

Name _____

Date _____

Capital Punishment

Passage 1

Capital punishment, also dubbed the "death penalty," is the premeditated and planned taking of a human life by a government in response to a crime committed by that legally convicted person. Crimes that can result in the death penalty are known as *capital crimes* or *capital offences*. The term *capital* originates from the Latin *capitalism*, literally "regarding the head." Hence, capital crimes were originally punished by severing the head from the body.



In the past, capital punishment has been practiced by most societies, although currently only 58 nations actively practice it, with 96 countries having abolished it. It is a matter of active controversy in various countries and states, and positions can vary within a single political ideology or cultural region. In the European Union member states, Article 2 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union prohibits the use of capital punishment.

As of 2010, Amnesty International considered most countries abolitionist, meaning that in most countries the death penalty is not practiced. The UN General Assembly has adopted, in 2007 and 2008, non-binding resolutions calling for a global moratorium on executions, with a view toward eventual abolition worldwide. Although many nations have abolished capital punishment, over 60% of the world's population lives in countries where executions take place. This is because the People's Republic of China, India, the United States of America, and Indonesia, which are the four most populous countries in the world, continue to apply the death penalty (although in India and Indonesia it is used only rarely). Each of these four nations voted against the General Assembly resolutions.

Passage 2

The United States is one of the few remaining nations in the world that still uses death as the penalty for certain crimes. While many see the penalty as barbaric and against American values, it is clear that it is a very important tool in fighting violent, premeditated murder. The death penalty gives closure to the victim's loved ones, creates a strong crime deterrent, prevents further killings, and relieves the prison overcrowding problem. For these reasons, it should continue as a practice in contemporary society.

To begin, the death penalty brings closure to the victim's loved ones. Losing a loved one to a violent crime is extremely traumatic and takes years, if not decades, to recover from. Some victims' families never recover. Yet one thing that aids in hastening this recovery is to achieve real, palpable closure. Rather than having the criminal spend life in prison (still around to haunt the victim's family), a death sentence brings finality to a horrible chapter in the lives of these family members.

In addition, the death penalty creates a strong deterrent to violent crime. Without some form of negative consequence, criminals have no incentive to check their actions. While jail sentences are an effective deterrent for average criminals, a death sentence offers another form of deterrent for especially heinous crimes. Prosecutors should have the option to use a variety of punishments in order to minimize future crime.

Thirdly, the death penalty prevents further murders by negating the possibility of escape or parole. Nor can the criminal continue to kill within the confines of prison—a tragic, yet all-too-common occurrence.

Finally, the death penalty relieves the prison overcrowding problem. U.S. prisons are currently experiencing a major shortage of funding. This has resulted in a lack of room, food, clothing, guards, etc. If the death penalty is eliminated, it means that even more prisoners must be housed for life. This would only add to the problem of an already overcrowded prison system.

Given these reasons, it is clear that the death penalty should continue to be upheld in contemporary society.

Passage 3

The United States is one of the few remaining nations in the world that still uses death as the penalty for certain crimes. While many see the death penalty as a viable method of combating violent, premeditated murder, it is clear that the death penalty is an inhumane act that contradicts core American values. The death penalty increases costs, obstructs the court system, is an ineffective deterrent, and does not undo the damage caused by the criminal. It should therefore be abolished from contemporary society.

Firstly, the death penalty is very expensive to maintain. Most people don't realize that carrying out one death sentence costs 2-5 times more than keeping that same criminal in prison for the rest of his or her life. This expense comes as a result of the seemingly endless appeals, additional required procedures, and legal wrangling involved in the judicial process. It's not unusual for a prisoner to be on death row for 15-20 years. The judges, attorneys, court reporters, clerks, and court facilities involved all require a substantial investment by the taxpayers.

Secondly, the death penalty clogs up the court system. The U.S. court system goes to enormous lengths before allowing a death sentence to be carried out. All the necessary appeals, motions, hearings, and briefs monopolize much of the time of judges, attorneys, and other court employees as well as use up courtrooms and facilities. This time and space could be devoted to resolving other matters, since the court system is tremendously backed up. Ending the death penalty is the only way to help move things along.

