

### Writing Prompt: The Death Penalty

According to the US Supreme Court and the US Constitution, capital punishment is acceptable when the severity of the sentence has been deemed to be appropriate to the severity of the crime. Some people believe the death penalty is a just form of capital punishment for the crime of first degree murder. As of January 2008, 37 states permit capital punishment. On the other hand, some people believe the death penalty is unjust because it violates the Eighth Amendment of the US Constitution, which forbids “cruel and unusual punishment.”

**Write a letter to your state legislator in which you explain whether or not you believe the death penalty is a just form of capital punishment to be permitted in your state. You may use the following information, your own experiences, observations, and/or readings.**

Arguments in **favor** of the death penalty:

- The death penalty prevents future murders
- A just society requires the death penalty for the taking of a life
- Death penalty is more humane than life imprisonment
- Death penalty is more economical than life imprisonment
- The death penalty is usually applied fairly
- executing the innocent is a rare but acceptable risk of the death penalty

Arguments **against** the death penalty:

- The death penalty is not a proven deterrent to future murders
- The death penalty is not a just response for the taking of a life
- Death penalty precludes the chance for guilty person to reform and “pay-back” society
- The death penalty is sometimes applied unfairly
- There is a risk of executing people who are actually innocent

“If a punishment is unusually severe, if there is a strong probability that it is inflicted arbitrarily, if it is substantially rejected by contemporary society, and if there is no reason to believe that it serves any penal purpose more effectively than some less severe punishment, then the continued infliction of that punishment violates the command of the Clause that the State may not inflict inhuman and uncivilized punishments upon those convicted of crimes. Under these principles and this test, death is today a ‘cruel and unusual’ punishment.”

-US Supreme Court Justice William Brennan

“How come life in prison doesn't mean life? Until it does, we're not ready to do away with the death penalty. Stop thinking in terms of "punishment" for a minute and think in terms of safeguarding innocent people from incorrigible murderers.”

-Jesse Ventura, Former Governor of Minnesota

“In the last 30 years, 124 inmates were found to be innocent and released from death row.”

-American Civil Liberties Union website

**As you write your letter, remember to:**

- Consider the purpose, audience, and context of your letter
- Organize your letter so that your ideas progress logically
- Include relevant details that clearly develop your letter
- Edit your letter for standard grammar and language usage