ROOT OF THE DAY

pen / pun / poen — *Latin poena (penalty, punishment), from Greek poinē (blood-money, penalty); verb punire (to punish) · "penalty, punish"*

penal — Latin poenalis, from poena (penalty) = relating to punishment; hence the penal code
penalty — Medieval Latin poenalitas, from poena = the punishment fixed for breaking a law or rule
penalise — penal + -ise = to subject someone to a penalty or put them at a disadvantage
punish — Old French puniss-, from Latin punire (to punish), from poena = inflict a penalty
punitive — Medieval Latin punitivus, from punire = intended as punishment (punitive damages)
subpoena — Medieval Latin sub poena = 'under penalty', the opening words of a writ ordering a person to attend court
pain — Old French peine, from Latin poena = penalty; the sense of suffering grew out of punishment

POWER WORDS

penitent *adj./n.*
"The court noted that the accused, visibly penitent, had returned the stolen money before the trial began."
Meaning: feeling or showing sorrow and regret for having done wrong; (n.) a person who repents
Syn: remorseful, repentant, contrite · **Ant:** impenitent, unrepentant
HOOK: Latin paenitere (to regret): the penitent regrets the wrong; English pairs it with penal, though the link to poena is uncertain

condign *adj.*
"The victims' families demanded condign punishment for the officials who had ignored repeated safety warnings."
Meaning: (of punishment) fitting and fully deserved; appropriate to the wrong done
Syn: deserved, fitting, merited · **Ant:** undeserved, excessive
HOOK: con (fully) + dignus (worthy): punishment fully worthy of the crime; almost always paired with 'punishment'

retributive *adj.*
"Critics argue that a purely retributive approach to sentencing ignores the prospect of reforming the offender."
Meaning: (of punishment) inflicted as repayment for a wrong, rather than to reform or deter
Syn: retaliatory, avenging, vindictive · **Ant:** reformative, rehabilitative
HOOK: re (back) + tribuere (to pay, assign): paying the offender back for the wrong done

commute *v.*
"The President commuted the death sentence to life imprisonment after a long delay in deciding the mercy petition."
Meaning: (law) to replace a sentence with a less severe one; also, to travel regularly between home and work
Syn: reduce, lighten, mitigate · **Ant:** enhance, aggravate
HOOK: com (thoroughly) + mutare (to change): the sentence is changed into a milder one

mulct *v.*
"The consumer forum mulcted the airline in damages for leaving passengers stranded without food or information."
Meaning: to extract money from someone by a fine, damages or a tax; to swindle
Syn: fine, penalise, fleece · **Ant:** compensate, reimburse
HOOK: Latin multa / mulcta (a fine): the old Roman word for a money penalty; 'mulcted in damages'

peculation *n.*
"The audit exposed years of peculation by the cashier, who had quietly diverted municipal funds to his relatives."
Meaning: embezzlement of public money or property by a person entrusted with it
Syn: embezzlement, misappropriation, defalcation · **Ant:** honesty, integrity
HOOK: Latin peculari (to embezzle), linked to peculium (private property): treating public money as one's own

palliate *v.*
"Free rations may palliate the distress of drought-hit families, but they cannot cure the failure of irrigation behind it."
Meaning: to make a problem or illness less severe without removing its cause; to make an offence seem less serious
Syn: alleviate, ease, gloss over · **Ant:** aggravate, worsen
HOOK: Latin pallium (a cloak): cloaking a problem rather than curing it, as palliative care eases pain without a cure

approbation *n.*
"The scheme won the approbation of the Finance Commission, which recommended that other States adopt it."
Meaning: formal approval or praise
Syn: approval, endorsement, commendation · **Ant:** disapproval, condemnation
HOOK: Latin approbare (to approve): approbation is approval given with formality

querulous *adj.*
"The judge cut short the querulous litigant, who had spent an hour complaining about every adjournment."
Meaning: complaining in a petulant or whining manner
Syn: peevish, petulant, fretful · **Ant:** uncomplaining, contented
HOOK: Latin queri (to complain), the source of 'quarrel': a querulous person always has a complaint

reprobate *n./adj.*
"The judge refused to treat the young first offender as a hardened reprobate beyond the reach of reform."
Meaning: (n.) an unprincipled person of bad character; (adj.) morally depraved
Syn: scoundrel, degenerate, rogue · **Ant:** paragon, saint
HOOK: Late Latin reprobatus (disapproved, rejected), from reprobare: one who has failed the test of conduct

CONFUSABLE PAIRS — DON'T MIX THESE UP

penance *vs* **penitence**
penance: an act of self-punishment or religious duty performed to show sorrow for wrongdoing
penitence: the feeling of sorrow and regret for having done wrong
TIP: PENANCE is what you DO; PENITENCE is what you FEEL. Penitence may lead a person to perform penance.

punitive *vs* **putative**
punitive: intended as punishment (punitive damages)
putative: generally supposed or reputed to be (the putative father)
TIP: PUNitive PUNishes; PUTative is what people PUT forward as supposed, without proof.

peculation *vs* **speculation**
peculation: embezzlement of public funds by one entrusted with them
speculation: forming a theory without firm evidence; risky trading in the hope of profit
TIP: Drop the S and the speculator becomes a thief: PECULATION is stealing what you hold in trust.

approbation *vs* **opprobrium**
approbation: formal approval or praise
opprobrium: harsh public criticism and the disgrace that follows it
TIP: They sound alike but are opposites: APPRObation APPROves; OPPRObrium brings shame.

IDIOMS & ONE-WORD SUBSTITUTION

Idioms in context

- **to face the music** — to accept the unpleasant consequences of one's own actions
  "Once the audit report was tabled, the officials who had cleared the bogus bills had to face the music."