Moreover, the death penalty is an ineffective deterrent to violent crime. Life in prison is a far more effective deterrent than the death penalty, which, in some cases, actually represents an act of clemency for the criminal. With a death sentence, the suffering is over in an instant. With life in prison, however, the pain goes on for decades. Prisoners are confined to a cage, living in an environment of rape and violence where they are treated as animals.

Lastly, the death penalty does not undo the damage caused by the criminal; it cannot bring the victim back to life. Killing the criminal doesn't change the fact that the victim is gone and will never come back. Hate, revenge, and anger will never cure the emptiness caused by a lost loved one. Forgiveness is the only way to start the healing process, and this can't happen in an individual preoccupied with revenge.

Given these reasons, it is clear that the death penalty should be abolished from contemporary society.

- 1) According to information in Passage 1, how many countries have prohibited the death penalty?
 - A. 42
 - B. 58
 - C. 72
 - D. 96

- 2) According to Passage 1, what percentage of the world's population lives in countries where executions take place?
 - A. less than 50%
 - B. just over half
 - C. more than 60%
 - D. approximately 75%

- 3) Upon being confronted with the argument that the death penalty does not undo the damage caused by the criminal, it can be inferred that the author of Passage 2 would use which of the following counterarguments?
 - A. The death penalty brings closure to the victim's loved ones.
 - B. The death penalty creates a strong deterrent to violent crime.
 - C. The death penalty prevents further murders by negating the possibility of escape or parole.
 - D. The death penalty relieves the prison overcrowding problem.

- 4) In paragraph 3 of Passage 2, the author argues that, "The death penalty creates a strong deterrent to violent crime." Which of the following pieces of information, if true, would most Weaken this argument?
 - A. In 2010, the total number of violent crimes committed in the United States exceeded 17,000.
 - B. The number of criminals who received the death penalty rose by 4.2% between 2008 and 2009, causing the President to issue a national address.
 - C. Over the last 20 years the rate of violent crime increased more in states that apply the death penalty than it did in states that do not.
 - D. Criminals who received life sentences in 2010 committed more prison murders than those who received life sentences in 2009.

- 5) In paragraph 4 of Passage 2 the author writes, “Nor can the criminal continue to kill within the confines of prison—a tragic, yet all-too-common occurrence.” Which of the following pieces of Information, if true, would best support this statement?
- A. In 2011, 843 murders were committed within the confines of prison.
 - B. One of the most famous criminals in history was originally sentenced to death but ended up spending life in prison.
 - C. Parolees are four times as likely to commit crimes as the average person.
 - D. Death row inmates are twice as likely as other criminals to commit violent crimes while in prison.
- 6) As used in paragraph 1 of Passage 3, it can be inferred that the word **obstructs** belongs to which of the following word groups?
- A. hampers, interferes, blocks
 - B. ceases, concludes, terminates
 - C. expands, multiplies, swells
 - D. tangles, twists, contorts
- 7) Based on information in Passage 3, it can be inferred that a criminal who costs \$100,000 to keep in prison for life might cost how much to put to death?
- A. \$50,000
 - B. \$100,000
 - C. \$400,000
 - D. \$600,000

8) In paragraph 3 of Passage 3, which of the following logical fallacies is present in the author's conclusion that "Ending the death penalty is the only way to help move things along"?

A. Weak analogy, present in an argument in which the arguer relies on an analogy between two or more objects, ideas, or situations that are not really alike or analogous in the relevant respect.

B. Begging the question, present in an argument in which the arguer asks his or her opponent to simply accept a conclusion absent any real evidence; the argument either relies on a premise that says the same thing as the conclusion (commonly referred to as "being circular" or "circular reasoning"), or simply ignores an important (but questionable) assumption that the argument rests on.

