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Composition for Creative Expression

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Argumentative Essay: The Death Penalty

Originating from the European culture, capital punishment, also known as the death penalty, is the legally authorized killing of someone as punishment for a crime. This idea of punishment by death has been around as early as the sixteenth century BC (Reggio). Almost every culture has used some form of the death penalty at least once in history however most of these cultures have stopped practicing it. As of today there are are only 25 countries that continue to use the death penalty as punishment for crimes (Amnesty International). The death penalty is not something that should continue to exist in American society because it is dangerous, unconstitutional, and inhumane. No authority should be able to hold the power to take someone’s life, no matter how extreme the crime. Once a life is taken, it can not be given back.

Since 1973, over 69 people have been released from death row due to evidence that has come up over time proving their innocence (Dieter). As William Blackstone said, it is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer. The death penalty is far too dangerous to continue practicing in American society. One example of an innocent’s suffrage is that of Rolando Cruz. Cruz was released after a total of ten years on death row even though another had admitted to committing the crime shortly after his conviction (Dieter). Although Cruz did not lose his life, he lost ten years with his family, he was faced with the mental challenges of being on death row, and his family and friends were faced with the fear of losing their loved one.

Ricardo Aldape Guerra was on death row for 15 years before he was found innocent and released back to his home country, Mexico. “...Ricardo Aldape Guerra, was sentenced to death in 1982 for the killing of a Houston police officer and once came within three days of execution” (Mexican Long Held in Texas Murder Wins His Freedom**)**. To put someone through that kind of mental torture is wrong. To find out that the person going through that torture was innocent makes it unconstitutional.

Although the death penalty has been risky and dangerous, in recent times it has become even more dangerous. “The number of people on death row has been increasing, and this expansion is likely to continue as states and the federal government broaden the death penalty to new crimes, and new states such as New York and Kansas begin sentencing people to death. With the greater use of the death penalty, there is a greater likelihood of mistakes” (Dieter). If the death penalty is not stopped now, then when? How many innocent people have to be put on death row before it is found to be wrong and unconstitutional?

The eighth amendment of the constitution states these words, “excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.” The key line here is that which states no cruel or unusual punishments inflicted. Allowing for someone who may end up being innocent to be put on death row and go through the mental torture that comes with such a conviction is truly cruel. To actually execute someone who is later found innocent is no longer cruel, it is murder. The only way to be sure that an innocent person does not end up on death row would be to get rid of capital punishment as an entirety.

Larry Griffin was a man who was on death row for fourteen years. In 1995 he was executed for the murder of a Missouri drug dealer.

Griffin always maintained his innocence, and now, evidence seems to indicate he was telling the truth. The first police officer on the scene now says the eyewitness account was false, even though the officer supported the claims during the trial. Another eyewitness who was wounded during the attack was never contacted during the trial, and he says Griffin wasn’t present at the crime scene that night. (Eric)

In a similar case, a man named Cameron Todd Willingham was executed in 2004 for the accusation of starting an intentional fire to kill his three kids (Eric). “Unfortunately, the Texas Forensic Science Commission later found that the evidence was misinterpreted, and they concluded that none of the evidence used against Willingham was valid. As it turns out, the fire really was accidental” (Eric).

As shown by the examples above, innocent people have been put on death row and executed for crimes they were not responsible for. The only crime done was being found in the wrong place at the wrong time, which in reality is no crime at all. No one can be absolutely one hundred percent certain that they have the right person convicted. For this reason alone the death penalty should be taken out of practice in our society. The United States of America prides itself on providing freedom for its citizens, however many innocent American citizens are being deprived of their freedom and in some cases, their life.

Beyond all things, the death penalty is inhumane. An article published by the Washington Posts states that “...[there was a] botched execution in Oklahoma, in which an inmate died of a heart attack 43 minutes after receiving what was supposed to be a lethal injection…” (Chokshi). This inmate stayed alive for one hour and forty minutes after the lethal injection, in pain the entire time (Anderson). Similar to the botched execution in Oklahoma, “Clayton Lockett walked into the execution room, took a seat and was strapped down from head to toe. He was injected with a triple-drug cocktail, and at the point where he should have gone unconscious, he instead experienced a seizure. Struggling against the restraints, he said, something’s wrong” (Zakeri). What is truly disturbing is that at the time of conviction, the inmate must choose how they would like to be executed, whether it be by lethal injection, electrocution, lynching, gas chamber, or a firing squad. To make someone chose how they will die and force them to sit in a cell for what more often than not ends up being years until the inmate is executed is morally wrong.

