testimony of all of the witnesses, regardless of who may have called them, and all of the exhibits received in evidence, regardless of who



may have produced them.

If the proof fails to establish any essential part of [the Plaintiff's] [a party's] claim[s] by a preponderance of the evidence, you should find for the [Defendant] [Counter-Defendant, Cross-Claim Defendant] as to that claim.

### **3.7.2 Responsibility for Proof—Affirmative Defense Preponderance of the Evidence**

In this case, the [Defendant, Counter-Defendant, cross-claim Defendant] asserts the affirmative defense[s] of \_\_\_\_\_. Even if the [Plaintiff] [Party bringing the claim] proves [his/her/its] claim[s] by a preponderance of the evidence, the [Defendant, Counter-Defendant, cross-claim Defendant] can prevail in this case if [he/she/it] proves an affirmative defense by a preponderance of the evidence.

[When more than one affirmative defense is involved, you should consider each one separately.]

I caution you that the [Defendant, Counter-Defendant, cross-claim Defendant] does not have to disprove the [Plaintiff's] [Counter-Plaintiff's] [cross-claimant's] claim[s], but if the [Defendant, Counter-Defendant, cross-claim Defendant] raises an affirmative defense, the only way [he/she/it] can prevail on that specific defense is if [he/she/it] proves that defense by a preponderance of the evidence.

### **3.8.1 Duty to Deliberate When Only the Plaintiff Claims Damages [3.8.2 if applicable]**

Of course, the fact that I have given you instructions concerning the issue of

Plaintiff's damages should not be interpreted in any way as an indication that I believe that the Plaintiff should, or should not, prevail in this case.

Your verdict must be unanimous—in other words, you must all agree. Your deliberations are secret, and you'll never have to explain your verdict to anyone.

Each of you must decide the case for yourself, but only after fully considering the evidence with the other jurors. So you must discuss the case with one another and try to reach an agreement. While you're discussing the case, don't hesitate to reexamine your own opinion and change your mind if you become convinced that you were wrong. But don't give up your honest beliefs just because others think differently or because you simply want to get the case over with.

Remember that, in a very real way, you're judges—judges of the facts. Your only interest is to seek the truth from the evidence in the case.

### **Final Instructions (court's charge)**

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury, I remind you once again that the arguments of counsel are not evidence in this case. The court allows counsel to make closing arguments or summations to help you recall the evidence and to help you tie the evidence together. You should not substitute what the lawyers say about the evidence for your own recollection. You must decide the case based solely on your view of the facts as you find them to be from the evidence and applying the law to those facts as I have instructed you.

In this case you have been permitted to take notes during the course of the trial, and most of you—if not all of you—have taken advantage of that opportunity and have made notes from time to time. You will have your notes available to you during your deliberations, but you should make use of them only as an aid to your memory. In other words, you should not give your notes any precedence over your independent recollection of the evidence or the lack of evidence; and neither should you be unduly influenced by the notes of other jurors. I emphasize that notes are not entitled to any greater weight than the memory or impression of each juror as to what the testimony may have been.

### **3.9 Election of Foreperson and Explanation of Verdict Form(s)**

When you get to the jury room, choose one of your members to act as foreperson. The foreperson will direct your deliberations and speak for you in court.

A verdict form has been prepared for your convenience.

[Explain verdict]

Take the verdict form with you to the jury room. When you've all agreed on the verdict, your foreperson must fill in the form, sign it and date it. Then you'll return it to the courtroom.

If you wish to communicate with me at any time, please write down your message or question and give it to a court staff member. He/she will bring it to me and I'll respond as promptly as possible—either in writing or by talking to you in

the courtroom. Please understand that I may have to talk to the lawyers and the parties before I respond to your question or message, so you should be patient as you await my response. But I caution you not to tell me how many jurors have voted one way or the other at that time. That type of information should remain in the jury room and should not be shared with anyone, including me, in your note or question.

### **Conclusion**

When you have reached your decision knock on the jury room door and tell a member of the court's staff that you have a verdict.

Starting now, you will decide when you want to take your breaks and when you want to stop for the day. Just let a member of the court's staff know. But you can only discuss the case when all of you are together in the jury room.

I remind you again: do not discuss this case, or anything about it, with anyone outside the jury room. Do not post anything about this case or your jury service on any blog or social networking platform. Do not send email messages about the case to anyone. Do not call, text, or email each other. Do not conduct any research about any aspect of this case—do not consult a dictionary; do not use Google or Wikipedia; do not ask questions of anyone other than each other or me. Remember, as I told you earlier, the only information you should use to decide this case is the evidence presented and the law explained in this courtroom.

At this time, please return to the jury room. You may select your foreperson but do not begin your deliberations until you have the exhibits and verdict form(s).

## **2.8 Civil *Allen* Charge [IF APPLICABLE]**

Members of the jury:

I'm going to ask you to continue your deliberations to reach a verdict. Please consider the following comments.

This is an important case. The trial has been expensive in terms of time, effort, money, and emotional strain to both the plaintiff and the defendant. If you fail to agree on a verdict, the case remains open and may have to be tried again. A second trial would be costly to both sides, and there's no reason to believe either side can try it again better or more exhaustively than they have tried it before you.

Any future jury would be selected in the same manner and from the same source as you. There's no reason to believe that the case could ever be submitted to a jury of people more conscientious, more impartial, or more competent to decide it—or that either side could produce more or clearer evidence.

It's your duty to consult with one another and to deliberate with a view to reaching an agreement—if you can do it without violating your individual judgment. You must not give up your honest beliefs about the evidence's weight or effect solely because of other jurors' opinions or just to return a verdict. You must each decide

the case for yourself—but only after you consider the evidence with your fellow jurors.

You shouldn't hesitate to reexamine your own views and change your opinion if you become convinced it's wrong. To bring your minds to a unanimous result, you must openly and frankly examine the questions submitted to you with proper regard for the opinions of others and with a willingness to reexamine your own views.

If a substantial majority of you is for a verdict for one party, each of you who holds a different position ought to consider whether your position is reasonable. It may not be reasonable since it makes so little impression on the minds of your fellow jurors—who bear the same responsibility, serve under the same oath, and have heard the same evidence.

You may conduct your deliberations as you choose, but I suggest that you now carefully reexamine and reconsider all the evidence in light of the court's instructions on the law. You may take all the time that you need.

I remind you that in your deliberations, you are to consider the court's instructions as a whole. You shouldn't single out any part of any instructions including this one, and ignore others.

You may now return to the jury room and continue your deliberations.