C. Slippery slope, present in an argument in which the arguer assumes that a chain reaction, usually ending in some dire consequence, will take place, but without enough evidence to support that assumption. The arguer asserts that if one were to take even one step onto the "slippery slope," he or she will invariably end up sliding all the way to the bottom; the arguer assumes the subject cannot halt his or her slide partway down the slope.

D. False dichotomy, present in an argument in which the arguer makes it look as though the answer to a question admits of only two alternatives (one that is logical and one that is illogical), when, in reality, there are multiple undisclosed options available.

9) Which author(s) would likely agree that the father of a victim will not gain closure by seeking revenge upon the criminal?

A. the author of Passage 1

B. the author of Passage 2

C. the author of Passage 3

D. both the author of Passage 2 and the author of Passage 3

10) As used in paragraph 4 of Passage 3, which of the following describes an act of **clemency**?

A. Following her murder conviction, Magdalene was sentenced to death. Before she was Executed, she was asked if she had any last words. Magdalene said she did, and proceeded to tell the victim's family that she never meant to do them any harm.

B. Given that he was the one who hit the ball, Xavier was held responsible for breaking Mr. Janice's window. But after telling Mr. Janice what had happened, Xavier felt a wave of relief wash over him, because Mr. Janice said he would not make him pay for the damages.

C. After listening to his case, the members of the jury found Mr. Davis guilty of second degree murder. However, due to the emergence of evidence suggesting that the jury had been corrupted, the case was declared a mistrial and had to be retried.

D. Jane typically wears her yellow rain jacket to school. However, because the sun was shining and there was not a cloud in the sky, she decided to leave it at home. Unfortunately, this was a poor decision. As soon as she arrived at school, the sky clouded and it began to rain.

11) In your opinion, which of passage two's arguments is strongest or most convincing? Why?

Answers and Explanations

1) D

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In Passage 1, paragraph 2, the author states, “In the past, capital punishment has been practiced by most societies, although currently only 58 nations actively practice it, with 96 countries having abolished it.” From this information we know that 96 countries have abolished the death penalty, or gotten rid of it. Even without knowing that the word “abolished” means prohibited, we can infer its meaning from the first sentence in paragraph 3: “As of 2010, Amnesty International considered most countries abolitionist, meaning that in most countries the death penalty is not practiced.” Since in abolitionist countries the death penalty is not practiced, we can infer that these countries have abolished, or prohibited, it. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

The passage does not provide information to support choice **(A)**. Therefore it is incorrect.

58 is the number of countries that do actively practice the death penalty, so these countries have not prohibited it. This makes **(B)** incorrect.

The passage does not provide information to support choice **(C)**. Therefore it is incorrect.

2) C

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In Passage 1, paragraph 3, the author claims that “over 60% of the world’s population lives in countries where executions take place.” Because “more than 60%” is another way to say “over 60%,” **(C)** is correct.

The passage does not provide information to support choice **(A)**. Therefore it is incorrect.

Although “over 60%” might be considered “just over half,” this is a less specific statistic. Since there is a choice that means the same thing as “over 60%,” **(B)** is not the best choice.

The passage does not provide information to support choice **(D)**. Therefore it is incorrect.

3) A

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In Passage 2, paragraph 2, the author claims, “Losing a loved one to a violent crime is extremely traumatic and takes years, if not decades, to recover from. Some victims’ families never recover.” From this statement we can infer that the author understands that the death penalty does not undo the damage caused by the criminal. But then the author goes on to say, “Yet one thing that aids in Hastening this recovery is to achieve real, palpable closure. Rather than having the criminal spend life in prison (still around to haunt the victim’s family), a death sentence brings finality to a horrible chapter in the lives of these family members.” From this we can infer that the author would likely argue that the death penalty brings closure to the victim’s loved ones. So even though it does not undo the damage caused by the criminal, the death penalty still serves a useful function in aiding the family’s recovery from the trauma. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

Choices **(B)**, **(C)**, and **(D)** each list a reason why the author supports the death penalty, but none of these reasons addresses the damage caused by the criminal to the victim and the victim’s family, as does the argument that the death penalty does not undo the damage caused by the criminal.

