

What's Your Theory of Admissibility: Character Evidence, Prior Conduct, and Habit*

Theory	Character directly in issue	Character as circumstantial evidence of conduct as witness	Character as circumstantial evidence of conduct in case	Prior conduct to show non-character purpose	Habit as circumstantial evidence of conduct
What person may be the subject of the evidence?	Person whose character is directly in issue	Person who gives testimony, including own witness and out-of-court declarant	Defendant or victim in criminal case	Any person	Any person
What aspects of character or conduct may be proved?	Aspects relevant to character trait at issue	Character for truthfulness	Pertinent character trait of defendant or victim	If for relevant purpose, not for character, not too dissimilar or remote in time, and passes balancing test	Aspects relevant to issues in case
What kinds of evidence may be used?	Reputation, opinion, and specific acts	Convictions, reputation, lay opinion, and as permitted on cross specific acts	Reputation, lay opinion, and on cross specific acts	Specific acts, but generally not convictions	Opinion and specific acts
Is extrinsic evidence permissible in addition to cross-examination?	Yes	Yes, for convictions, reputation, lay opinion; no, for specific acts	Yes, for reputation and lay opinion; no, for specific acts	Yes	Yes
Who can introduce evidence?	Any party	Party may offer character for untruthfulness; opposing party then may offer character for truthfulness	Defendant may offer character of defendant or victim, state then may rebut as to <u>that</u> person	Any party	Any party
Are the rules the same in civil and criminal cases?	Yes	Yes	No, the above applies to criminal cases only	Yes	Yes
Applicable Rules	405(a), (b)	607, 608, 609, 806	404(a), 405(a)	403, 404(b)	406

**Character* comprises the actual qualities and characteristics of an individual. *Habit* is a regular or uniform response to a specific situation.

Evidence Rules on Character, Non-Character Purposes, and Habit

Rule 403. Exclusion of relevant evidence on grounds of prejudice, confusion, or waste of time.

Although relevant, evidence may be excluded if its probative value is substantially outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice, confusion of the issues, or misleading the jury, or by considerations of undue delay, waste of time, or needless presentation of cumulative evidence. (1983, c. 701, s. 1.)

Rule 404. Character evidence not admissible to prove conduct; exceptions; other crimes.

(a) Character evidence generally. – Evidence of a person's character or a trait of his character is not admissible for the purpose of proving that he acted in conformity therewith on a particular occasion, except:

- (1) Character of accused. – Evidence of a pertinent trait of his character offered by an accused, or by the prosecution to rebut the same;
- (2) Character of victim. – Evidence of a pertinent trait of character of the victim of the crime offered by an accused, or by the prosecution to rebut the same, or evidence of a character trait of peacefulness of the victim offered by the prosecution in a homicide case to rebut evidence that the victim was the first aggressor;
- (3) Character of witness. – Evidence of the character of a witness, as provided in Rules 607, 608, and 609.

(b) Other crimes, wrongs, or acts. – Evidence of other crimes, wrongs, or acts is not admissible to prove the character of a person in order to show that he acted in conformity therewith. It may, however, be admissible for other purposes, such as proof of motive, opportunity, intent, preparation, plan, knowledge, identity, or absence of mistake, entrapment or accident. Admissible evidence may include evidence of an offense committed by a juvenile if it would have been a Class A, B1, B2, C, D, or E felony if committed by an adult. (1983, c. 701, s. 1; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 7, s. 3; 1995, c. 509, s. 7.)

Rule 405. Methods of proving character.

(a) Reputation or opinion. – In all cases in which evidence of character or a trait of character of a person is admissible, proof may be made by testimony as to reputation or by testimony in the form of an opinion. On cross-examination, inquiry is allowable into relevant specific instances of conduct. Expert testimony on character or a trait of character is not admissible as circumstantial evidence of behavior.

(b) Specific instances of conduct. – In cases in which character or a trait of character of a person is an essential element of a charge, claim, or defense, proof may also be made of specific instances of his conduct. (1983, c. 701, s. 1.)

Rule 406. Habit; routine practice.

Evidence of the habit of a person or of the routine practice of an organization, whether corroborated or not and regardless of the presence of eyewitnesses, is relevant to prove that the conduct of the person or organization on a particular occasion was in conformity with the habit or routine practice. (1983, c. 701, s. 1.)

Rule 607. Who may impeach.

The credibility of a witness may be attacked by any party, including the party calling him. (1983, c. 701, s. 1.)

Rule 608. Evidence of character and conduct of witness.

(a) Opinion and reputation evidence of character. – The credibility of a witness may be attacked or supported by evidence in the form of reputation or opinion as provided in Rule 405(a), but subject to these limitations: (1) the evidence may refer only to character for truthfulness or untruthfulness, and (2) evidence of truthful character is admissible only after the character of the witness for truthfulness has been attacked by opinion or reputation evidence or otherwise.

(b) Specific instances of conduct. – Specific instances of the conduct of a witness, for the purpose of attacking or supporting his credibility, other than conviction of crime as provided in Rule 609, may not be proved by extrinsic evidence. They may, however, in the discretion of the court, if probative of truthfulness or untruthfulness, be inquired into on cross-examination of the witness (1) concerning his character for truthfulness or untruthfulness, or (2) concerning the character for truthfulness or untruthfulness of another witness as to which character the witness being cross-examined has testified.

The giving of testimony, whether by an accused or by any other witness, does not operate as a waiver of his privilege against self-incrimination when examined with respect to matters which relate only to credibility. (1983, c. 701, s. 1.)

Rule 609. Impeachment by evidence of conviction of crime.

(a) General rule. – For the purpose of attacking the credibility of a witness, evidence that the witness has been convicted of a felony, or of a Class A1, Class 1, or Class 2 misdemeanor, shall be admitted if elicited from the witness or established by public record during cross-examination or thereafter.

(b) Time limit. – Evidence of a conviction under this rule is not admissible if a period of more than 10 years has elapsed since the date of the conviction or of the release of the witness from the confinement imposed for that conviction, whichever is the later date, unless the court determines, in the interests of justice, that the probative value of the conviction supported by specific facts and circumstances substantially outweighs its prejudicial effect. However, evidence of a conviction more than 10 years old as calculated herein is not admissible unless the proponent gives to the adverse party sufficient advance written notice of intent to use such evidence to provide the adverse party with a fair opportunity to contest the use of such evidence.

(c) Effect of pardon. – Evidence of a conviction is not admissible under this rule if the conviction has been pardoned.

(d) Juvenile adjudications. – Evidence of juvenile adjudications is generally not admissible under this rule. The court may, however, in a criminal case allow evidence of a juvenile adjudication of a witness other than the accused if conviction of the offense would be admissible to attack the credibility of an adult and the court is satisfied that admission in evidence is necessary for a fair determination of the issue of guilt or innocence.

(e) Pendency of appeal. – The pendency of an appeal therefrom does not render evidence of a conviction inadmissible. Evidence of the pendency of an appeal is admissible. (1983, c. 701, s. 1; 1999-79, s. 1.)

Rule 806. Attacking and supporting credibility of declarant.

When a hearsay statement has been admitted in evidence, the credibility of the declarant may be attacked, and if attacked may be supported, by any evidence which would be admissible for those purposes if declarant had testified as a witness. Evidence of a statement or conduct by the declarant at any time, inconsistent with his hearsay statement, is not subject to any requirement that he may have been afforded an opportunity to deny or explain. If the party against whom a hearsay statement has been admitted calls the declarant as a witness, the party is entitled to examine him on the statement as if under cross-examination. (1983, c. 701, s. 1.)