



Developing | Exemplar Essay

Criminal Justice Reform

Criminal Justice Fairness



Claim and Focus

The essay introduces a claim based on the topic but it is somewhat unclear (“We should change the law so that judges don’t have to go by mandatory minimum sentences”). Focus wanes toward the end of the body paragraph, veering a bit off-task, resulting in the demands of the prompts not being fully met.



Support and Evidence

The essay references evidence from two sources but only provides one brief quote to support its claim. Some reasoning is evident (“This means that a lot of people that aren’t dangerous are ending up in prison sometimes for a long time”), though ideas do not consistently support the claim, and counterclaims are not acknowledged.



Organization

The essay introduces the topic of mandatory minimum sentencing and leads to a claim in the introduction. A basic organizational structure is present, though a lack of transitions makes connections between ideas unclear at times, and the concluding statement does not adequately follow from the essay’s claim.



Language

The sentence structure does not vary often (“This means that,” “This is,” “This just shows”), language is mostly informal, and word choice does not attend to the interests of the reader or the complexity of the topic (“especially scary,” “huge problem”).



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait ‘looks like’ in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see “25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays” by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

Criminal Justice Reform



Criminal Justice Fairness

Mandatory minimum sentences are hurting people. We should change the law so that judges don't have to go by mandatory minimum sentences, they can decide what's fair for each person.

Mandatory minimum sentences are putting too many people in prison. Even if they committed a crime that is small, if it's their third time getting caught then they will get sent to prison. "If you are convicted of a felony three times, you are sentenced to life in prison" (Source 1). This means that a lot of people that aren't dangerous are ending up in prison sometimes for a long time. Even if the judge wants to give a different kind of sentence they have to give the mandatory minimum. Sometimes counseling or job training would be more helpful than jail but the judges are not allowed to do that. This is especially scary because the article showed how black and Latino people are more likely to get arrested and convicted than white people. If they're more likely to get convicted then they're more likely to hit the three strikes law and get life in prison. This just shows how racism is a huge problem in America. If a person is being mean and saying racist things, that's a problem but think about what happens when that person is a judge. They can treat people differently and give longer prison sentences if they want to. When people have powerful jobs like that they can destroy someone's life for real. Think about people in government and how there used to be laws that said there should be separate schools and separate water fountains because the people who had power thought so and they make the law. People in government are elected to protect all of the people and should be fighting to make things fair for everyone.

We need to make sure that people in government and judges are making things fair and equal for everyone.