

Robbery

DEFINITION: ROBBERY

THEFT ACT 1968 SEC 8(1)

“A person is guilty of robbery if he steals, and immediately before or at the time of doing so, and in order to do so, he uses force on any person or puts or seeks to put any person in fear of being then and there subjected to force.”

Personal Robbery:

DEFINITION: ROBBERY OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

A robbery where the goods stolen belong to an individual or group of individuals, rather than a corporate body, regardless of the location of the robbery, or whether the personal property actually belongs to the person being robbed.

Goods that are the property of business but would generally be regarded as personal property should be treated as personal property if robbed from the person.

Examples of such items are mobile phones, laptop computers and pagers.

If a person is robbed of both personal and business property, then the decision whether to classify under robbery of business property (class 34A) or robbery of personal property (class 34B) depends on the respective values of the goods stolen.

DEFINITION: ROBBERY OR THEFT FROM THE PERSON

The use or threat of force in a theft from the person, in order to commit the theft, should be recorded as a robbery. For example, if the victim or a third party offers any resistance that needs to be overcome, or if anyone is assaulted in any way, then this constitutes force. Similarly, if a victim is under any impression from the offender's words or actions that the offender may use force, then this constitutes threat of force.

Where property is stolen from the physical possession of the victim and some degree of force is directed to the property but not to the victim (e.g. a bag is taken cleanly from the shoulder of a victim or a phone is taken cleanly from the hand) the allegation should be classified as theft from the person and not a robbery.

This guide addresses street robbery and reviews factors contributing to its occurrence. It then provides a series of responses to the problem and what is known about them from evaluated research and police practice.

In this guide, a robbery is defined as a crime with the following five characteristics:

- the offender targets a victim
- the offender attempts or completes a theft of cash or property;
- the offender uses force or the threat of force against the victim
- the offence occurs in a public or semipublic place, such as on a street, in an alley, in a public park, on or near public transportation.

Importantly, a robbery need not involve a weapon, nor is it necessary that the offender injures the victim.

Several subtypes of street robbery exist that vary in frequency depending on local circumstances. Among the better known are:

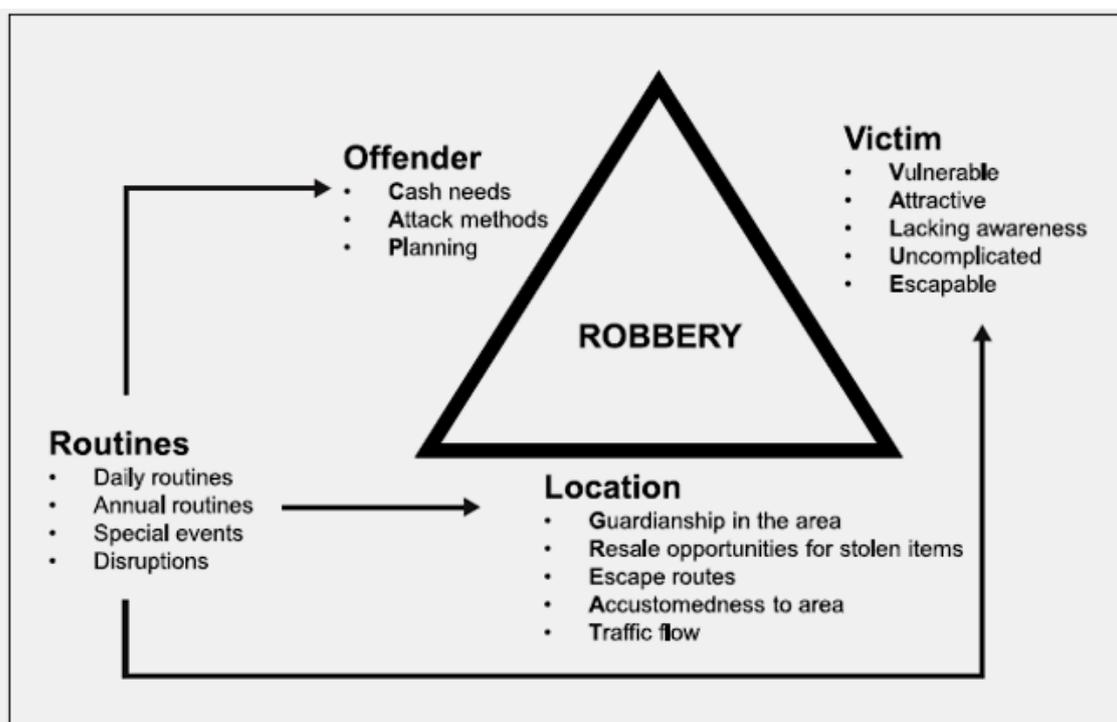
- purse-snatching
- robbery at ATMs
- robbery of drunken bar patrons;
- robbery of students
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Problem Analysis Triangle.