Because they do not directly counter this argument, they are incorrect.

4) C

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 3 of Passage 2 the author writes, “The death penalty creates a strong deterrent to violent crime.” If this claim were true, then it follows that there should be fewer violent crimes in states that apply the death penalty than in states that do not. However, if over the last 20 years the rate of violent crime increased more in states that apply the death penalty than it did in states that do not, this finding would directly contradict the argument that the death penalty creates a strong deterrent to violent crime. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The total number of violent crimes committed in the United States is not a relevant statistic because there is no point of reference for comparison, such as the number of violent crimes committed in countries that do not practice the death penalty. Since this statistic does not provide any information about whether or not the death penalty is a deterrent to violent crime, **(A)** is incorrect.

An increase in the number of criminals who received the death penalty does not provide any information about whether or not the death penalty is a deterrent to violent crime, so **(B)** is incorrect.

An increase in the number of prison murders committed by prisoners with life sentences does not provide any information about the death penalty as a deterrent to violent crime, so **(D)** is incorrect.

5) D

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 4 of Passage 2 the author writes, “Nor can the criminal continue to kill within the confines of prison—a tragic, yet all-too-common occurrence.” From this we can understand that the author believes a benefit of the death penalty is that criminals who receive it are prevented from committing another murder, which they could do while in prison serving a life sentence. From this we can infer that the author believes at least some criminals who receive the death penalty are likely to commit more violent crimes as long as they are alive. If it is true that death row inmates are twice as likely as other criminals to commit violent crimes while in prison, this would support the author’s belief that criminals who receive the death penalty are likely to commit more violent crimes.

Therefore **(D)** is correct.

Although a statistic about the number of prison murders could seem like relevant information, there is no point of reference given for us to determine whether 843 murders in one year is a large or small amount. Furthermore, this statistic does not necessarily involve criminals previously sentenced to death, so it does not support the claim that criminals who receive the death penalty might, if allowed to live, continue to commit violent crimes. This makes **(A)** incorrect.

The fact that a famous criminal spent life in prison after originally being sentenced to death does not support the author’s argument, because we do not know whether or not this criminal committed more violent crimes. This means **(B)** is incorrect.

A comparison between parolees and the average person does not support the author’s argument, because it does not distinguish criminals previously sentenced to death from other parolees. This makes **(C)** incorrect.

6) A

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

Obstruct (*verb*): to block, prevent, or hinder.

In Part 3, paragraph 1, the author writes, “The death penalty...obstructs the court system... It should therefore be abolished from contemporary society.” From this information we can infer that obstructing the court system is something negative, since it is a reason why the author believes the death penalty should be abolished. In paragraph 3, the supporting paragraph about this point, the author discusses the obstruction of the court system in more detail. Here the author writes, “Secondly, the death penalty clogs up the court system...This time and space could be devoted to resolving other matters, since the court system is tremendously backed up. Ending the death penalty is the only way to help move things along.” From this information we can infer that *obstruct* means to clog, back up, or block. This means that obstructs belongs to the word group *hampers, interferes, blocks*. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

While the author argues that the death penalty clogs up the court system, he or she does not go so far as to say that it shuts down the system altogether. This means that obstructs does not belong to the word group *ceases, concludes, terminates*, so **(B)** is incorrect.

Although the author does give examples in paragraph 3 of things that death penalty cases require more of, such as “appeals, motions, hearings, and briefs,” the death penalty does not cause the court system itself to get larger, but to become clogged. This means that obstructs does not belong to the word group *expands, multiplies, swells*. Therefore **(C)** is incorrect.

