

VOCABULARY BUILDER · IELTS

Crime & Law

23 high-band words to read, understand,
and actually use – from B2 to C2.

B2

C1

C2

How to use this pack

A word you can only recognise is not yet a word you own. This pack is built to move each term from “I’ve seen it” to “I can use it under exam pressure.” Work through it in order.

1 Test yourself first

Go straight to the **Before** page and write what you think each word means. Don’t look ahead — this is your baseline.

2 Study the word bank

Read each entry: the definition, the example sentence, the collocations and the word family. The example is the most important part — it shows the word alive in context.

3 Do the tasks

Gap-fill, matching, word formation, a full IELTS-style reading, and speaking & writing practice. Use a pencil so you can redo them.

4 Test yourself again

Return to the **After** page and write the meanings from memory. Compare with your baseline — that gap is your progress.

HOW TO READ AN ENTRY

noun / verb / adjective

part of speech

B2 · C1 · C2

CEFR difficulty level

/ˈsɪmbəl/

pronunciation (IPA)

e.g.

example sentence in context

↔

opposite / contrast

What do you already know?

BEFORE

Before you read a single definition, write what you think each word means — even a rough guess or a synonym. Tick how sure you are. This is your honest starting point; you'll come back at the end to measure how far you've moved.

#	WORD	SURE? know · unsure · new	WHAT I THINK IT MEANS
1	deterrent	☐ ☐ ☐	
2	rehabilitation	☐ ☐ ☐	
3	offender	☐ ☐ ☐	
4	conviction	☐ ☐ ☐	
5	sentence	☐ ☐ ☐	
6	prosecute	☐ ☐ ☐	
7	acquit	☐ ☐ ☐	
8	verdict	☐ ☐ ☐	
9	capital punishment	☐ ☐ ☐	
10	custody	☐ ☐ ☐	
11	parole	☐ ☐ ☐	
12	legislation	☐ ☐ ☐	
13	enforce	☐ ☐ ☐	
14	lenient	☐ ☐ ☐	
15	incarceration	☐ ☐ ☐	
16	corruption	☐ ☐ ☐	
17	fraud	☐ ☐ ☐	
18	trafficking	☐ ☐ ☐	
19	vandalism	☐ ☐ ☐	
20	perpetrator	☐ ☐ ☐	
21	crackdown	☐ ☐ ☐	
22	alleged	☐ ☐ ☐	
23	probation	☐ ☐ ☐	

The word bank

Twenty-three words, chosen for how often they earn marks in IELTS Writing Task 2 and Speaking Part 3. Read the example sentence aloud – that is where the meaning sticks.

1 **deterrent** /dɪ'terənt/

noun

C1

Something that discourages people from doing something, especially committing a crime.

e.g. Supporters of tougher sentences argue that they act as a **deterrent** to would-be criminals.

COLLOCATIONS

an effective deterrent • a deterrent to (sth)

WORD FAMILY

deter (v), deterrence (n)

IELTS Central to "crime and punishment" essays – the phrase is "act as a deterrent".

2 **rehabilitation** /,ri:ə'bɪlɪ'teɪʃn/

noun

C1

The process of helping an offender return to normal life as a law-abiding member of society.

e.g. Many experts believe **rehabilitation** is more effective than punishment at reducing reoffending.

COLLOCATIONS

offender rehabilitation • a focus on rehabilitation

WORD FAMILY

rehabilitate (v)

IELTS The natural counter-argument to punishment – set it against "deterrent" and "incarceration".

3 **offender** /ə'fendə/

noun

B2

A person who commits a crime or breaks a law.

e.g. First-time **offenders** are often given a warning rather than a prison sentence.

COLLOCATIONS

a first-time / repeat offender • a young offender

WORD FAMILY

offend (v), offence (n)

4 conviction /kən'vɪkʃn/

noun

C1

A formal decision by a court that someone is guilty of a crime.

e.g. New evidence led to the overturning of his **conviction**.

COLLOCATIONS

a criminal conviction • secure / overturn a conviction

WORD FAMILY

convict (v/n) • opp. acquittal

5 sentence /'sentəns/

noun / verb

B2

(n) the punishment given by a court; (v) to officially state that punishment.

e.g. She received a five-year **sentence** for her part in the robbery.