One-word substitution

- the study of the punishment of crime and the management of prisc → **penology**
- a prison in which convicts serve long sentences, intended both to p to reform → **penitentiary**

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- **to get off scot-free** — to escape entirely without punishment or penalty
  "Because the key witness turned hostile, the accused got off scot-free."
- **a slap on the wrist** — a very mild punishment, far lighter than the offence deserves
  "Environmental groups called the token fine on the polluting factory a mere slap on the wrist."
- **to throw the book at someone** — to punish someone as severely as the law allows
  "With three earlier convictions on record, the prosecutor urged the court to throw the book at the accused."

- the conditional release of a prisoner before the sentence ends, on a promise of good behaviour → **parole**
- a periodic short release of a long-term prisoner, not tied to any particular emergency → **furlough**
- the killing of one in every ten of a group, originally a Roman military punishment for mutiny or cowardice → **decimation**

WORDS IN THE WILD — FROM TODAY'S NEWSPAPER

- **archetypal** — being a perfect or original example of a type, on which later versions are modelled
  "The title deliberately echoes the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, the archetypal tale of fraternal rivalry, and Archer returned to Biblical-sounding titles at the end of his career with Adam and Eve." — *CLAT Gurukul daily brief (Jeffrey Archer dies at 86: Kane and Abel and the House of Lords), 7 Oct 2026*
- **defensible** — able to be justified or supported by reasoned argument; (of a place) able to be protected
  "Watch for proportionality: a 21-day period tied to the incubation window is defensible; an indefinite one is not." — *CLAT Gurukul daily brief (Kenya reports first Ebola case, Bundibugyo strain), 7 Oct 2026*
- **longevity** — long life; long duration of a career, service or institution
  "Records in team sport are a product of longevity as much as talent." — *CLAT Gurukul daily brief (Messi retires from international football), 8 Oct 2026*
- **retaliation** — the act of striking back at someone in return for harm done
  "The MEA statement is worth reading closely because of its tone. It did not threaten retaliation." — *CLAT Gurukul daily brief (US suspends eight firms from PERM labour certification: MEA reacts), 10 Oct 2026*

LEGAL & LATIN TERMS EVERY ASPIRANT MUST KNOW

- **nemo bis punitur pro eodem delicto** — no one is punished twice for the same offence; reflected in the bar on double jeopardy in Article 20(2)
- **nemo punitur sine injuria, facto, seu defalta** — no one is punished except for some wrong, act or default of his own
- **ut poena ad paucos, metus ad omnes perveniat** — so that punishment may reach a few but fear may reach all; the classic statement of deterrence
- **crimen falsi** — a crime involving falsehood or deceit, such as forgery, perjury or fraud
- **particeps criminis** — a partner in crime; an accomplice who takes part in the offence
- **nolo contendere** — 'I do not wish to contend': a plea (in US practice) that accepts punishment without admitting guilt

- **modus operandi** — method of operating; in criminal law, the characteristic way an offender commits crimes
- **in custodia legis** — in the custody of the law; property held by a court or its officer pending a case
- **non compos mentis** — not of sound mind; lacking the mental capacity to be legally responsible
- **durante bene placito** — during (the ruler's) good pleasure; tenure at pleasure, the basis of the doctrine of pleasure in Article 310
- **quamdiu se bene gesserit** — as long as he conducts himself well; tenure during good behaviour, which protects judges from removal at pleasure

RECALL CHECK — WORDS FROM EARLIER

infraction (learnt 7 days ago) — meaning: _____

facile (learnt 21 days ago) — meaning: _____

usurp (learnt 45 days ago) — meaning: _____

PRACTICE DRILL

1. The forger, the court held, deserved ____ punishment: neither more nor less than his offence merited.
A) condign · B) querulous · C) penitent · D) reprobate

2. Choose the word closest in meaning to PECULATION.
A) risky trading on the stock market · B) delay in paying a fine · C) embezzlement of public funds by one entrusted with them · D) a petty quarrel between neighbours

3. Article 20(2) bars prosecuting and punishing a person more than once for the same offence. Which maxim expresses this rule?
A) crimen falsi · B) nemo bis punitur pro eodem delicto · C) particeps criminis · D) durante bene placito

4. Acting on the mercy petition, the Governor decided to ____ the death sentence to life imprisonment.
A) palliate · B) mulct · C) reprobate · D) commute

5. Which sentence uses every word correctly?
A) Investors lost heavily through reckless peculation on the stock market. · B) The new policy drew the opprobrium of the board, who praised it warmly. · C) The treasurer was charged with peculation after public funds vanished from his care. · D) The court passed a putative sentence to deter other offenders.

6. The magistrate let the repeat offender off with a token fine, and critics called the penalty a mere ____.
A) throwing of the book · B) slap on the wrist · C) facing of the music · D) scot-free

7. In 'a 21-day period tied to the incubation window is defensible', DEFENSIBLE means:
A) able to be justified as reasonable · B) able to be guarded by soldiers · C) forbidden by law · D) deserving of punishment

8. Choose the word most nearly OPPOSITE in meaning to APPROBATION.
A) approval · B) endorsement · C) commendation · D) condemnation

Answer key: 1-A · 2-C · 3-B · 4-D · 5-C · 6-B · 7-A · 8-D

ETYMOLOGY TRAIL

From Latin poena, penalty, English took pain, penal and penalty; through punire it took punish and punitive. A subpoena summons a witness 'under penalty'. **penitent** *accused may plead for mercy, and a Governor may* **commute** *even* **condign** *punishment.*

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