

### **Writing Prompt: The Purpose of Punishment**

All societies have maintained the right to punish people who break their rules. But what is the purpose of punishment? What is it supposed to accomplish? Experts and laypeople alike often disagree. Over the years, theories have been advanced about different ways of handling wrongdoers. People advocating one approach have often condemned other approaches as brutal, unjust, or ineffective. The following are brief descriptions of each of the major categories of punishment.

**Rehabilitation:** seeks to treat and reform the lawbreaker. Advocates of this theory believe that the correctional system should try to turn the wrongdoer into a productive member of society. To implement this theory, the prison system has to provide job training, psychological counseling, and educational programs. Critics of this theory admit that it is a noble idea, but they argue it just does not work in practice.

**Restitution:** seeks repayment. The offender repays the victim or community in money or services. Critics say money and services cannot sufficiently repay for the harm cause by violent crimes.

**Incapacitation:** seeks to isolate criminals from society to protect ordinary citizens. Confinement in a secure prison makes it impossible for a criminal to commit further crimes in the surrounding society. Critics argue that most criminals have fixed prison terms, and they will be released sooner or later. If they are not reformed, the protection is only temporary.

**Deterrence:** seeks to prevent crimes. Deterrence targets criminals in question, as well as other potential criminals, to discourage them from committing crimes because of the harsh punishment that may ensue. Critics argue that few criminals expect to be caught and deterrence is only powerful when criminals fear they will, in fact, be caught and punished.

**Retribution:** seeks revenge. This is perhaps the oldest theory/form of punishment based on the ancient “eye-for-an-eye” philosophy. Advocates say that by imposing punishment we “get even” with criminals. Some critics argue that retribution is often too cruel for modern society, and others claim that it does nothing to address serious issues like reforming criminals or protecting the innocent.

--Source: *Constitutional Rights Foundation. Criminal Justice in America. Los Angeles, CA: Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2005.*

“During 2006, North Carolina’s rate of violent crime, which includes murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault, rose 0.9 percent statewide. The rate of property crime, consisting of burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft, increased 0.5 percent across the state.” (Source: <http://sbi2.jus.state.nc.us/crp/public/Default.htm>)

Write an informative article for your local newspaper in which you discuss the five categories of punishment and address:

- Which of the five categories of punishment do you feel will be most effective for reducing North Carolina’s crime rate and why?
- Which of the five categories of punishment do you feel will be least effective for reducing North Carolina’s crime rate and why?

As you write your article, remember to:

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