Stocks, owned by tens of millions of Americans, are a way gain a stake in the fortunes of corporations, and in the appreciation (or depreciation) of the markets.

The term usually refers to common stock. Owners of common stock are entitled to a share of the profits of the corporation that has issued the stock. They also have the right to vote in shareholder elections.

Stock ownership can benefit investors by allowing them to participate in a company's profit, in the form of dividends. Investors can also benefit from market appreciation—in other words, when other investors bid up the price of the stock they hold. Not all stocks pay dividends; those that do can lower them under certain circumstances. And of course a stock's price can both rise and fall.

A second kind of stock is known as preferred stock. Preferred stock behaves more like a bond, guaranteeing a dividend. And preferred shares are more secure in the event of bankruptcy: Their owners stand ahead of common stock investors to be compensated in the wake of a corporation's failure.

The purchase of either kind of stock should be well-researched. Copeland Wealth Management uses cutting-edge research tools and years of experience in recommending both when to buy and when to sell stocks.