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## Focus Words

advocates | contrary | prohibit | release | reverse



## Weekly Passage

Should people who commit serious crimes be sentenced to death? The death penalty is also known as capital punishment. It is allowed in some states, but not in others. In the year 2005, sixty people were put to death by lethal injection in the United States.

Advocates of the death penalty say that the threat of being punished by death stops people from committing violent crimes. They also contend that the death penalty helps murder victims' families find peace.

Those who take the contrary position argue that the death penalty does not lower rates of violent crime. These death penalty opponents also point out that in some cases,

innocent people have been sentenced to death. After further investigation their sentences were reversed. For example, DNA testing showed that some people had not committed the crimes they were accused of committing, so they were released from prison. Death penalty opponents worry that many innocent people have been put to death.

Should the death penalty be prohibited, or are there good reasons to keep it? When, if ever, do you think capital punishment is justified?

# Unit 1.13 - Is the death penalty justified?

## Focus Word Chart

| Word      | Meaning                               | Forms | Examples of Use | Notes |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| advocates | (n.) – supporters                     |       |                 |       |
| contrary  | (adj.) – opposite;<br>opposing        |       |                 |       |
| prohibit  | (v.) – to not allow; to<br>forbid     |       |                 |       |
| release   | (v.) – to let go; to set<br>free      |       |                 |       |
| reverse   | (v.) – to change back;<br>to overturn |       |                 |       |

# Unit 1.13 - Is the death penalty justified?

## Problem of the Week



Death penalty **advocates** say the death penalty helps society by discouraging crime and eliminating the most dangerous criminals. On the **contrary**, some say a society that executes its own citizens will be less moral and less fair overall. Many countries around the world, from Mexico to South Africa, have abolished the death penalty. The European Union (EU) **prohibits** the death penalty in all EU countries.

Between 1973 and 1995, American courts sentenced 5,760 people to death. Of these people, only 313 were executed. A study found that 68% of death sentences were **reversed** because of serious errors. In 9% of those reversals, the defendant was eventually acquitted and **released**.

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**Option 1:** Of 5,760 people sentenced to death, only 313 were actually executed. What percent of the people sentenced to death were actually executed?

- A) about 5.4%
- B) about 10.3%
- C) about 16.8%
- D) about 20.1%

**Option 2:** If 68% of death penalty cases are reversed and in 9% of those reversals the defendant is eventually declared not guilty, what percent of people sentenced to death are eventually acquitted?

**acquitted:** free from criminal charge

**Math Discussion Question:** The study cited above found that in 68% of the cases where a defendant was sentenced to death, the sentence was **reversed** by another court because serious mistakes had been made during the trial. Death penalty opponents say this shows that the system is deeply flawed. When mistakes are so common, they say, the only way to prevent innocent people from being executed is to **prohibit** capital punishment or the death penalty. On the **contrary**, say death penalty **advocates**, these statistics prove that each defendant gets a fair trial, with safeguards to prevent mistakes. They point out that in most reversals, the defendant is not acquitted and **released**, but rather, is still found guilty, and sentenced to prison instead of death. What do you think? Do these statistics on death sentence reversals support death penalty advocates, or death penalty opponents?

# Is the death penalty justified?

## Debating the Issue



## 1. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

**A** The death penalty is justified because the threat of being put to death stops people from committing violent crimes.

**B** The death penalty is justified because it helps murder victims' families find peace.

**C** The death penalty is not justified because juries sometimes make a mistake and convict an innocent person.

**D** The death penalty is not justified because it is never right to kill another human being, no matter what he or she did.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

...because...

I disagree with part of that...

An example might help convince me. Can you give me an example?

What part of the passage makes you think that?

## 2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

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# Unit 1.13 - Is the death penalty justified?

## Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

Professor Seemy and Professor Kahn read a press **release** that said that Illinois just became the 16th state to stop using the death penalty. Professor Seemy supports the death penalty. Like many other death penalty **advocates**, he believes it prevents crime. “On the **contrary**,” says Professor Kahn, “the threat of harsh punishment usually doesn’t improve behavior.”

Do harsh punishments work? Professor Seemy decides to find out. In his classroom, students are **prohibited** from chewing gum. Professor Seemy introduces a harsh new punishment for breaking the gum rule: a month of detention.

“This should put an end to gum!” says Professor Seemy. “If it doesn’t, I’ll have to think about **reversing** my support for the death penalty.”

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### Question:

Will the threat of harsh punishment stop students from chewing gum?

### Hypothesis:

When a harsh punishment is introduced, fewer students will chew gum.

### Materials:

- ▶ Classroom
- ▶ Students

**Procedure:**

1. For three weeks, keep track of the gum rule violations.
2. Introduce harsh punishment.
3. For three more weeks, keep track of the gum rule violations.

**Data:**

| <b>First 3 Weeks - No Punishment</b> | <b>Week 1</b> | <b>Week 2</b> | <b>Week 3</b> |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Gum Violations                       | 1             | 3             | 2             |

  

| <b>Second 3 Weeks - Harsh Punishment</b> | <b>Week 4</b> | <b>Week 5</b> | <b>Week 6</b> |
|--|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Gum Violations                           | 0             | 2             | 3             |

**Conclusion:**

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

What evidence supports your conclusion?

How would you make this a better experiment?



[illegible]