The U.S. Supreme Court: A Very Short Introduction
Linda Greenhouse

The U.S. Supreme Court: A Very Short Introduction tells the Court's story by drawing on its history and its written and unwritten rules to show how it really works. The Supreme Court today, housed in a majestic building on Capitol Hill, bears little resemblance to the ill-defined institution the Constitution's Framers launched. Their expectation was that it would be the weakest of the three branches of government. The Court put the independence the Framers gave it to use, and in many ways has continued to define itself. How do cases get to the Supreme Court? What special role does the chief justice play? How does the Court relate to the other branches?

1. Origins
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What does the Supreme Court do? How does that differ to the original intentions of the Framers in 1787? ‘Origins’ looks at the beginnings of the Supreme Court to see if this helps with understanding how it operates today. From the beginning, the Court has filled in the blanks contained in Article III by defining its own power. Article III announced a national court with the authority to decide cases ‘arising under’ the country's Constitution. This is quite vague. The role of the Supreme Court has been a matter of dispute ever since. How has the modern Court come to be able to exercise its great power?

2. The Court at work (1)
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How do cases reach the Court? How do the justices proceed to select and decide them? ‘The Court at work (1)’ looks at how the Court operates, and the sorts of cases that get
heard by the Court. There are no typical Supreme Court cases; there is a typical range of cases during a given term. One category consists of cases of constitutional interpretation, usually involving a claim that a federal or state statute of policy violates a provision of the Constitution. The second consists of cases requiring the justices to decide the meaning or application of a federal statute. A third category consists of suits between states.