The problem analysis triangle (also known as the crime triangle) comes from one of the main theories of environmental criminology - routine activity theory. The theory states that predatory crime occurs when a *likely offender* and *suitable target* come together in *time* and *place*, without a capable guardian present.

It takes the existence of a likely offender for granted since normal human greed and selfishness are sufficient explanations of most criminal motivation.

It makes no distinction between a human victim and an inanimate target since both can meet the offender's purpose. And it defines a *capable guardian* in terms of both humans and security devices.



Offenders

Research has provided a demographic sketch of typical street robbers. First, robbery appears to be a young person's crime. Offenders tend to be in their late teens and early 20s.

Second, the overwhelming majority of arrested street robbers are male.

Victims

robbers search for victims who appear to have money or other valuables—for example, students and tourists. They also target people who appear to be the most vulnerable—like young adults using ATMs alone at night or under the influence of alcohol.

Offenders also look for victims who seem unaware of their immediate surroundings. Pedestrians who look lost, are using a mobile phone, are rummaging through their bags, or are listening to MP3 players might appear less alert and more vulnerable to street robbers than other people.

Targets

Finally, street robbers tend to take certain items during a Robbery: cash, purses, wallets, credit cards, mobile phones, MP3 players, jewelry, clothing, and other small electronic devices

(e.g., cameras and smaller laptop computers). The proliferation of small, portable, expensive electronic items may be linked with street robbery in some locations. The items listed above are "hot products" that have similar **CRAVED** characteristics:

- **Concealable**—the robber can hide the items on his or her person;
- **Removable**—the robber can easily take the items from the victim;
- **Available**—the items are commonly found on potential victims;
- **Valuable**—the items are useful to the robber or others;
- **Enjoyable**—the items are fun to use; and
- **Disposable**—the robber can easily sell the items.

Times, Days and Locations

Times. Overall, most robberies occur at night. For some groups, however, peak robbery times vary with their routine activity patterns. For instance, most elderly people run errands early in the day. Accordingly, offenders usually rob older people (65 and above) in the morning and early afternoons. By contrast, offenders are more likely to rob youths (aged 17 and below) between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. This timeframe aligns with school dismissal, when students routinely go home or elsewhere. Yet offenders usually rob young adults during the evening. This group is often in public later at night in pursuit of entertainment.

Attack methods.

The ability to use certain attack methods in particular settings might also affect a person's decision to commit street robbery. Street robbers use four main attack methods: confrontations, cons, blitzes, and snatch-thefts. Offenders use some tactics more frequently. For example, confrontations were most common in one U.K. study (used in 37% of robberies), followed by blitzes (25%), cons (22%), and snatch-thefts (14%). These methods are not mutually exclusive and can change during the course of the robbery. Each attack method is described below.

CONFRONTATIONS.

The offender demands property or possessions at the moment of contact with the victim. The offender will usually use verbal commands to gain compliance (e.g., "Give me your money"). Violence might follow if the victim does not comply.

BLITZES.

The offender uses violence first to gain control over the victim (i.e., establish "who is in charge"). The actual robbery occurs after the offender immobilizes the victim.

CONS.

The offender uses a distraction to catch the victim off guard. For example, an offender might ask someone for the time or directions before attacking. Using a legitimate distraction enables the robber to gain contact with the victim without causing alarm.

SNATCH-THEFTS.

This tactic occurs very quickly. No verbal communication occurs between the offender and the victim before the robbery. The offender typically grabs visible property (e.g., purses and mobile phones), then escapes.

Planning.

Robberies appear tactically simple and quickly completed, but they are seldom completely unplanned. Robbers learn which tactics work in what situations based on prior experience. So what might appear as an impulsive act could be based on a plan developed from prior experience. Immediate circumstances might also affect planning perspective.

