

Talking About Crime and Court in English – Video

In this lesson, you can learn to talk about crime and court in English. You'll learn vocabulary you can use to talk about crime, criminals and the justice system in English.

1. Talking About Burglary

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Crime-at-a-house-scaled.webp>)

Gina: How was your trip?

Liam: My trip was good... But my house was burgled while I was gone.

G: Oh no!

L: Yeah... I came back to find the back window broken, and everything was messed up inside.

G: I'm so sorry to hear that. Do you know when it happened?

L: Not exactly. Apparently there have been several break-ins in the area recently, though.

G: Did they take much stuff?

L: Some electronics, a laptop, a few other small things. It's all replaceable, but it's still not a good feeling.

G: I'm sure. Still, maybe the police will catch them and you'll get it back.

L: Maybe, but I doubt it. They came and dusted for prints, but they said that there was almost no chance of recovering my things.

G: Really?

L: They say that stolen goods tend to be moved out of the city and sold somewhere else, so they're very difficult to trace. The detective told me that there's a whole network of fences around the country, and they move stolen items between them.

G: Sounds like big business.

Look at a sentence you heard at the start of the dialogue.

My house was _____ while I was gone.

Do you remember the missing word?

The word was 'burgled', from the verb 'to burgle'.

With crime vocabulary, you often need to learn words in threes.

burgle -> verb

burg— -> n. person

burg--- -> n. activity

Do you know the noun forms?

Here they are.

burgle -> verb

burglar -> n. person

burglary -> n. activity

You need to know one noun for the person, one noun for the activity, and the verb. Do you need a review on parts of speech and sentence structure? Watch our lesson: English Sentence Structure (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/sentence-structure>).

Sometimes, some of the forms might be the same. For example: murder, murderer, murder.

murder -> verb

murderer -> n. person

murder -> n. activity

Sometimes, one of the forms might be a completely different word, like this: steal, thief, stealing.

steal -> verb

thief -> n. person

stealing -> n. activity

Keep this in mind when learning vocabulary to talk about crime and court in English.

This is also a useful way to learn other types of vocabulary. Would you like more vocabulary practice? Be sure to watch our Oxford Online English lesson on learning English vocabulary (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/learn-english-vocabulary>).

Let's look at some other useful vocabulary from the dialogue.

1. There have been several **break-ins** in the area recently.
2. They came and **dusted for prints**.
3. **Stolen goods** tend to be moved out of the city and sold somewhere else.
4. There's a whole network of **fences** around the country.

Here's a task for you: look at the definitions. Can you match the words to the definitions?

- a. Items taken from someone illegally.
- b. When a house is burgled.
- c. Someone who buys and sells stolen items.
- d. To spread fine powder everywhere in order to find fingerprints.

Pause the video and find your answers.

Could you do it? Let's look!

1b

2d

3c

4a

'Break-in' and 'burglary' have a similar meaning; you could use either word in this sentence.

'Fence' is a colloquial word, but it's useful sometimes as there's no single word with the same meaning.

Learn more about what colloquialisms are and get some examples of them: Colloquialism Examples (<http://www.literarydevices.com/colloquialism/>).

Let's move on to part two in talking about crime and court in English. Don't forget that you can always review a dialogue or a section as many times as you need.

2. Talking About Street Crime

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Police-car-in-the-street-scaled.webp>)

Liam: That was fun!

Gina: Yes, we should do it again some time.

L: By the way, how are you getting home?

G: I'll walk through the park, and then get the bus, I think.

L: Maybe get a taxi instead? My colleague was mugged near here last week.

G: Really? I didn't think there was much street crime here.

L: No, me neither, but it's better to be careful. She was robbed at knifepoint. She's fine but it was scary.

G: I bet. I know there's a lot of pickpocketing on public transport here, but I didn't think there was much violent crime.

L: Well, maybe it was just bad luck, but better to be safe, I think.

G: Yeah, I'll get a taxi.

Let's see if you can remember the key vocabulary you heard. Look at some sentences.

My colleague was _____ near here last week.

I didn't think there was much _____ crime here.

She was _____ at knifepoint.

There's a lot of _____ on public transport.

Can you remember the missing words? Pause the video and think about it. If you want, go back and listen to the dialogue again, and find them!

Ready? Let's look.

*My colleague was **mugged** near here last week.*

*I didn't think there was much **street** crime here.*

*She was **robbed** at knifepoint.*

*There's a lot of **pickpocketing** on public transport.*

Did you get them right? Next, can you explain what they mean?

Mugging is a kind of robbery. In general, 'robbery' means stealing by using violence or the threat of violence. Mugging is robbery which takes place on the street, or in another public place.

‘Street crime’ includes crimes like mugging, pickpocketing, graffiti, and so on. In general, it refers to crimes which are committed in public.

‘She was robbed at knifepoint’ means that someone threatened her with a knife. You can also use the word ‘gunpoint’. For example, ‘The gang held the bank staff at gunpoint during the robbery.’

Pickpocketing means stealing from someone’s bag or wallet, usually in a crowded public place.

Here’s an important point: in English, there are many different words for different types of stealing (<https://www.wordhippo.com/what-is/another-word-for/stealing.html>). You’ve heard some of them already: burglary, robbery, mugging and pickpocketing. There’s also shoplifting – stealing from a shop.

