

STAGES OF CRIME

When I teach crime, I don't want you to just remember sections - I want you to understand how a crime actually grows step-by-step. A crime never starts suddenly; it begins in the mind, then slowly moves into action. So if we understand these stages, we also understand when the law steps in and how criminal liability is decided.

Understanding the stages of crime helps us see how criminal liability develops from a mere thought to the actual commission of an offence. It also helps the law decide at what point a person should be held punishable, since not every step in this process attracts criminal liability.



Stage 1 - Intention

When we talk about the stages of crime, the first thing I ask my students is — where does a crime begin?

And the answer is: in the mind.

The mind is hidden. We cannot open someone's head and see what they were thinking. But before any act happens in the real world, it first takes birth as a thought, a decision to do something illegal or wrongful. That decision is called intention.

At this stage, nothing may have actually happened yet — no planning, no action — only the internal resolve. That is why, as a general rule, mere intention alone is not punishable, because the law cannot punish thoughts unless they turn into action.

In criminal law, intention is part of mens rea (guilty mind).

Stage 2 - Preparation

Once the mind is made up, what happens next? Naturally, the person starts preparing.

So I ask my students:

“If someone has decided to commit a crime, what will they do next?”

They will plan. They will gather things.

They will see how, when, and where the act can be done.

For example:

1. If someone wants to commit theft - they may arrange tools, find out the house timings, plan the entry and exit.
2. If someone wants to commit murder - they may choose the place, arrange a weapon, and think about how to escape.

So, preparation means all the steps taken after intention, but before the actual act begins. It is still the planning stage, the crime has not yet happened.

Is preparation punishable?

Generally, preparation alone is NOT punishable.

Why? Because a person may change their mind at any time before the act actually begins.

But there are exceptions for some serious offences, even preparation is punishable. Examples include:

-Preparation to commit dacoity - punishable under law

-Preparation for waging war against the Government of India

-Preparation related to counterfeiting currency or stamps

-Possessing instruments or materials for counterfeiting

These are punished because the risk to society is too high to wait for the actual act.

Stage 3 - Attempt

So now I ask my students:

Once the preparation is complete, what will happen next?

From here, the law says there are only two possibilities:

- Either the offence will actually happen

Or

-the person will try but something will stop it from being completed

That trying, but not completing the crime, is called an ATTEMPT

For example:

1. A person fires a gun at someone but misses.
2. A thief breaks the lock and enters a house but is caught before taking anything.

Here, the crime has physically begun, but the end result was not completed.

Is an attempt punishable?

Attempt is a punishable stage.

This is why we say:

- > Intention - Thought (not punishable)
- > Preparation - Planning (generally not punishable)
- > Attempt - Action begins (punishable)

Sometimes the person may succeed in completing the offence. If that happens, we move to the final and fourth stage.

Stage 4 Commission of the Offence

This is when the offence/crime is fully completed. The planned result actually happens - theft takes place, murder occurs, cheating is completed, etc. This is the last stage of crime.

IN BRIEF-

Stage 1 - Intention (mind decides)

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Stage 2 - Preparation (planning + arranging things)

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From here, two paths:

→ Path A

Stage 3 - Attempt (act begins but not completed — punishable)

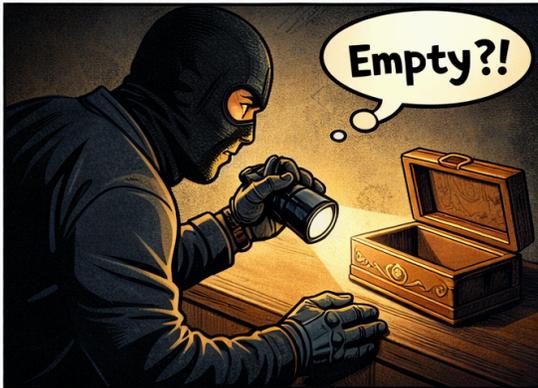
→ Path B

Stage 4 - Commission of Offence (crime completed)

But remember:

Attempt is that in-between stage where the person tries, but the offence does not fully happen.

TRIVIA



A thief named Nick breaks into a house at night. He finds a jewellery box, opens it, but there is nothing inside. So he leaves the house and returns home. Is Nick punishable?

- A. No offence hence not punishable
- B. Theft as the final stage of crime was completed
- C. Attempt to Theft
- D. None of the above