COLLOCATIONS

a prison / life sentence • a harsh / lenient sentence

WORD FAMILY

sentencing (n)

6 prosecute /'prɒsɪkjʊ:t/

verb

C1

To officially charge someone with a crime and try to prove their guilt in court.

e.g. The company was **prosecuted** for dumping waste into the river.

COLLOCATIONS

prosecute (sb) for (sth)

WORD FAMILY

prosecution (n), prosecutor (n) • opp. defend

7 **acquit** /ə'kwɪt/

verb

C1

To officially decide in court that someone is not guilty of a crime.

e.g. The jury **acquitted** him of all charges after only an hour.

COLLOCATIONS

be acquitted of (a charge)

WORD FAMILY

acquittal (n) · opp. convict

8 **verdict** /'vɜːdɪkt/

noun

B2

The official decision made by a jury or judge about whether someone is guilty.

e.g. The jury took three days to reach a **verdict**.

COLLOCATIONS

a guilty / not-guilty verdict • reach / deliver a verdict

WORD FAMILY

—

9 **capital punishment** /ˌkæpɪtəl 'pʌnɪʃmənt/

noun

C1

Punishment by death, ordered by a court; the death penalty.

e.g. Many countries have abolished **capital punishment** on human-rights grounds.

COLLOCATIONS

abolish / impose capital punishment • the death penalty

WORD FAMILY

—

IELTS A classic essay topic — pair it with “deterrent”, “abolish” and “miscarriage of justice”.

10 custody /'kʌstədi/

noun

C1

The state of being kept in prison or held by the police, especially before a trial.

e.g. The suspect was held in **custody** overnight for questioning.

COLLOCATIONS

(be) in / taken into custody • police custody

WORD FAMILY

custodial (adj)

11 parole /pə'reʊl/

noun

C1

The early release of a prisoner on the condition that they behave well.

e.g. He was released on **parole** after serving half of his sentence.

COLLOCATIONS

(be) released on parole • a parole board

WORD FAMILY

—

12 legislation /ˌledʒɪs'leɪʃn/

noun

C1

A law or set of laws passed by a government.

e.g. New **legislation** was introduced to tackle online fraud.

COLLOCATIONS

introduce / pass legislation • anti-terror legislation

WORD FAMILY

legislate (v), legislative (adj), legislature (n)

IELTS A precise, formal word for “laws” — strong in policy-focused essays.

13 enforce /ɪnˈfɔːs/

verb

C1

To make sure that a law or rule is obeyed.

e.g. Laws mean little unless the police have the resources to **enforce** them.

COLLOCATIONS

enforce a law / rule • strictly enforced

WORD FAMILY

enforcement (n), law enforcement (n)

14 lenient /ˈliːniənt/

adjective

C1

Not strict; giving a punishment that is less severe than expected.

e.g. Critics claimed the sentence was far too **lenient** for such a serious crime.

COLLOCATIONS

a lenient sentence / judge • too lenient

WORD FAMILY

leniency(n) • opp. harsh / severe

IELTS Pairs perfectly with its opposite, "harsh", when arguing about sentencing.

15 incarceration /ɪnˌkɑːsəˈreɪʃn/

noun

C2

The act of putting someone in prison, or the state of being imprisoned.

e.g. Long periods of **incarceration** do not always reduce crime.

COLLOCATIONS

mass incarceration • a term of incarceration

WORD FAMILY

incarcerate (v) • opp. release

IELTS A high-band synonym for "imprisonment".

16 corruption /kə'rʌpʃn/

noun

C1

Dishonest or illegal behaviour, especially by people in power, for personal gain.

e.g. Widespread **corruption** among officials undermined public trust in the government.

COLLOCATIONS

political corruption • tackle / root out corruption

WORD FAMILY

corrupt (v/adj) • opp. integrity

17 fraud /frɔ:d/

noun

B2

The crime of deceiving people in order to gain money or an advantage illegally.

e.g. He was jailed for a **fraud** that cost investors millions.

COLLOCATIONS

commit fraud • credit-card / tax fraud

WORD FAMILY

fraudulent (adj), fraudster (n)

18 trafficking /'træfɪkɪŋ/

noun

C1

The illegal trade or movement of goods or people, such as drugs or human trafficking.

e.g. The police uncovered a network involved in drug **trafficking**.

COLLOCATIONS

drug / human trafficking

WORD FAMILY

traffic (v), trafficker (n)

19 vandalism /'vændəlɪzəm/

noun

B2

The deliberate destruction of, or damage to, public or private property.

e.g. The park has been closed for repairs after repeated **vandalism**.