It’s more common to use these specific words when possible, instead of using general words like ‘stealing’.

Don’t forget also to learn the three words for each crime. For example: mug, mugger, mugging.

mug -> verb

mugger -> n. person

mugging -> n. activity

Is there much street crime or pickpocketing where you live? How can you protect yourself from this? Think about what you could say on this topic.

OK? Let’s move on to our next point in talking about crime and court in English.

3. Talking About Punishments

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Person-in-handcuffs-scaled.webp>)

Gina: Where’s John? He’s twenty minutes late!

Liam: He probably underestimated how long it would take to get here on the bus.

G: Why’s he taking the bus?

L: Oh, you didn’t hear? He was done for DUI.

G: No way!

L: Yeah. He got a twelve-month driving ban, and he has to do some community service, too.

G: Wow! He’s such a car nut, too. That must really hurt him.

L: I’m sure. I think it’s worse because he got a couple of speeding tickets last year, so he already had some points on his license.

G: Well, he can’t really complain.

Let’s see four sentences from the dialogue.

He was done for DUI.

He got a 12-month driving ban.

He has to do some community service.

He already had some points on his license.

What do these phrases mean? Could you explain them to someone?

Try it now.

'Done for DUI' means that...

A driving ban is...

Community service is...

If you have points on your license, you...

Try to complete these sentences. Pause the video and say your answers out loud, or write them down, or both.

Could you do it? Let's check!

'Done' is British slang. It means 'convicted', meaning that you are found guilty in court. 'DUI' stands for 'driving under the influence', which means driving while drunk or on drugs.

If you wanted to say this in a more formal way, you could say 'He was convicted of DUI'.

If you want to say this in a neutral style, you could say 'He was arrested for DUI'.

'Arrested' and 'convicted' aren't the same. 'Arrested' means when the police first find you and take you to the police station. 'Convicted' is when you are found guilty in court. However, in everyday conversation (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/have-english-conversation>), people might not use these words so precisely. People might say 'arrested' when the real meaning is 'convicted in court'.

A driving ban means that you are forbidden from driving for a period of time.

Community service is a punishment, usually for less serious crimes. It means you have to spend a certain number of hours working for free. For example, you might have to pick up litter on the street.

If you have points on your license, you have been caught breaking the law while driving before. Many countries use a points system. If you, for example, break the speed limit and the police catch you, you get points on your license. If you get too many points, you might lose your driver's license, or you might be banned from driving for some time.

Clear? To practise, try answering some questions.

1. Are traffic laws strict in your country? Give examples.
2. Is community service used as a punishment in your country? If so, for what kind of crimes?
3. Does your country have a points system for traffic laws? What would someone have to do to get a driving ban?

Think about your answers to these questions. Pause the video, make your answers, and say them out loud. If you want extra practice, write your answers in the comments and share them with other learners!

Could you do it? Great! Let's look at one more point.

4. Going to Court

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/People-in-court-scaled.webp>)

Before you listen to the dialogue, we have a challenge for you: try to find words with these meanings in the dialogue.

1. Not to be punished (informal)
2. A very light punishment
3. A kind of court (in the UK) which deals with less serious crimes

Got it? Try to find these words as you listen.

Liam: Could I ask a favour? Could I take half a day off on Wednesday?

Gina: Should be OK. Can I ask what it's for?

L: Well... I have a friend who was arrested for shoplifting. She says she didn't do it, and for what it's worth I believe her, but anyway, Wednesday is her court date and I said I'd go along to support her.

G: Sure, no problem. How long is the trial?

L: It's at the magistrates' court, so as I understand it it's pretty quick. It's not a full trial with a jury and so on.

G: Do you think she'll get off?

L: I don't know. Even if not, she has a clean record so I don't think she'll get more than a slap on the wrist, figuratively speaking.

G: Yes, I mean, I don't think people go to prison for shoplifting, right?

L: I don't think so. At least, not for a first offense. Anyway, that's not really my concern. I'm just going to support her, and whatever happens, happens.

Could you do it? Let's see the answers.

1. Not to be punished (informal) = get off
2. A very light punishment = a slap on the wrist
3. A kind of court (in the UK) which deals with less serious crimes = magistrates' court

'Get off' is slang. More formally, you could say 'be found innocent'. So, in the dialogue, the question was: 'Do you think she'll get off?' In formal English, you'd say 'Do you think she'll be found innocent?'

'A slap on the wrist' is an idiom. Often, it's used to refer to a punishment which is less serious than it should have been. So, if some people commit a serious crime, but only receive a light punishment, you could say 'They got away with a slap on the wrist.'

Different countries have different justice systems. In the UK, there are two levels of court: (<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/courts-structure-0715.pdf>) magistrates' court and Crown Court. Magistrates' courts deal with things like theft, traffic offenses, minor assault, and so on. More serious crimes go to Crown Court, where trials are held with a jury of twelve citizens.

There's much more useful language relating to crime and punishment in the dialogues, so we recommend reviewing them at least once, and writing down words or phrases you want to remember.

Thanks for watching! We hope you learned some useful phrases and vocabulary to talk about crime and court in English. Practice using them in the comments on YouTube!