



HM PRISON  
SERVICE

A SURVIVAL GUIDE

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## HMP – A SURVIVAL GUIDE

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## INTRODUCTION

This isn't intended to be a dramatic memoir about my experience in prison, nor is it a rant against the expensive, ineffective and unconstructive injustice that prison is (it is... but that's another story); it's simply a factual, practical and up-to-date account designed to help anyone who finds themselves facing incarceration.

Anyway, in calling this a 'survival guide' I guess I've already wrong-footed you: those who haven't been to prison generally think that as soon as you arrive you'll get banged up with a psychopath, raped in the shower and then robbed. In reality it's nothing like this... I ended up on the high-risk wing of one of England's most notorious jails and I had no problems whatsoever... well... it's not as simple as that, but we'll get on to that a bit later.

With your favourite tapes, your own bed sheets, flip-flops and a few bits of information it becomes so much easier, so please share this with anyone you know who's on bail or inside – photocopy it, tweet it, post it, plagiarise it – whatever, so long as it helps people when they're at an all-time low that's all that matters.

I quickly want to mention two things... Firstly I served my time in five of the 140 (and growing) prisons across the UK. Whereas you'd expect every prison to have a standardised system they each have their own nuances. I believe this guide will help anyone serving any length of sentence but some parts are more geared for those serving a 'shit and a shave' (that's prisonish for a shorter sentence - a couple of years or less).

And secondly any clandestine information I've included in here is already well known to the authorities: every dogsbody 'screw' (prison guard) knows how you make hooch, they know that people charge their phones with a games console and they know you can build secret compartments in cupboards. For obvious reasons I've left out the ever-dwindling number of things they don't know.

If I've missed anything or you have any corrections or would like to just talk about your experiences in prison don't hesitate to contact me at the address or email listed at the front of the guide.



## ON BAIL

After you've been arrested you'll either get remanded or released on bail. Remand is where you're sent to jail before you've been sentenced which is understandable for seriously dangerous criminals but you'd be surprised how many people this happens to.

Bail is where you're released from the police station on a kind of contract. Unlike the American system you normally don't have to pay anything but they can impose a whole load of conditions on you... mine included house arrest, reporting to a police station every single day, not being allowed to contact certain friends and not being allowed to take public transport.

Besides these more tangible punishments bail is a mental sentence of its own: sleepless nights, strain and stress about what will happen in jail and what people will think, night and daymares about employment, housing, family and money... So much for 'innocent until proven guilty'!

## TAKING THE PLUNGE

As soon as you've been remanded or given a custodial sentence you'll be bundled down in to the holding cells so make sure you go with your bags packed if there's any chance this could happen. Every court always discharges to the same jail, so if you're not sure where you'll end up you can phone the court beforehand and ask them.

Don't forget to cancel your standing orders and phone before you go away or HSBC might repossess your family and friends by the time you get released.

Provided you're not given an indeterminate or life sentence you only serve the first half of your sentence inside. If your sentence is under four years you may be eligible for house arrest ('tag' or HDC) for part of the sentence. The second half of your sentence you'll spend on licence (see the Returning To The Real World section for more on licence). There are many exceptions to this rule so I'm not going to write them all down, I just want you to know that if the judge gives you two years, for example, it doesn't actually mean two years behind bars.

Next you'll be carted off in the Serco 'sweat box' (those anonymous looking white prison vans that are sweaty during July, and freezing for the remaining 11 months of the year when you need to sweat about your predicament to justify the title) with things like AGRESIV GAV OV BRUM scratched into the blacked-out windows, on your way to jail ready to give her majesty pleasure. They'll lock the van in the security lock gates, shine a torch into your compartment and count you only as a number. Welcome to prison!

You'll get herded to a processing area, into a box full of twitching junkies enduring nasty cold turkey and nut-jobs asking you what you're in for... it feels like you're in the waiting room for the next departure to Hades.

Some bakedbeanhead screw will then call you by your surname, you'll be processed, photographed, told what you can and largely can't have, stripped

naked then told to bend over and cough, given a light blue t-shirt and scratchy grey tracksuit and moved on to the 'first night wing'. You should be allowed to make a free phone call, although it's hardly worth it as it lasts literally a minute.

By this point you will have already been asked for a 'burn' (prisonish for cigarette) about 150 times. People will probably be looking you up and down trying to assess you. Don't be worried (or at least don't show it), don't be pumped up, don't be wet, you'll be ok... it gets easier and easier from this point in.

Over the fortnight if the prison is doing it's job (unlikely) you'll do 'induction'. They'll explain to you how to go about 'kit change' (getting 'clean' bed sheets and clothes), how to get to the library, how to fill in meal slips and all the rest.

At some point you'll be further assessed and they'll ask you all the usual – are you suicidal, do you have violent antecedents, do you take drugs, etc etc. Whatever you do don't even admit to having smoked weed 10 years ago... they'll treat you as a 'user' and put you on weekly 'mandatory drug testing' for the rest of your sentence.