Summary of Robberies

Type of Robbery	How It Works	Works Best If...	Considerations
Blitz	Offenders use immediate violence to gain control.	...victims are isolated, and offenders can immediately physically immobilize them, using surprise.	A blitz is not useful in most crowds. Can be used when escape routes are limited.
Snatch-theft	Offenders spot visible items. They quickly take them without verbal demands.	...locations are crowded, there are many escape routes and crowds impede victims and allow offenders to escape by blending into them.	This is useful for many smaller offenders who can distract the victim. Multiple offenders can hide the snatch. It does not require weapons. Offenders must look like they belong in the area.
Confrontation	Offenders approach victims with immediate verbal demands. Violence is possible but not necessary.	...victims are isolated, offenders can approach them without alerting them, and offenders can use overwhelming threats.	Distracted, impaired or encumbered victims are better for robbers. Victims may not have much of value.
Con	Offenders use distractions to make contact with victims, then rob them.	...victims do not feel threatened by the place or offenders, and valuable items are visible and within reach.	Offender can use this method in both a crowd and in isolation. Offenders need a weapon only as a backup.

Five characteristics of potential victims appear particularly critical, and the acronym **VALUE** summarizes them.

Vulnerable. Offenders prefer targets they can intimidate, subdue or overpower. For example, senior citizens or those unlikely to report their victimization to the police (e.g., drug users and prostitutes).

Attractive. Target attractiveness is in the eye of the robber. Therefore, attractiveness is not universal. Some robbers might be particularly attracted to people carrying a CRAVED item. Other robbers, however, might associate attractiveness with less tangible features and prefer attacking people of a particular sex, racial, or ethnic group.

Lacking awareness. Street robbers could perceive people who are distracted (e.g., using a mobile phone, drunk, and/or unfamiliar with their surroundings) as easier to approach and overpower.

Uncomplicated. Offenders probably consider the ease of approaching targets. A potential target seen at a distance is likely less interesting than one nearby. How complex the robber perceives completing the robbery to be depends on the form of attack (confrontation, blitz, con, or snatch-theft) the robber usually uses.

Escapable. Offenders probably consider the ease of fleeing from targets. Robbers might altogether avoid targets they believe will chase them or use blitzes to disable them physically. Robbers might care less about escaping when some targets (e.g., senior citizens and drunken people) appear unlikely to chase or resist them. In this case, robbers might use a confrontation, a con or a snatch-theft because they don't think they have to immobilize the target.

Though considered separately, offenders probably consider VALUE as a package rather than a checklist. From a prevention perspective, however, VALUE can reveal potential countermeasures to protect possible victims.

on the transit node. At other times, it may disappear altogether if there are so few targets around that robbers ignore the area.

We can summarize robbery offenders' ideal locations with the acronym **NEAR**. Robbers are more attracted to small areas that fit these characteristics.

Natural guardianship. As mentioned, dense pedestrian and vehicle traffic increase guardianship and increase the risks for robbers, so they prefer areas where targets are relatively unguarded. Areas with dense pedestrian and vehicle traffic, however, could thwart detection by helping offenders blend into the environment after the robbery. However, robbers may select quicker and less-obvious attack modes in dense pedestrian areas compared with less-dense areas.

Escape routes. Not only do robbers need to consider their ability to escape from a victim, but also they want routes that provide a quick escape from the crime scene.

Area familiarity. Robbers prefer familiar areas over unfamiliar areas. Being familiar with an area facilitates planning decisions and escape strategies. Familiarity also makes it easier to predict the routines of targets, guardians and police.

Resale opportunities for stolen goods. Robbers who steal noncash items for resale want to get cash and quickly dispose of evidence of the crime. Thus, robbers consider areas close to resale opportunities more desirable than areas farther away. When robbers steal only cash, they don't fear getting caught as much.

