

Courtroom Abbreviations, Acronyms and Access to Justice

Background:

Court professionals have their own language and shorthand for communicating in the court. This adds an additional hurdle for defendants, victims, families and the public to understand the court proceedings.

In the beginning of my ethnography, I found the acronyms to be so difficult to decipher that I needed to create a “glossary” of terms for my notepad so I could actually understand what I was hearing in open court.

I often wondered: how would I fare with less education? How would I fare if English was my second language? What if I was a victim and could not understand the court proceeding? What if I was a defendant with little time to talk to my public defender? It was clear that the abbreviations helped court efficiency but what was the “cost” to the access to justice?

Below is a list of some of the most common court acronyms from the Cook County Courts – a partial replication of the glossary that I made in my field notes.

This “cheat sheet” may help as you court watch, but you may find that you need a separate glossary in your jurisdiction.

Discussion Questions:

- **What is the balance between court efficiency and access to justice?**
- **Based on the findings in “Crook County,” how do the use of acronyms exacerbate racial divides between professionals and defendants/victims/public?**
- **Discuss how the use of these acronyms is a form of boundary work in the courthouse.**
- **In considering the responsibility of “zealously advocating” for defendants (see chapter 5), what is the responsibility of defense attorneys in helping their clients navigate these terms?**
- **What differences and similarities do you notice in your jurisdiction?**

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“Crook County Learning Extras” are based on the book:
“Crook County: Racism and Injustice in America’s Largest Criminal Court”
Written By: Nicole Gonzalez Van Cleve
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Courtroom Acronym	Definition
UUW	unlawful use of a weapon
DCS	delivery of a controlled substance
PCS	possession of a controlled substance
DDT	defendant demands trial
FDOC	first day on call
IDOC	Illinois Department of Corrections
PSMV	possession of a stolen motor vehicle
SOJ	substitution of judge
VOP	violation of probation
PNG	plea not guilty
FG	found guilty
JW	jury waive
VG	verdict guilty
BCX	behavioral clinical exam
TOP	termination of probation
PTU	probation terminated unsatisfactorily
PTS	probation terminated satisfactorily
A/R	armed robbery
A/V	armed violence
ACSA	aggravated criminal sexual assault
CSA	criminal sexual abuse
MTSS	motion to suppress statements
402 conference	a plea bargain meeting

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