In the first week you'll be entitled to a 'reception visit' that requires no V.O. (visiting order). Whoever it is can just call and book a visit to come and see you, they'll just need your date of birth and full name.

You'll also get £2 phone credit to start you off and a pin number to use the phone: make sure you don't lose this and keep it to yourself. Phone numbers have to be approved by the prison and added to your permitted numbers list before you are allowed to ring them though. This can take an unreasonably long time (a fortnight or more) so bare this in mind.

The system will come as a shock to your own... you'll be astounded at how inefficient prisons are, how many mobile phones and drug parcels get thrown over the fence and how preventable it is, how little support is given to illiterate people and drug users when this would quite obviously reduce their likelihood of reoffending, how many people are serving such small sentences for crimes against people and how others are serving such huge ones for crimes against capital, how many reformed offenders are rotting away on indeterminate sentences 5 years past their release date, and how bitties smoke teabags wrapped in bible pages when they've run out of cigarettes.

If you're still feeling hard done by you should read Papillion by Henri Charriere. It's an autobiographical story by a guy who got sent to a South American penal colony at the start of last century... he gets parasites, gets shot, spends years in solitary confinement in a cell that fills up to his neck with water for 5 hours a day... trust me, it makes Parkhurst feel like Center Parcs!



## CODES OF CONDUCT

Prison is packed with stupid, manipulative and pugnacious people. And then there are the inmates – most of them are surprisingly harmless. Still, I'd recommend you keep yourself to yourself until you've assessed who you can be yourself with. Don't dress to impress, don't bullshit, keep it low-key, don't be too approachable and amiable until you know them. It's not nice but it's an important survival technique: some people in prison will try and take liberties with you but if you stay off the radar then you'll always be alright.

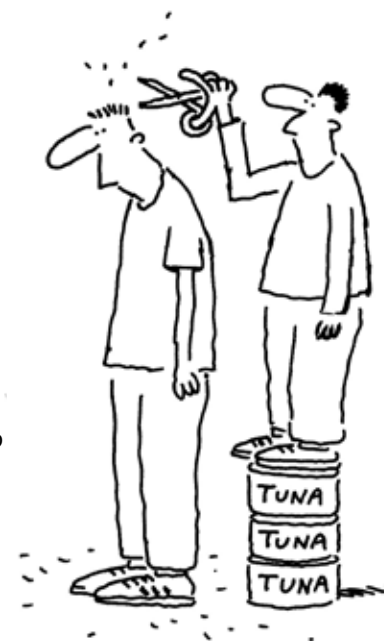
Quite often the most affable inmates will be pulling this same routine so you may never talk to them even though they live just down the landing from you. One of the best ways to track down like-minded people on the wing is a technique my friend calls 'Guardian Cell Mates'... find the 'newspaper orderly' (the inmate who deals with all the newspaper and magazine orders) and ask who orders a paper of the same type you would. Go and say hello, ask for their second hand newspapers... this is a good technique to meet someone and have a decent conversation. After all, social interaction is probably what you'll miss the most so finding someone you can have a half-decent daily conversation with is golden.

Generally speaking though, play your cards close to your chest. Don't share your secrets and don't trust anyone until you've known them for a good while. And remember some people completely reinvent themselves in jail – I remember this one guy scrounging cigarettes in the exercise yard one day, I was thinking to myself, hang on, yesterday you were telling me you're the Tony Montana of Kent and you've got a gullwing Lamborghini?

As there's no money behind bars prison is basically run on an economy of tobacco and tins of tuna. For example a haircut will set you back 2 tins of tuna, a kitchen worker will get you some black pepper for a few cigarettes, a little bit of hash might set you back a half ounce of tobacco, one of those horrible match stick jewellery box things might set you back two ounces, and so on.

Even if you don't smoke it's worth having some tobacco stashed away so you can buy something if you need it.

A good piece of advice though would be to give up smoking cigarettes before you go in. If you do smoke, keep it to yourself. As soon as you donate one cigarette the whole wing will swarm your door asking why they can't have one too.



I never had one thing stolen (by inmates that is) but I was slightly cautious until I knew people on the wing. Put your stuff away at 'sosh' (association time) because even if people don't try to steal it they'll look round your door and do your head in asking if they can have whatever it is 24/7.

Once you know your next-door neighbours they'll look out for your cell, but don't get too complacent. The main time for 'cell-dipping' is when a fight kicks off – everyone will run to one end of the wing to watch and you'll see a few wiley junkies taking their opportunity to dip in and out of peoples' cells.

**VIOLENCE** I did see some nasty stuff inside, including an all-out fight between 30 people, and you do see 'claret' splattered on the wall occasionally but compared to the media hype and most people's vicarious view of prison, violence is relatively rare.

