

IELTS Vocabulary Topics

Crime & The Law Word List

Word/phrase	Meaning	Example
Commit	To do something illegal.	He first committed a crime at the age of 14.
Offender	A person who is guilty of a crime.	First time offenders are usually not sent to prison.
Prison	A building where people are kept as punishment for committing a crime.	He was sent to a maximum-security prison because he had escaped from prison before.
Accused	A person who is on trial in a court of law.	The accused claimed her innocence throughout the trial
Trial	Statements and evidence presented in court to decide if someone is guilty of a crime.	Trial by jury is a constitutional right for all citizens.
Jury	A group of people responsible for deciding if someone is guilty or not guilty in a trial.	The jury's identity had to be kept secret from the public.
Judge	Someone who oversees a trial and decides on the punishment.	The judge for the case dismissed the witness when it was discovered that she had lied.
Victim	Someone who has suffered because of the actions of someone or something.	She claimed to be a victim of domestic abuse.
Sentence	The punishment given by a judge when someone is found guilty of a crime.	Murder carries a minimum sentence of 20 years in prison.
Arrest	To be taken away by the police to determine if a crime has been committed.	He was arrested for drinking and driving.
Capital punishment	Punishment by death.	Many countries still use capital punishment for a crime such as murder.
Criminal	A person who breaks the law.	He became a criminal at a very young age.
Guilty	Responsible for breaking a rule or law.	The jury found him guilty of murder and he was sentenced to 25 years in prison.
Fine	An amount of money to be paid for breaking a rule or law.	The driver was fined \$200 for not stopping at a red light.
Legalize	To make something legal.	Some states have legalized the use of "soft drugs."

Evidence	Reasons for believing something is true or not true.	At the end of the investigation, the police dropped the case due to lack of evidence.
Verdict	The decision made after considering all the facts in a trial.	After 2 days, the jury reached a verdict of not guilty.
Convict	Someone who is in prison for committing a crime.	He found it very difficult to find a job because he was an ex-convict.
Parole	Giving permission for a prisoner to be released from prison before their sentence is finished.	She was released from prison on parole for good behavior
Re-offending	To commit crime again and again.	The re-offending rates for ex-convicts is very high.
Soft on crime	Not to impose strict punishment for crime.	Policies that are soft on crime usually mean a lot of crime goes unpunished.
Zero tolerance	Applying the law very strictly. All crimes are punished.	The city authority's zero tolerance policy resulted in a huge increase of the prison population.
Rehabilitation	The process of leading a normal life after a prison sentence.	The government has prioritized rehabilitation programs for convicted criminals.
Deterrent	Something that makes somebody less likely to do something.	Long prison sentences are a deterrent to committing crime.
Ban	An official rule that says something is not allowed.	He was banned for driving for 6 months for constantly using his mobile phone while driving.
Law-abiding citizen	People who respect and obey the law.	John has always been a law-abiding citizen and has never been in trouble with the law.
Probation	When a convicted criminal has to see an official at regular intervals to check they are not involved in criminal activity.	Since it was his first offense, he was placed on probation for 6 months rather than be sent to prison.
Suspect	A person the police think is responsible for a crime.	She was the prime suspect in the investigation because she had no alibi.
Alibi	Evidence that someone did not commit a crime because there were in another place when it happened.	He was in hospital when the crime was committed so his alibi was solid.

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Crime & The Law Idioms

Get away with murder

Meaning: To do something illegal or behave badly and not be punished for it.

Example: My younger sister always comes home late and never does her homework, but my parents don't say anything. She *gets away with murder*.

The long arm of the law

Meaning: The power of the police and legal system to find and punish criminals.

Example: The *long arm of the law* finally caught up with him and he was arrested.

Partner in crime

Meaning: Someone who helps another to do something illegal or against the rules.

Example: John made sure nobody was looking while Jane broke into the car. They were *partners in crime*.

Get caught red handed

Meaning: To get caught in the act of committing a crime.

Example: She was *caught red handed* on CC TV stealing from the store.

Do something by the book

Meaning: To strictly follow the law, rules, or procedures.

Example: The police investigation *did everything by the book* and the criminal was found guilty of the crime.

Cop

Example: Slang term for police officer.

Meaning: The *cops* arrived at the scene of the accident shortly after the emergency call.

Lay down the law

Meaning: To forcefully remind or inform someone about the rules.

Example: After he got in trouble with the police again, the judge *laid down the law* and told him that next time he would go to prison.

Daylight robbery

Meaning: When you feel something is overpriced or too expensive.

Example: The new model of the smart phone costs \$550. That's *daylight robbery*, I'll never pay that price!

Keep one's nose clean

Meaning: To stay out of trouble (usually with the law)

Example: When he was released from prison, he *kept his nose clean* and didn't get involved in criminal activity.

Fess up

Meaning: To confess, tell the truth, about doing something.

Example: The suspect *fessed up* to committing the robbery after 2 days of police questioning.

White collar crime

Meaning: Financial crime committed by members of a government or business institutions

Example: Some people believe that *white collar crime* doesn't receive the same punishment as other crimes.