

Learn how to write an opinion essay.

## Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the text and tips and do the exercises.

### Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–f) with the vocabulary (1–6).

#### Vocabulary

1. .... harsh
2. .... a perpetrator
3. .... to deter someone from doing something
4. .... to reoffend
5. .... rehabilitative
6. .... empathy

#### Definition

- a. someone who has committed a crime or a violent act
- b. the ability to understand how other people feel
- c. able to bring someone back to health or a normal life
- d. strict; severe
- e. to make someone avoid or stop doing something
- f. to commit a crime again (not for the first time)

## Reading text: An opinion essay

*Some people think that some types of criminals should not go to prison. Instead they should do unpaid work in the community. To what extent do you agree?*

Owing to the great variety of crimes that can be punishable by prison, some people argue that not all criminals are the same and it would therefore be more appropriate to give certain criminals community service instead. I agree that in some cases, prison may not be the best solution and community service would probably have more benefits.

One justification given for prisons is to keep society safe by removing criminals from the outside world. So the first thing to consider is if someone who has broken the law is a danger to other people. In the case of violent crime, there is an argument to keep the perpetrator away from society. However, burglary or possession of drugs, for example, does not involve violence against other people so the criminal does not present a direct danger to anyone in the community. Keeping these types of criminals in prison is expensive for the taxpayer and does not appear to be an effective punishment as they often commit the same crime again when they come out of prison.

Personally, I also believe punishments should reform people so they do not reoffend. A further reason not to put these people in prison is that they may mix with more dangerous and violent criminals, potentially committing a worse crime when they are released. By keeping them in the community, helping others, they not only learn new skills, but they could also develop more empathy and care towards others. If this occurs, society can only benefit.

Critics of this more rehabilitative approach to crime believe that justice should be harsh in order to deter people from committing similar crimes and that community service could be less likely to have that effect. However, there is very little evidence to suggest that long prison sentences deter criminals.

In conclusion, putting criminals who are not a danger to society in prison is expensive and, in my opinion, ineffective, both as a deterrent and as a form of rehabilitation. Community service for non-violent crimes benefits both society and the offender. That said, it would be useful to have more data to work out whether community service or prison is more likely to stop someone reoffending. I strongly believe that decisions on how best to deal with criminals should be based on evidence of what actually works.

## Tips

1. Introduce your essay by restating the question in your own words.
2. If the essay asks you *to what extent do you agree?*, make your opinion clear throughout. You can either agree, partially agree or disagree with the statement, explaining and justifying your opinion.
3. The structure should be:
  - Introduction
  - The first reason why you agree/disagree
  - The second reason why you agree/disagree
  - The third reason why you agree/disagree (if you have one)
  - Conclusion
4. Use phrases to organise and link your ideas, e.g. *Owing to ...* , *One justification for ...* , *The first thing to consider is ...* , *A further reason ...* , *In conclusion ...* .
5. If you do not have solid evidence for your ideas, use modal verbs such as *might*, *may* or *could* (e.g. *they could develop more empathy and care*) or other tentative phrases (e.g. *it does not appear to be an effective punishment*).
6. Conclude by restating your opinion and summarising your two or three main arguments.

## Tasks

### Task 1

Are the sentences true or false?

	<b>Answer</b>	
1. The first paragraph should explain the question in your own words.	True	False
2. You shouldn't give your opinion until the conclusion.	True	False
3. You must always give both sides of the argument.	True	False
4. Structures like <i>One justification for ...</i> and <i>The first thing to consider is ...</i> link ideas together, and help the reader follow your argument.	True	False

- |  |      |       |
|--|------|-------|
| 5. Modal verbs (e.g. <i>may</i> in <i>Prison may not be an effective punishment</i> ) make sentences sound more certain. | True | False |
| 6. If you think of an extra idea, mention it in the conclusion.  | True | False |

## Task 2

Complete the sentences with words and phrases from the box.

However	One justification for	Owing to	The first thing to consider
In conclusion	It could be argued that	Personally	A further reason to

- ..... is what the purpose of prison is.
- ..... harsh prison sentences is that they act as a deterrent. .... , there is very little evidence to support this claim.
- ..... justify putting people in prison is to keep them away from society.
- ..... , I believe that prison should aim to rehabilitate people and reform violent criminals so they are less likely to reoffend.
- ..... prison works mainly as a punishment. .... overcrowded, cramped and sometimes violent conditions, prison is not a pleasant place to be.
- ..... , prison may not do everything that we want it to do but it does serve as an unpleasant punishment.

## Task 3

Tick the three sentences that are more tentative.

\_\_\_\_\_ Prison sentences are more effective in 29 per cent of cases.

\_\_\_\_\_ It seems that prison sentences are more effective.

\_\_\_\_\_ It might be argued that unpaid work exploits criminals.

\_\_\_\_\_ Unpaid work exploits criminals.

\_\_\_\_\_ This may suggest that the criminal is not a danger to others.

\_\_\_\_\_ These kinds of criminals are no danger to others.

## Discussion

Do you agree that community service is better than prison for some crimes?

## Answers

### Preparation task

1. d
2. a
3. e
4. f
5. c
6. b

### Task 1

1. True
2. False
3. False
4. True
5. False
6. False

### Task 2

1. The first thing to consider
2. One justification for | However
3. A further reason to
4. Personally
5. It could be argued that | Owing to
6. In conclusion

### Task 3

1. It seems that prison sentences are more effective.
2. It might be argued that unpaid work exploits criminals.
3. This may suggest that the criminal is not a danger to others.