Although there are many reasons why the death penalty should not be constitutional, there are a few cases that state the death penalty is a good thing. People argue that the death penalty is used as a way to help prevent acts of violence by making a criminal think twice about committing a crime. “Studies of the death penalty have reached various conclusions about its effectiveness in deterring crime. But... the majority of studies that track effects over many years and across states or counties find a deterrent effect” (Top 10 Pro & Con Arguments - Death Penalty - ProCon.org.). Others argue that the death penalty is fair because it is reserved for only the worst of crimes such as murder and rape. Another argument is that the death penalty saves taxpayers money because they won’t have to pay to keep someone alive in prison. However this argument is mistaken.

...The costs of a capital case begin long before the sentence is carried out. Experienced prosecutors and defense attorneys must be assigned and begin a long period of investigation and pretrial hearings. Jury selection, the trial itself, and initial appeals will consume years of time and enormous amounts of money before an execution is on the horizon…

All of the studies conclude that the death penalty system is far more expensive than an alternative system in which the maximum sentence is life in prison. (Top 10 Pro & Con Arguments - Death Penalty - ProCon.org.)

Not only is the death penalty dangerous, but allowing the state to chose whether or not someone gets to live or die is wrong. From a biblical standpoint, the only one who can chose to give and or take life is God. By putting someone on death row and ultimately killing them is in a sense the state playing the role of God. The bible says “thou shalt not kill” and yet the United States of America decides that it is okay to take a life? Two wrongs don’t make a right. That is something that almost every parent says to their kid as they are growing up. If we chose to listen to those words then we must understand that killing someone because they killed someone else is wrong. At some point the killing needs to stop. That point is now.

Arguments about the death penalty and whether it is constitutional or not have been going on since it was first introduced to society. There have been times when the argument became so grand that for a short period, the death penalty was declared unconstitutional. Arguments for the death penalty state that it provides safety and security to the country. However in the end the risks of the death penalty are simply to grand to allow the practicing of capital punishment to continue on.

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Outline

1. Introduction
   1. Introduction Sentence: Originating from the european culture, capital punishment, also known as the death penalty is the legally authorized killing of someone as punishment for a crime.
   2. The death penalty should not be allowed.
   3. Thesis Statement: The death penalty is dangerous, unconstitutional, and inhumane.
2. First Body Paragraph
   1. Topic Sentence: Since 1973, over 69 people have been released from death row due to evidence that has come up over time proving their innocence (Dieter).
   2. People who are not supposed to be on death row because they are actually innocent are ending up on death row.
      1. Dangerous
      2. Wrong
3. Second Body Paragraph
   1. Topic Sentence: Ricardo Aldape Guerra was on death row for 15 years before he was found innocent and released back to his home country, Mexico.
   2. Evidence and examples of people who have ended up on death row when they should not have been
4. Third Body Paragraph
   1. Topic Sentence: Although the death penalty has been risky and dangerous, in recent times it has become even more dangerous.
   2. More and more people seem to be getting put on death row
   3. Raising the possibility of making a mistake
5. Fourth Body Paragraph
   1. Topic Sentence: The eighth amendment of the constitution states these words, “excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.”
   2. The death penalty was once found to be unconstitutional
      1. Eighth amendment
      2. Cruel and unusual punishment
   3. The death penalty goes against the constitution
6. Fifth Body Paragraph
   1. Topic Sentence: Larry Griffin was a man who was on death row for fourteen years.
      1. Executed in 1995
      2. Later found to be innocent
   2. “Quote from an article”
7. Sixth Body Paragraph
   1. Topic Sentence: Innocent people have been put on death row and executed for crimes they were not responsible for.
   2. Death penalty needs to be abolished from the United States of America
8. Seventh Body Paragraph
   1. Topic Sentence: Beyond all things, the death penalty is inhumane.
   2. Supporting articles
   3. The death penalty is torture to the mental state of the inmate and for the family and loved ones of the inmate.
9. Eighth Body Paragraph
   1. Topic Sentence: Although there are many reasons why the death penalty should not be constitutional, there are a few cases that state the death penalty is a good thing.
   2. Support for the other side
      1. The death penalty can help to deter people from committing crimes
      2. Reserved for only the worst of crimes
      3. Thought to be less expensive than life in prison
         1. Not true
         2. Is more expensive after it is all said and done
10. Ninth Body Paragraph
    1. Topic Sentence: Not only is the death penalty dangerous, but allowing the state to chose whether or not someone gets to live or die is wrong.
    2. Biblical standpoint
       1. States playing “God”
       2. Two wrongs don’t make a right
11. Conclusion: in the end the risks of the death penalty are simply to grand to allow the practicing of capital punishment to continue.