COLLOCATIONS

an act of vandalism • petty vandalism

WORD FAMILY

vandalise (v), vandal (n)

20 perpetrator /'pɜːpətreɪtə/

noun

C1

A person who commits a crime or does something wrong or harmful.

e.g. The **perpetrators** of the attack were never caught.

COLLOCATIONS

the perpetrator of (a crime) • bring perpetrators to justice

WORD FAMILY

perpetrate (v)

21 crackdown /'krækdaʊn/

noun

C1

Strong, sudden action taken by authorities to stop a particular type of crime or behaviour.

e.g. The government announced a **crackdown** on knife crime in major cities.

COLLOCATIONS

a crackdown on (sth) • launch a crackdown

WORD FAMILY

crack down (on) (phrasal v)

22 **alleged** /əˈledʒd/

adjective

C1

Said to have happened or to be true, but not yet proven.

e.g. The **alleged** thief has not yet been charged with any offence.

COLLOCATIONS

an alleged crime / offender • the alleged victim

WORD FAMILY

allege (v), allegation (n), allegedly (adv)

IELTS Signals a claim that is unproven – common in news and formal writing.

23 **probation** /prəˈbeɪʃn/

noun

C1

A system that allows an offender to stay out of prison under supervision, as long as they behave.

e.g. Instead of prison, she was placed on **probation** for two years.

COLLOCATIONS

(be) on probation • a probation officer

WORD FAMILY

probationary (adj)

Task 1 · Gap-fill

Complete each sentence with a word from the bank. You may need to change the form (tense, ending). Each word is used once.

acquit

alleged

corruption

custody

deterrent

enforce

fraud

legislation

lenient

parole

rehabilitation

vandalism

1. Some argue that the death penalty is not an effective _____ against violent crime.
2. The victim's family felt that the judge had been far too _____.
3. Two suspects are currently being held in police _____.
4. After ten years, the prisoner finally became eligible for _____.
5. It is difficult to _____ speed limits without enough traffic cameras.
6. The council spends thousands each year repairing damage caused by _____.
7. The scandal exposed widespread _____ at the highest levels of government.
8. Prisons should focus on _____ so that inmates can rejoin society.
9. New _____ makes it illegal to use a phone while driving.
10. The jury voted to _____ her because the evidence was unreliable.
11. He was arrested on suspicion of tax _____.
12. The _____ offender denies any involvement in the robbery.

Task 2 · Match the meaning

Write the letter of the correct definition next to each word.

1 offender	☐	a the official decision on guilt or innocence
2 conviction	☐	b a court's formal decision that someone is guilty
3 sentence	☐	c the illegal trade in goods or people
4 prosecute	☐	d a person who commits a crime
5 verdict	☐	e strong, sudden action by authorities against crime
6 capital punishment	☐	f the punishment a court gives
7 incarceration	☐	g the act of putting someone in prison
8 trafficking	☐	h to charge someone and try to prove their guilt
9 perpetrator	☐	i the person who commits a crime or harmful act
10 crackdown	☐	j punishment by death

Task 3 · Word formation

Change the word in **CAPITALS** into the correct form to complete each sentence.

1. **DETER** Harsher penalties may _____ some people from committing crimes.
2. **CONVICT** He already has two previous _____ for theft.
3. **PROSECUTE** The _____ presented strong evidence to the court.
4. **CORRUPT** The investigation uncovered a web of _____ officials.
5. **LEGISLATE** Parliament passed the new _____ within a week.
6. **OFFEND** The programme is designed to stop young _____ from reoffending.
7. **ENFORCE** Stricter _____ of the law would reduce street crime.
8. **FRAUD** The emails turned out to be part of a _____ scheme.

Task 4 · Reading in context

Read the passage, then answer the questions. This mirrors an IELTS reading set – notice how many of your new words appear naturally.

Punish or Reform?

When someone commits a crime, society must decide how to respond. For centuries, the standard answer was punishment: an offender was locked away, and the length of the sentence reflected the seriousness of the offence. Prison, supporters argue, keeps dangerous people off the streets and acts as a deterrent, warning others of the consequences of breaking the law.

Yet many criminologists now question whether incarceration actually works. Studies in several countries suggest that a large proportion of released prisoners are convicted again within a few years. If the main aim of the justice system is to reduce crime, they argue, then locking people up without helping them change is a failure. This is why growing attention is being paid to rehabilitation – the education, training and therapy that prepare offenders to return to ordinary life.