Generally speaking if you adhere to the following simple rules prison is safer than your average provincial high street on a Friday night: don't be wet, but at the same time don't walk around like Buzz Lightyear, never ever grass anyone up, don't steal from people, don't start taking smack and don't start 'ticking' (borrowing things on advance).

## COMPLAINTS AND APPLICATIONS

If you want to get something done in prison you need to go through the correct channels. I'm not going to list off every scenario and what you should do as it will become apparent, but there are a few things you should know...

'Wing reps' go off to wherever they represent every day. So if you want to apply for education or attend the mosque or whatever it may be you're generally better off asking them than going through forms for reasons I'll explain in a second.

In a box somewhere on the wing you'll have general apps, wing requests, comp1 forms and a whole bunch of others like job applications and property hand out applications. Keep a few of each in your cell for quick access as they are often not available when you most need them.

Even if they are there, you have what me and a good friend call the Bermuda Triangle of prison paper work – anything vaguely important tends to get 'lost' because screws cant be bothered to do more paperwork than they have to. For example two months before my release a very close family member and then a lifelong friend of mine both died but rather than process the paperwork required to let me out on an escorted visit to attend the funerals they denied all knowledge of the forms and letters my family and I had submitted. On that note, if someone you're close to dies while you're inside contact Cruse bereavement (find their address in the Useful Contacts section) if you need help and support.



**HMP PRISON SURVEY 2** **FORM COMP 1** **PRISONER'S FORMAL COMPLAINT** P2018

Establishment: \_\_\_\_\_ Serial #: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE READ CAREFULLY**

- This form is for you to make a formal written complaint under the complaints procedure. Complaints should whenever possible be raised and resolved by speaking to your wing officer or hearing an appeal. Use this form only if you have not been able to resolve your complaint this way.
- Read the complaint procedure in the manual which is available at reception or at the nearest fact centre to your wing.
- Read the complaint form and fill in the details.
- If you are unhappy with the response, you can appeal to a superior team (COMP 2).
- There is no charge for this form. It is only to be used by prisoners in Prison Service establishments. If you complain about one of these subjects, the form will take time.
- There is a separate form (COMP 2) for confidential access complaints.

Your name (use BLOCK CAPITALS):

Surname: \_\_\_\_\_ First name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Prison number: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you spoken to anyone about your complaint? Yes  No

If so, who did you speak to? \_\_\_\_\_

Your complaint:

Does your complaint have a racial aspect? Yes  No

Is your complaint about bullying? Yes  No

What would you like to see done about your complaint? \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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If you need a response use a 'comp1' (formal complaint form) as they HAVE to log this and give you a response. Alternatively you can photocopy anything that's important (the wing office should begrudgingly do this for you), keep the original and send the photocopy so that they know that you've got the original to refer to if needed.

The prison complaints system is designed to be impenetrable. They know they can take the piss in the knowledge that a massive proportion of inmates are either dyslexic, illiterate or not going to have the tenacity to complain.

As a literate person with all the time in the world it's imperative that you let them know they can't walk all over you and anyone else who might find themselves in a similar situation in the future.

Write a comp1. When they give you a useless response (that's just a formality) write a comp1a appeal form. When they give you another unsatisfactory response write to the IMB (Independent Monitoring Board). When that still bares no fruit write to the PPO (Prisons and Probation Ombudsman... I've included the address in the useful contacts section). Write to the governor. Get a solicitor involved. Write to your MP. Write to the Home Office.

It will probably take three months or longer to actually get a result but it's absolutely necessary... when the governor is getting formally disciplined and you've set a legal precedent it makes it all worthwhile.

## SHARING A CELL

To state the obvious, who you share a cell with, especially when you're banged up 23 hours a day, will have a massive impact on your existence.

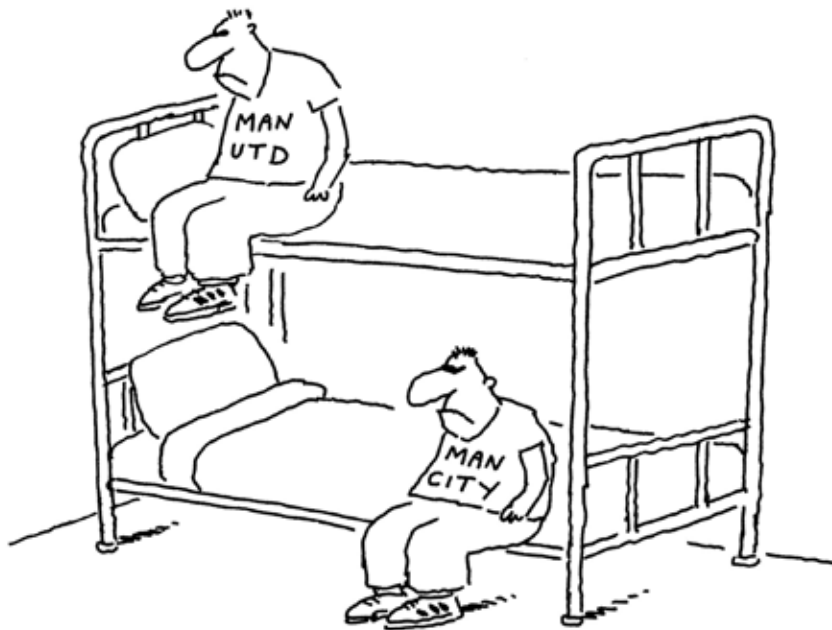
I shared with eyebrowless Russians who didn't speak a word of English besides racist insults, a grumpy old bank robber who just farted and smoked fags on the bunk below me all day, and for one night only a crackhead going cold turkey, shitting and puking all night in the toilet situated just at the end of the bed.