Reflection Paper

The argument regarding the death penalty is one that I have long been interested in and felt strongly about. When it came time to choose a topic to write about for both the expository and argumentative essay there was no question as to what I would pick. The argumentative essay was far easier to write about then the expository essay in regards to this topic. Once I was allowed to add my personal opinion sway my paper the ideas and thoughts rolled right out as I typed on my computer.

The genre of this assignment is an argumentative essay. This means that the student is required to investigate a topic; collect, generate, and evaluate evidence; and establish a position on the topic in a concise manner. My paper follows the rules of an argumentative essay because a topic was investigated (the death penalty), evidence on the topic was gathered, and a position was established. This paper opens with a thesis statement and every point made in the essay refers back to it.

When it comes to media used for this project, the correct answer is multimodal. The argumentative essay is the second part of an entire project. The first part of the project was the expository essay. With this being said, both essays will be condensed down and put into a powerpoint. When this is done the project becomes multimodal. Multimodal simply means that more than one resource is used to present the project.

Transitioning from paper to powerpoint, the rhetorical situation changes. Because it is harder to include all of the information that is in a five page paper into a five minute powerpoint, you have to be more concise with your information. The purpose of the information changes given that you are presenting to your audience instead of them reading your essay. The biggest difference between the paper and the powerpoint is that when presenting the powerpoint, you are in a sense performing. The information is being spoken not read.

Given that this portion of the project is the argumentative part, a stance is taken. This is what makes it argumentative. Throughout my essay it becomes clear that I am against the death penalty and do not think that it should be practiced in the United States of America, or anywhere for that matter. Although this is the stance I take on the death penalty, points are made that support the other side, however they are quickly counteracted by more reasons as to why the death penalty is bad.

The audience that will be reading my paper and listening as well as watching my presentation is known. Those who will read my paper and the classmates who are in my group for the peer review and my professor who will read the final draft. Those who will be watching and listening to my presentation are my classmates and my professor as well as anyone else who may be present on that day.

There is more than one purpose to my essay. The first purpose is to provide information about the death penalty to my audience. The second purpose of this essay is to try and persuade my audience to agreeing that the death penalty should no longer be allowed and practiced.

Usually when someone writes about something there is an issue, problem, or situation that occurred that prompted that person to write about that topic. This is known as an exigence. My exigence for this essay has to do with political debates and talks with my family at the dinner table. After these talks my interest in the death penalty rose. This is when I began to do my own research which lead me to the opinion that I have about the death penalty today. I hope to furthermore learn about the death penalty and eventually start to take action on stopping it for good.

This essay meets all of the course learning outcomes. When working on this project I had to analyze a variety of genres and rhetorical situations because of the peer review workshops. By reading my peers essays throughout this project I was exposed to many different genres and rhetorical situations. I also had to develop strategies for reading, drafting, revising, and editing. This came into play when I was editing my essay as well as those who were in my group for the peer review. When I was working on my works cited page I was practicing systematic application of citation conventions. When I was reading the reflection papers of my peers was when I recognized and practiced key rhetorical terms and strategies when engaged in writing situations. By working with other students and giving as well as receiving suggestion on how to make a peice better I developed collaborative and social aspects of the writing processes. I used both print and digital technologies such as email, blackboard, and powerpoint to address a range of audiences. Because this assignment required research I had to locate sources on the internet and evaluate them for credibility, accuracy, timeliness and bias. And finally, I had to compose texts that integrated my stance and language with appropriate sources using strategies such as summary, critical analysis, interpretation, synthesis, and argumentation.

By the end of this project I truly believe that I have become a better writer. I feel more confident than I did starting out that I can be given a topic, do the research, and creating a well composed essay on such topic. I enjoyed this assignment and getting to write about a topic that I feel strongly about. Although I ran into a few personal conflicts, in the end I was able to conquer them and for that, I am better off both as a writer and as a student.