

CJ 1010

PLA Content Guide

What is Criminal Justice

- Systemic framework: Criminal justice operates as an interconnected system of law enforcement, courts, and corrections.
- Normative goals: The system reflects competing goals of justice, public safety, fairness, and social order.

The Crime Picture

- Patterns and trends: Crime rates vary by offense type, geography, and demographic factors over time.
- Measurement limits: Official crime data underrepresent certain offenses due to underreporting and recording practices.

The Search for Causes

- Individual explanations: Biological, psychological, and developmental factors help explain criminal behavior.
- Structural explanations: Social inequality, neighborhood conditions, and systemic disadvantage influence crime rates.

Criminal Law

- Substantive vs. procedural law: Criminal law defines offenses and prescribes how cases move through the system.
- Legal elements of crime: Acts must typically include actus reus, mens rea, and causation to establish guilt.

Policing: History and Structure

- Evolution of policing: American policing developed from informal watch systems to professionalized agencies.
- Organizational diversity: Policing includes local, state, and federal agencies with distinct roles.

Policing: Purpose and Organization

- Crime control and service: Police perform enforcement, order maintenance, and community assistance roles.
- Bureaucratic structure: Most departments operate within hierarchical chains of command.

Policing: Legal Aspects

- Constitutional limits: Police actions are governed by Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Fourteenth Amendment protections.
- Discretion and accountability: Officers exercise discretion within legal and departmental boundaries.

Policing: Issues and Challenges

- Use of force concerns: Public scrutiny has increased attention to police use-of-force incidents.
- Legitimacy and trust: Community trust influences cooperation, compliance, and public safety outcomes.

The Courts: Structure and Participants

- Court hierarchy: Cases move through trial and appellate courts at state and federal levels.
- Key actors: Judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and juries shape case outcomes.

Pretrial Activities and the Criminal Trial

- Case processing: Arrest, charging, bail decisions, and plea negotiations shape trial outcomes.
- Adversarial process: Trials rely on competing narratives presented by prosecution and defense.

Sentencing

- Sentencing models: Judges use determinate, indeterminate, and guideline-based frameworks.
- Disparity concerns: Sentencing outcomes may vary based on race, offense type, and jurisdiction.

Probation, Parole, and Reentry

- Community supervision: Probation and parole allow supervision outside institutional confinement.
- Reentry challenges: Housing, employment, and stigma affect successful reintegration.

Prisons and Jails

- Functional differences: Jails primarily hold pretrial detainees, while prisons house sentenced individuals.
- Population pressures: Overcrowding strains safety, healthcare, and programming.

Prison Life

- Social organization: Informal norms and inmate culture influence daily life inside facilities.
- Adaptation and coping: Incarcerated individuals develop strategies to manage confinement and stress.