A couple months in though I got made 'high risk', meaning that I was deemed too risky to share a cell with anyone. This was a load of rubbish: a screw told a lie about me in the hope of screwing me over, but in the end I was actually very grateful for the privacy.

It's quite easy to stage a fight if you have nothing to lose and want to be made high risk and therefore get a single cell. Alternatively you can say you're a bed-wetter when you're first assessed... I know people who that has worked for.

But if not it's a good idea to share with someone you get along with. Don't do it by application, it'll just get lost in the Bermuda triangle of prison paperwork: just get your possessions bagged up, persuade your friends current cellmate to move (a cigarette or two will probably do the job) and just do it... tell the screws it's already happened and they should be ok with it.

This is quite often how it works in prison, if you go through the correct channels i.e. endless applications and detailed explanations it doesn't get you anywhere. Get on with it, be confident and use initiative.



## STAYING SANE

90% of conversations in jail revolve around bitching about screws and discussing

Match Of The Day which is understandable when you're surrounded by white-washed walls, the same few faces with the same few stories and little else.

This lack of stimulus can result in the torturous over-thinking of the most minor soundbite from a phone call or sentence in a letter for weeks. It's nasty and can lead to all types of neurosis you wouldn't be a part of if you were in the outside world or had something to distract you.

When you're under lock and key the only place you can escape to is inside your head. Television is the escapism of choice for most prisoners and becomes a surrogate family for too many. After your door is locked at 5pm it's straight Neighbours – Simpsons – Eastenders – Corrie – Enders pt2 – Brookside channel ping-pong until lights out.

I watched a bit of TV but I felt like books offered so much more escapist potential. I had hardly read since I left school but by the time I got released I'd got through almost every classic on the bookshelf. Not only was this a genuine distraction from the neurosis I mentioned before but I came out feeling sharper than ever.

## EDUCATION

Once you're on the wing make sure you get to the education department during the day.

What's on offer changes in every jail but there'll be all the usual woodwork or business studies courses type things.

After your door gets clanked shut at 5pm for the next 15 hours you can still study though. If you've got more than six months left to serve you can get funding through the Prisoners' Education Trust to take a course with the Open University. If you know you are going to prison for a while it would be a good idea to research the OU website for what courses you want to do before you go in.

Learning a language behind bars is a good way to meet foreign nationals and hear interesting stories about their lives back home and how they ended up doing porridge. I learnt a bit of Spanish with a 70 year-old Columbian grandfather who'd hit hard times and tried to bring a suitcase full of cocaine through Heathrow. He didn't speak a word of English before jail and had learnt it all from the Cockney geezers on the wing. As a result he didn't understand basic outside world vocabulary such as 'traffic cone' or 'coat hanger', but he did talk about 'avin a bubble with his china plates.

## KEEPING IN CONTACT WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD

The payphones (aka blue boxes) on the wing are extortionate, the pounds drop faster than minutes when you call a mobile. I'm sure they're more expensive than payphones in the outside world.

You're only allowed to talk for 10 minutes at a time. First you enter your eight digit security code, then the number of your friend or family which must've already been added to your permitted numbers list. Be careful with your pin because if someone knows it they can add their own numbers to your list then use your credit. Oh yeh and don't forget that everything is monitored, so don't say something silly like "call me back on my mobile" if you've got one.

That brings me on to mobiles. First things first, having a mobile phone is highly illegal. If you get caught and found guilty at adjudication you could be given extra days, denied tag or not given parole. Prisons take it very seriously and from time to time they get hot on it. Despite this you'll be surprised at how many phones are in most jails. If you're clever there's a plethora of security avoidance techniques (the best of which I'm obviously not going to list here) for example you can look out for phone scanners by keeping your TV on – if it flickers they're on the landing.

Always watch the shadows outside your cell, never ever use it during lunchtime bang up and if you're being transferred to another jail be aware of the BOSS chair (the ominous sounding Body Orifice Security Scanner).

Letters are a serious lifeline. Unlike rushed phone calls and visits they afford you time to think. It's the nearest you'll get to genuine interaction with the people you're closest to, which, as I've already said, is what you'll probably miss the most.