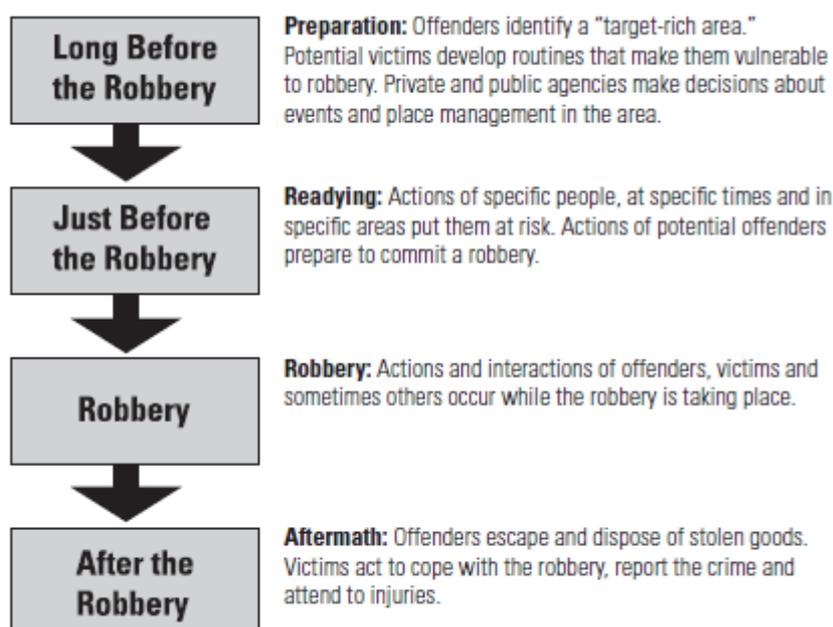
Understanding The Local Problem

The information provided above is a generalized description of robbery. To understand the local robbery problem, you must combine this general knowledge with facts that illuminate your local conditions. Carefully analyzing your local problem will help you design an effective response strategy that fits your specific needs. However, the fewer robberies you have to analyze, the more difficult it will be to diagnose your problem.

The first step in this process is identifying the specific form of robbery affecting your community. Having identified a specific form of robbery, the next step is analyzing its process. The process might vary from robbery problem to robbery problem. A useful approach is to divide the robbery process into four time blocks:

- events occurring *long before* the robbery;
- events occurring *just before* the robbery;
- events occurring *during* the robbery; and
- events occurring *after* the robbery.

Figure 3. Robbery process.



Building a detailed robbery profile could help develop a more useful process-analysis. Using alternatives to official crime statistics, like victim surveys, could prove useful

Stakeholders

Understanding the process of specific types of robbery not only aids prevention, but also helps identify stakeholders who have an interest in the problem. In addition to criminal justice agencies, including police, courts and corrections, the following groups have an interest in the street robbery problem, and you should consult them when gathering information about the problem and responding to it.

Transport and Parks departments:

- Street robberies could reduce the use of public transportation and parks as people become afraid of robbery.
- These departments could provide useful information for analyzing the problem, beyond using official police data alone.

Schools:

- Schools have an interest in protecting their students' safety. Students who feel unsafe may avoid going to school.
- Local schools could help your agency identify at-risk students.
- Schools are critical to developing and running robbery education/awareness campaigns if your community's children and teens are a high-risk group.

Universities:

- Universities have an interest in protecting their students and may have information on robberies not reported to the police.
- Student organizations on college campuses have an interest in getting students involved in their own safety.

Local business associations:

- Business districts have a stake in robbery prevention because they rely on a reputation of safety to stay profitable. They also have an interest in their employees' safety. Businesses in areas perceived to be unsafe might have trouble recruiting new employees.
- Business associations might have information about robbery concerns not reported to police and about businesses that are at special risk to attract robbers (e.g., those known to allow night cash deposits).

● Community/neighborhood associations:

- These groups have an interest because their members are potential victims.
- These groups could use their local knowledge to identify potential offenders, locations and other problem and potential contributing factors.

- Local hospitals:
 - Hospitals have an interest in reducing injuries from robberies.
 - Hospital staff might have information about robbery-related injuries not reported to police.

- Other local government agencies (e.g., city planning departments, city councils, public health departments, and social services providers):
 - Such agencies could provide data for analyzing the problem or plan and implement responses-including those too costly for local neighborhood or resident groups.

General Advice

Stay Alert - Remember

- If you are wearing headphones or chatting on your mobile phone you will be distracted from your surroundings and may not hear trouble approaching.

If you're planning a night out, plan to stay safe. Think: "Keys, money, phone, plans to get home"

- Pre-book a taxi – make sure you know how you're getting home.
- Look out for your friends and arrange a safe meeting place in case you get separated.
- Save an ICE* number in your phone. *(In Case of Emergency)
- Stash some cash in case you lose your purse or wallet.
- Know your limits and always stay in control.

Make sure you avoid danger spots:

- Stick to busy, well lit streets whenever possible and avoid quiet or badly lit alleyways, subways, isolated parks or waste grounds.
- Take the safer route, even if it's longer.

Plan Ahead:

- Know where you're going and the best way to get there.
- Whenever possible, avoid long waiting times at bus stops and stations by checking the arrival times before leaving home.

Listen to your instincts:

- If you feel threatened, head for a safe place where there are lots of people, such as a pub, shop, garage etc.

Ensure you take the same precautions wherever you are:

- It's natural to feel more relaxed and comfortable in your own neighbourhood than when you're in an unfamiliar area but it's important not to get complacent about your personal safety even when close to home