

Apology (the text)

The

Apology purports to be an accurate account by [Plato](#) of [Socrates](#)' trial before an Athenian [jury](#) in 399 BCE. The text consists of three speeches that were given by [Socrates](#) during this trial.

Trials began with the prosecutors presenting their case against the accused before the Athenian [jury](#). In this trial [Meletus](#) argued that [Socrates](#) was guilty of corrupting the youth of [Athens](#) and committing acts of impiety. It is possible that [Anytus](#) spoke as well. We have no actual record of what was said during this speech. Speeches were timed by water clocks similar to the ones on the right.

Speech 1: Defense After the prosecution finished presenting its side, the defense had a chance to respond to the charges. The *Apology* begins with the defense speech by [Socrates](#). He began by noting that he was unfamiliar with the law court since he spent most of the time in the [agora](#) ([17a-18a](#)). He observed that he really had two sets of accusers (old and new) and that he feared the old accusers more ([18b-20c](#)) so he would deal with them first. He responded to the charges of the old accusers by telling a story about the [oracle](#) of [Delphi](#) ([20d-24b](#)). He then turned to [Meletus](#)' charge of corrupting the youth ([24c-25e](#)) and impiety ([26a-28a](#)). [Socrates](#) described his important mission to [Athens](#) ([28b-30d](#)) and compared himself to a [gadfly](#) ([30e-31c](#)). He concluded his defense by discussing his integrity ([32d-33b](#)), his followers ([33c-34b](#)), and his family ([34c-35d](#)).

After [Socrates](#) finished his defense, the [jury](#) then voted whether he was guilty of corrupting the youth and committing acts of impiety. The [jury](#) found him guilty, so the trial moved to the second stage for sentencing. At the right are ballots used by jurors - open centers meant guilty and closed acquittal. Again, the prosecutor went first, so [Meletus](#) argued that [Socrates](#) should be given the death sentence. We have no actual record of this speech.

Speech 2: Penalty: [Socrates](#) had to respond by proposing an alternate penalty, and the [jury](#) had to choose between the two. [Socrates](#) facetiously argued that since his philosophical activity actually benefitted the state, justice required that he be given some good thing such as being treated like an Olympic hero. ([35e-37a](#)). He then proposed that he, with the help of his wealthy friends, pay a fine ([37b-38c](#)).

Speech 3: After the Trial: After hearing both sentencing proposals the jury sided in favor with [Meletus](#). The trial was officially over. However, [Socrates](#), knowing that he was about to die soon, had some final words for the [jurors](#). He told those who voted to kill him that they were doing a great injustice ([38d-39e](#)). To those who would have acquitted him, he said that he was not afraid of dying but looked forward to continuing his philosophical questioning with the heroes in [Hades](#) ([40a-42a](#)).

The title of the *Apology* can be confusing to students. The initial impression some have is that [Socrates](#) is being apologetic about his beliefs or that he is apologizing to the [Athenians](#) for what he did. Nothing could be further from the truth. The word **apology** refers to a defense of a person (or institution) against charges brought against that person. In this work, [Socrates](#) has been charged with corruption of the youth and impiety. The **Apology** is [Socrates'](#) response why he should be vindicated of these charges.