People will feel pressure to write you deep/interesting/long letters which are great... but also encourage them to just keep you in the social loop... get them to scribble down everyday gossip or the meaningless kind of stuff you'd send them in a text message, ask them to print the stupid LoLCAT memes, Facebook statuses, jokes you take for granted on the internet, or maybe an article they would forward to you if you were free. When you begin to understand that the prison environment often isn't the problem, it's the feeling of the outside world keeping moving while you feel like you're stuck in a cryogenic ice cube, it's easy to see how these frivolous pieces of contact can make a critical difference.



Letters can also be sent to prison from the outside world through emailprisoner.com, this cheap-ish service is well worth signing up to. However you will have to reply using pen and paper as there is strictly no access to the internet in jail.

The wing office should give you two postage-paid envelopes a week. A lot of people don't use theirs so it's worth asking around if you need more. Don't forget that all the mail is monitored, especially if you're on 'monitored mail' (wing staff will be able to tell you if you are). The prison is not allowed to monitor legal letters though. You can seal these and write RULE39 on them and they're supposed to not open them although prisons have been found to abuse this rule. Don't think you can just write to your mate and stick RULE39 on the front and they won't notice, they compare the name and address to a list of solicitors and courts.

There are various ways people can send you in money so you can buy 'canteen', newspapers or items from an in-prison catalogue: cheque (the cheapest but can take a LONG time to clear), postal order (crazy expensive but quick) or cash (make sure it's sent by recorded post or the screws will steal it).

Visits are a strange airlock between prison and the real world. It's definitely not an ordinary form of interaction. Even if you want to hold a normal conversation it's pretty impossible... watched over by CCTV cameras and over-zealous screws all the prisoners are sat there wearing hi-vis tabards like some kind of cycle proficiency training trying to not spill the emotional beans, lightheaded from overindulging on sweets and fizzy drinks that you can rarely get on the wing. People are crying their eyes out, arguing, joking around and sick of the fifth year of this, others are desperately trying to pass drugs to their partner and everyone's ever-conscious that the clock is ticking towards boot-out time.

Whereas in real life you rarely talk to each other solidly for two hours, in a visit you're sat opposite each other and feel awkward if you can't verbally machine gun each other from start to finish. And if you do cut the visit short the screws tend to strip search you on the way out in the assumption that you've just received a package and can't maintain a conversation. It's also worth mentioning that lip readers are used in visits so if you're on remand for something serious don't talk about your case, or at least cover your mouth when you do.

You'll get between one and four 90 minute visits a month depending on which jail and status you're on. Apparently visitors can make visiting requests online at [www.gov.uk/prison-visits](http://www.gov.uk/prison-visits) although I never heard about this whilst I was inside. The normal way is the VO (visiting order) system. You'll need to get your head around the particularities of each prison's system but it normally goes something like filling out a VO form with the contact details of your visitor, putting it in a box on the wing (fingers crossed it doesn't get thrown away), then waiting for it to be sent to your visitor who then has to call and book the visit.

I remember my friend telling me that he tried to book a visit for three consecutive days, no answer and no answerphone, just ringing and ringing. When they finally answered on the fourth day a voice in the background shouted PICK UP THE DAMN PHONE... then hung up.

When people come to visit make sure you remind them and remind them again to bring the required ID. The prison takes joy in turning you away for the ink being blue when it should be black or if your address on the passport doesn't match the one on the VO. According to my visitors a handful of people got turned away at every single visit they came to... you will feel very sore if you have driven all the way to Norfolk or the Isle of Wight from London and you don't get let in.

Check the Inside Time website for concise and up to date visiting information for any prison; what ID you'll need, how to get there, and what restrictions are in place.

By the way you can get help with the cost of visiting prison from the Assisted Prison Visits Unit. I've included the phone number in the Useful Contacts section.



**HAVING A PARTNER** Having a relationship is by far and away the hardest part about being in prison and to be honest if it isn't rock solid it won't survive the emotional tumble dryer so give it some deep consideration whether you want to put your partner and yourself through this. My now ex-girlfriend supported me while I was inside, the following is written by her...

*"Being with someone you care about and love in prison is hard, in many ways you serve a sentence as well. The parameters of your relationship are completely transformed and the ways in which you can communicate and support one another are hugely constrained. Supporting a friend or family member inside is massively important for them, the reality of the prison system is pretty f\*cked up and prisoners definitely need to have a line to the outside world to help them through and use their time in more constructive ways than dying of boredom or getting hooked on skag.*

*This doesn't just involve physically visiting someone; I'd say the most valuable form of communication is actually letters. You can write them and read them in your own time, without someone watching over you, cutting you off, or asking you to sit further apart; and it's just way easier to say stuff. Loads of people say 'oh I don't know what to write', but you can write about anything, it's all good. What you did that day, what plans you have, about what you're reading or what you're friends are doing, just everyday stuff. You'll inevitably miss a load of conversations you normally just have with each other so try and put them into a letter, moan about whatever stuff at work to them, gossip about whoever's relationship, or run any ideas past them. Phone calls and visiting times offer much less space for this sort of conversation, they are often much more formulaic or forced. You can also photocopy articles from magazines (they often don't let you send the actual magazines) and send these in, send photos, or when you're somewhere where a load of their mates are, pass round a bit of paper and get everyone to write a quick message on it, it's just nice for them to know the outside world hasn't forgotten about them.*