Critics of this approach worry that it can appear too lenient, and that victims deserve to see wrongdoers properly punished. There is also concern that some perpetrators are simply too dangerous to release.

Most modern systems therefore try to strike a balance. Serious offenders may face long periods in custody, while those who commit minor crimes might be given community service or released on parole under supervision. The debate is unlikely to be settled soon, but on one point there is agreement: a system that neither protects the public nor reforms the guilty serves no one.

Questions 1–5 · True / False / Not Given

TRUE = the passage says so. **FALSE** = the passage says the opposite. **NOT GIVEN** = the passage doesn't say.

- | | | |
|----------|---|-------------------|
| 1 | Supporters of prison believe it can discourage others from committing crimes. | T / F / NG |
| <hr/> | | |
| 2 | All criminologists agree that prison is the best solution to crime. | T / F / NG |
| <hr/> | | |
| 3 | The passage states the exact percentage of prisoners who reoffend. | T / F / NG |
| <hr/> | | |
| 4 | Some people think that rehabilitation can seem too lenient. | T / F / NG |
| <hr/> | | |
| 5 | The writer concludes that punishment should be replaced entirely by rehabilitation. | T / F / NG |

Questions 6–9 · Vocabulary in context

- | | | |
|----------|--|-------|
| 6 | Find a word/phrase meaning: a person who commits a crime | <hr/> |
| <hr/> | | |
| 7 | Find a word/phrase meaning: something that discourages people from doing something | <hr/> |
| <hr/> | | |
| 8 | Find a word/phrase meaning: the act of putting someone in prison | <hr/> |
| <hr/> | | |
| 9 | Find a word/phrase meaning: not strict; less severe than expected | <hr/> |

Task 5 · Use it yourself

Recognising a word is easy; producing it is what raises your band. Answer out loud, then in writing.

SPEAK Speaking — Part 3 style

Answer each question in 3–4 sentences. Try to use the words in **bold** accurately.

1. Do you think prison is an effective **deterrent**? Why or why not?
2. Should the justice system focus more on **rehabilitation** than on punishment?
3. Are longer **sentences** the best way to reduce crime?
4. What can governments do to **enforce** the law more effectively?

WRITE Writing — Task 2 mini

Write an introduction and one body paragraph (about 80–100 words) for this prompt. Use **at least four** words from this pack.

Some people think that harsher punishments, such as longer **sentences**, are the best way to reduce crime. Others believe that tackling the causes of crime is more effective. Discuss both views and give your own opinion.

Now, from memory

AFTER

Cover the word bank. Write each meaning from memory and tick the box only if you could also use the word in your own sentence. Compare this page with your **Before** page – every word you can now explain is a mark you’ve earned.

#	WORD	MEANING (FROM MEMORY)	CAN USE IT
1	deterrent		☐
2	rehabilitation		☐
3	offender		☐
4	conviction		☐
5	sentence		☐
6	prosecute		☐
7	acquit		☐
8	verdict		☐
9	capital punishment		☐
10	custody		☐
11	parole		☐
12	legislation		☐
13	enforce		☐
14	lenient		☐
15	incarceration		☐
16	corruption		☐
17	fraud		☐
18	trafficking		☐
19	vandalism		☐
20	perpetrator		☐
21	crackdown		☐
22	alleged		☐
23	probation		☐

Answer key

TASK 1 · GAP-FILL

1 deterrent 2 lenient 3 custody 4 parole 5 enforce 6 vandalism 7 corruption 8 rehabilitation 9 legislation
10 acquit 11 fraud 12 alleged

TASK 2 · MATCHING

1 d 2 b 3 f 4 h 5 a 6 j 7 g 8 c 9 i 10 e

TASK 3 · WORD FORMATION

1 deter 2 convictions 3 prosecution 4 corrupt 5 legislation 6 offenders 7 enforcement 8 fraudulent

TASK 4 · TRUE / FALSE / NOT GIVEN

1 TRUE 2 FALSE 3 NOT GIVEN 4 TRUE 5 FALSE

TASK 4 · VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

6 offender 7 deterrent 8 incarceration 9 lenient



Nicely done. Revisit this pack in a week and again in a month — spaced review is what turns a recognised word into an automatic one. More themed packs at prepex.ai.