

Background: This section provides for the imposition of a sentence of probation. The court may sentence a defendant to a term of probation in any case unless (1) prohibited by statute, or (2) where a term of imprisonment is required under §5C1.1 (Imposition of a Term of Imprisonment). Under 18 U.S.C. § 3561(a)(3), the imposition of a sentence of probation is prohibited where the defendant is sentenced at the same time to a sentence of imprisonment for the same or a different offense. Although this provision has effectively abolished the use of “split sentences” imposable pursuant to the former 18 U.S.C. § 3651, the drafters of the Sentencing Reform Act noted that the functional equivalent of the split sentence could be “achieved by a more direct and logically consistent route” by providing that a defendant serve a term of imprisonment followed by a period of supervised release. (S. Rep. No. 225, 98th Cong., 1st Sess. 89 (1983)). Section 5B1.1(a)(2) provides a transition between the circumstances under which a “straight” probationary term is authorized and those where probation is prohibited.

<i>Historical Note</i>	Effective November 1, 1987. Amended effective November 1, 1989 (amendments 271 and 302); November 1, 1992 (amendment 462); November 1, 2010 (amendments 738 and 747); November 1, 2025 (amendment 836).
------------------------	---

§5B1.2. Term of Probation

- (a) When probation is imposed, the term shall be:
- (1) at least one year but not more than five years if the offense level is **6** or greater;
 - (2) no more than three years in any other case.

Commentary

Background: This section governs the length of a term of probation. Subject to statutory restrictions, the guidelines provide that a term of probation may not exceed three years if the offense level is less than 6. If a defendant has an offense level of 6 or greater, the guidelines provide that a term of probation be at least one year but not more than five years. Although some distinction in the length of a term of probation is warranted based on the circumstances of the case, a term of probation may also be used to enforce conditions such as fine or restitution payments, or attendance in a program of treatment such as drug rehabilitation. Often, it may not be possible to determine the amount of time required for the satisfaction of such payments or programs in advance. This issue has been resolved by setting forth two broad ranges for the duration of a term of probation depending upon the offense level. Within the guidelines set forth in this section, the determination of the length of a term of probation is within the discretion of the sentencing judge.

<i>Historical Note</i>	Effective November 1, 1987
------------------------	----------------------------