*Mostly it seemed like in the visiting room everyone just pretended their hardest like everything is OK, which wears thin after a while, especially when a lot of the women visiting are clearly trying to support families on the outside. I'm not going to lie, visiting is pretty grim. Each prison has a different system, you can read a bit online, but it's more about just leaving plenty of time and asking the other visitors when you get there. Some prisons you need about twenty different bits of ID, and they just anally refuse you entry even if you're about 90 and have your passport but forgot your water bill. You'll get herded through different gates, it smells dingy, sometimes there are dogs, and at Wormwood Scrubs there was an ominous load of posters saying '134 VISITORS ARRESTED THIS YEAR' and each time I went the number had been scrubbed out and had gone up by a couple digits.*



The screws are all turdy caricatures of themselves, and fully enjoy telling you that every single item you brought to try and hand in is not allowed. You actually just have to make a joke of it to survive it – so it's always going to be easier if you go with a friend. In a lot of visits you actually get quite a long time, like two hours sometimes, and I quite liked the thing of choosing to leave before the screws start yelling and prodding at you to move. The whole thing is about power and control, right down to how you are allowed to sit together or put your jacket on the chair, so wherever you can take it back makes it feel a little bit more normal.

When their sentence is nearly over it can get pretty daunting, especially if you are in a relationship with them, suddenly it can feel like you have to deal with all the expectations. What if it isn't the honey dipped reunion we're all waiting for?! You've all just been through a pretty inhumane and damaging experience and it's difficult to know how it's going to work out. The prison system doesn't offer any real support for any of the people concerned so it is really important you get it yourself. Talk to your friends and family about it, and try and make plans for their release that doesn't put too much pressure on you. A relationship is maybe even worth breaking off and starting again at this point, in order to return to normality. However this is not a straightforward choice because you are an important part of their (true) rehabilitation process, bringing them back and helping them through. Some people may think this is some sort of exaggeration, but it's not worth underestimating how damaging a system the prison system is, especially when the effects of it so often remain hidden behind a front of machismo.

## OMU AND CATEGORISATION

The OMU (offender management unit) department will decide what category of prisoner you become and subsequently what kind of prison you will end up in. There are four basic categories...

Double A-cat and A-cat prisons... firstly, I've never been in one. All I know is that they are hard to break out of.

B-cat prisons in my experience are like a sorting office; most people don't stay there for too long before they get moved on to a different prison. In a B-cat you'll meet everyone from triple murderers waiting for extradition to bitties doing a month for stealing a packet of sausages. They are full of heroin, people doing short sentences and local ruffraff so at least it's eventful.

C-cats are basically a B-cat in the middle of nowhere with less security and less staff... so if you're a drug addict or you use your phone all day I guess it's an improvement but for me it was just mind numbingly boring. This is what really kills you in prison; nothing, and I mean nothing, happens. And in C-cats in particular NOTHING happens because most inmates are on a 'progressive moves system' (see the IEP section for more details) so they are just trying to behave well to get their D-cat, home leave or parole.



D-cats (open prisons) in comparison you get home visits after a month, you have a key to your own cell and get your friends to throw bottles of whisky over the fence. If you're in for a non-violent crime and have never had a drugs problem etc both you and your solicitor should write to the governor and the OMU as soon as possible asking for you to be made a D-cat prisoner.

## MOVING PRISON

You can get moved around for a number of reasons. People get 'ghosted' (when social structures in prison are seen as a threat to the system or other prisoners and staff) or recategorised (your categorisation gets reviewed once every six months if you're serving less than four years, and once every year if your sentence is longer). However inmates often get moved to the other side of the country to try and make space in the creaking overcrowded prison system, with no regard for how it will affect them and their contact with family and friends. If this happens you should deluge the governor with letters and keep your fingers crossed.

You'll get minimal notice - a slip under the door after everyone's been locked up announcing that you will be moved the next morning, leaving you no opportunity to tell the outside world or to say a proper goodbye to the people you've spent every day with for the last however long.

When you arrive in the new jail you'll be treated like a newbie by both the system and the inmates: you'll get put on the first night wing initially, you'll be entitled to a reception visit, and you'll have to go through the whole stoic routine for the first few weeks to prove you're not a pushover.

Ask your contacts on the outside to let everyone know that you've been moved and that you've got a new address. Letters should get forwarded from jail to jail but it takes weeks and even months for the prison service to get round to this.