While something that is tangled up is generally not as efficient as something untangled, being clogged indicates that something is more completely blocked than something merely tangled. This means that obstructs does not belong to the word group *tangles, twists, contorts*. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

7) C

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In Passage 3, paragraph 2, the author claims, “Most people don't realize that carrying out one death sentence costs 2-5 times more than keeping that same criminal in prison for the rest of his or her life.” Although the author does not directly state how much it costs to put a criminal to death, we can infer the answer based on the information given in the question and the information in the passage. The question tells us that a criminal costs \$100,000 to keep in prison for life. The passage tells us that carrying out a death sentence “costs 2-5 times more.” From this information we can infer that it would cost between \$200,000 and \$500,000 to put this same criminal to death. The only choice that falls in this range is **(C)**, so it is correct.

The passage does not provide information to support choices **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(D)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

8) D

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In Part 3, paragraph 3, the author argues that “the death penalty clogs up the court system...All the necessary appeals, motions, hearings, and briefs monopolize much of the time of judges, attorneys, and other court employees as well as use up courtrooms and facilities.” As a solution to this clogged court system, the author asserts, “Ending the death penalty is the only way to help move things along.” However, the author only presents two choices: either we keep the death penalty and the courts remain clogged, or we abolish the death penalty to move things along. In reality, there are multiple options that could help unclog the court system without abolishing the death penalty, such as reforming the legal system to make it more streamlined or reducing the number of appeals allowed. Since the author makes it look like there are only two choices when in reality there are multiple options, this is an example of a *false dichotomy*, which means that **(D)** is correct.

The author does not commit the logical fallacies listed in choices **(A)**, **(B)**, and **(C)**. Therefore they are incorrect.

9) C

Core Standard: **Key Ideas and Details**

In Passage 3, paragraph 5, the author claims, “Killing the criminal doesn't change the fact that the victim is gone and will never come back. Hate, revenge, and anger will never cure the emptiness caused by a lost loved one. Forgiveness is the only way to start the healing process, and this can't happen in an individual preoccupied with revenge.” From this we can infer that the author believes that the father of a victim will only gain closure through forgiveness, which cannot happen as long as the father seeks revenge upon the criminal. This means that the author would likely agree that the father of a victim will not gain closure by seeking revenge. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The author of Passage 1 provides objective background information about capital punishment. He or she does not take a position on the issue, so we cannot infer whether he or she would likely agree that the father of a victim will not gain closure by seeking revenge upon the criminal. This means **(A)** is incorrect.

In Passage 2, paragraph 3, the author claims that “the death penalty brings closure to the victim's loved ones. From this information we can understand that the author likely would not agree that the father of a victim will not gain closure by seeking revenge upon the criminal. This means both **(B)** and **(D)** are incorrect.

10) B

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

Clemency (*noun*): a power to in some way lower or moderate the harshness of a punishment; leniency; mercy.

In Passage 3, paragraph 4, the author states, “Moreover, the death penalty is an ineffective deterrent against future crimes. Life in prison is a far more effective deterrent than the death penalty, which, in some cases, actually represents an act of clemency for the criminal. With a death sentence, the suffering is over in an instant. With life in prison, however, the pain goes on for decades.” From this we can understand that the author believes that life in prison is actually a harsher sentence than death in some cases. Since it follows that in these cases, the author believes a death sentence is more lenient or merciful than life in prison, we can infer that *clemency* means showing mercy or making a punishment less harsh. Xavier broke Mr. Janice's window and expected to be punished for it, but he was relieved to find out that Mr. Janice would not make him pay for the damages. This means that Xavier's punishment was more lenient, or less harsh, than he had expected because Mr. Janice showed him mercy. Since clemency means showing mercy, this is an act of clemency. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Magdalene telling the victim's family that she never meant to do them any harm is an act of remorse, not mercy, so **(A)** is incorrect.

A retrial based on a corrupt jury is an example of a temporary reprieve from punishment, but no one showed Mr. Davis mercy or made his punishment less harsh. Instead, his case had to be retried.

This means **(C)** is incorrect.

Jane leaving her raincoat at home on a rainy day is an unfortunate coincidence, but not an act of mercy. This makes **(D)** incorrect.