Federal court jurisdiction is limited to certain kinds of cases listed in the Constitution. For the most part, federal courts hear cases in which the United States is a party, cases involving violations of the Constitution or federal law, crimes on federal land, and bankruptcy cases.

The federal civil litigation system in particular is filled with a variety of business-related disputes. These may include actions concerning contracts, copyrights, trademark infringement, antitrust and unfair competition, employment discrimination, and environmental issues.