TEA					SWEET				
THURSDAY - TEA					THURSDAY - TEA SWEET				
A	Halal Beefburger in Gravy	☞	☾		X	Vanilla Sponge & Custard			☾
B	Cheese & Potato Bake	☞	☾		Y	Yogurt			
C	Vegetable Paella	☞	●	☺	Z	Fresh Fruit	☞	●	☺
D	Pork Pie	☞			FRIDAY - TEA SWEET				
E	Minced lamb Curry	☞			X	Xmas Muffin or Vegan Flapjack			☾
F	Turkey Baguette	☞		☺	Y	Fresh Fruit			☺
FRIDAY - TEA					MONDAY - TEA SWEET				
A	Chicken Pie	☞	☾		X	Eve's Pudding			☾
B	Cheese & Tomato pizza	☞	●		Y	Yogurt			
C	Vegan pizza	☞	●	☺	Z	Fresh Fruit	☞	●	☺
D	Battered Fish	☞	☾		TUESDAY - TEA SWEET				
E	Beef Pie	☞		☺	X	Jam Sponge & Custard			☾
F					Y	Yogurt			☺
MONDAY - TEA					WEDNESDAY - TEA SWEET				
A	Halal Turkey Fricasse	☞	☾		X	Ginger Sponge & Custard			☾
B	Vegetable Stroganoff	☞	●		Y	Yogurt			
C	Cauliflower & Coconut Curry	☞	●		Z	Fresh Fruit	☞	●	☺
D	Mutton & Onion Pasty	☞			WEDNESDAY - TEA				
E	Pork Faggots in tomato sauce	☞			A	Halal Pasta Bolognese	☞	☾	☺
F	Roast vegetable Baguette	☞		☺	B	Vegetable Bolognese	☞	●	☺
TUESDAY - TEA					THURSDAY - TEA SWEET				
A	Savoury minced Lamb	☞	☾	☺	X	Vanilla Sponge & Custard			☾
B	Vegetable Spring Roll	☞	☾		Y	Yogurt			
C	Vegetable curry & Naan Bread	☞	●	☺	Z	Fresh Fruit	☞	●	☺
D	Meatballs in Chilli Sauce	☞			FRIDAY - TEA SWEET				
E	Sweet & Sour Turkey	☞		☺	X	Xmas Muffin or Vegan Flapjack			☾
F	Beef Baguette	☞	☾		Y	Fresh Fruit			☺
WEDNESDAY - TEA					MONDAY - TEA SWEET				
A	Halal Pasta Bolognese	☞	☾	☺	X	Eve's Pudding			☾
B	Vegetable Bolognese	☞	●	☺	Y	Yogurt			
C	Mixed Bean & Tomato Pie	☞	●		Z	Fresh Fruit	☞	●	☺
D	Bacon Chop	☞			TUESDAY - TEA SWEET				
E	Minced Lamb Bolognese	☞		☺	X	Jam Sponge & Custard			☾
F	Turkey baguette	☞		☺	Y	Yogurt			☺
THURSDAY - TEA					WEDNESDAY - TEA SWEET				
A	Halal Beefburger in Gravy	☞	☾		X	Ginger Sponge & Custard			☾
B	Cheese & Potato Bake	☞	☾		Y	Yogurt			
C	Vegetable Paella	☞	●	☺	Z	Fresh Fruit	☞	●	☺
D	Pork Pie	☞			FRIDAY - TEA SWEET				
E	Minced lamb Curry	☞			X	Xmas Muffin or Vegan Flapjack			☾
F	Turkey Baguette	☞		☺	Y	Fresh Fruit			☺

MAKE YOUR CHOICES IN THE GRY BOY  
ON THE OTHER SIDE

**KEY TO SYMBOLS**

- ☺ : Healthier Option (Lower in Fat, Salt & Sugar)
- : Vegan Option (Also Vegetarian and Halal Option)
- ☾ : Vegetarian Option (Also Halal Option)
- ☞ : Halal Meat, Poultry or Fish
- ☞ : May Contain Genetically Modified Foods
- ☞ : Main Ingredient: Vegetables / Fruit / Grains / Eggs
- ☞ : Main Ingredient: Fish
- ☞ : Main Ingredient: Poultry (Chicken / Turkey)
- ☞ : Main Ingredient: Pork / Bacon
- ☞ : Main Ingredient: Beef
- ☞ : Main Ingredient: Lamb
- ☞ : Main Ingredient: Goat

All dishes are subject to availability and may change without prior notice  
All medical dietary needs must be reported to the kitchen through the Medical Officer / Doctor



A Menu sheet from HMP Wormwood Scrubs

**FOOD** Prisons have a budget of £1.85 per day per prisoner so you can imagine how the food is going to taste. You'll fill in a menu sheet at the beginning of every week and at 11.30 am and 4pm every day go with your baby blue plastic plate and plastic knives and forks to get served a mix of gritty burgers, over boiled beans, rice that tastes like disinfectant and quadruple microwaved chicken that tastes like wood.

Try to get friendly with someone who works in the kitchen; they'll bring you onions, herbs, pepper and spices that'll liven it up a bit. The last two are disallowed in most jails though because people used to blow it in screws eyes. I used to laugh to myself when I was stashing black pepper like it's some kind of class-a drug but these are the kind of stupid situations prison puts you in.

With the evening meal you get a breakfast pack consisting of ULTRA strong tea bags, a carton of UHT milk, coffee whitener and various types of cereal depending on the day. You know people call prison 'doing porridge', really it should be called doing 'choco rice crispies' because no one goes near the porridge sachets. If you let people know that you like porridge you'll get avalanched with these mini-packs of oats and stave off hunger until you're released.

If you are a vegan or vegetarian you'll have three or four options to choose from the whole way through your sentence. It's grim. If you are diabetic or have any other dietary requirement you should be given a supplementary pack every day which probably will be of little benefit to your condition but might mean you get an extra milk or some extra fruit, just let the staff know that you need it when you first get on any wing and complain until you finally get it.

At the start of the week two forms will get slipped under your door – the menu sheet, where you select from various options what you want to eat for the rest of the week, and the canteen sheet; a selection of items you can buy out of your prison earnings and any money that you've had sent in.

Make sure you check your balance every week (prisons regularly steal from inmates), check your bags before you open them (DHL, who supply canteen, also steal from inmates) and circle or highlight the entries on your canteen sheet when you hand it in so the inmates who process it don't miss anything.

You can make some simple recipes from the bits available on the canteen to make the prison grub slightly more edible. Here are a few suggestions...

#### INSTANT NOODLES WITH TUNA

A prison staple... the best meal you'll get inside. Order both off the canteen.

#### BAKED BEANS ON TOAST

This is a personal favourite of mine. You take a kettle lead, strip it down, connect it to a can of beans, (I don't know much about electrics all that I know is that this is

highly dangerous so don't blame me if you hurt yourself) and turn on the power... after about three minutes they'll be nicely warmed. To make toast you need to wrap bread in a piece of newspaper and stick it on the hot pipes for 5 minutes.

#### SALAD DRESSING

- \* take an empty ketchup bottle
- \* two parts sunflower oil from a can of tuna
- \* one part vinegar given out in sachets or available on canteen
- \* mix in lots of mixed herbs, pepper, salt, chili sauce, mustard or brown sauce
- \* shake well and that's that

#### KETTLE CURRIES & DUMPLINGS

Yardies, Africans and all the Asian guys cook malodorous curries, mackerel stews and dumplings in their kettles. You too can have a curry night in your cell if you buy all the right bits off of canteen.

#### YOGHURT

My Middle Eastern friends made decent yoghurt in their cells from prison issue UHT milk. You'll have to ask them if you want to know exactly how.

**ALCOHOL** Okay... hooch can taste like mouldy orange juice if you do it badly, or vodka and orange if you do it well. I generally avoided it. Being drunk on the wing never really appealed to me, plus it has the potential of making you go blind, but if you really want to try here's how...

You need a couple of large bottles – squash bottles will do. You get the yeast from brown bread... you can crumble it up and just stick it in the bottle, but you'll have soggy bits of bread floating around in your finished product. If you're a pro you dry the bread out on the pipes, grind it up, stick it in a sock (a clean one) and immerse this in warm water for 5 minutes before removing it.

So now you take your yeasty water, add a whole load of sugar and top it up with fruit juice. This is pretty much it. Now you just need to leave it to ferment in the warmest part of your cell. Don't forget to periodically loosen the lid to let the carbon dioxide out... if you don't it will explode and coat all of your possessions in stinking hooch.

This process takes up to a week, but if you're a real pro you use a 'kick' (the sludgy sediment from the bottom of a previous batch) you can do it over a weekend. Not only does this take less time but also the weekends are a 'non patrol state' i.e. the screws won't raid you out of the blue like they can do on a normal weekday.

You can go one step better and make vodka: I only saw one guy doing this the whole time I was inside and he sold it on for £20 for half a litre (a lot of money in prison terms). So you take your hooch – a couple litres or so to make it worthwhile – and stick it in a bucket or a cleaned out bin. Now here's the tricky bit... you need to suspend a smaller bowl in the middle of the bucket – the easiest way to do this is to drill three holes a centimetre beneath the rim, evenly spaced, in your bucket. Do the same to your bowl and tie pieces of rope so your bowl hangs nicely in the middle. Take a kettle lead, expose the wires at one end and stick this in the mixture. Now you need to attach a sheet of plastic (a section of bin bag will do) over the top of the entire thing but give it a little bit of slack so it sags in the middle. Use elastic bands or rope to seal it so it's airtight.

Now you need to put ice or the coldest thing you can find on the top of this plastic.... stand back.... and switch on the power. The kettle lead will heat up the hooch in the big bucket, the alcohol will evaporate then condense when it hits the cold plastic and drip into the smaller bowl. After a few hours you will find your bowl is full of distilled homebrew vodka!



## PRISON LAW AND ADJUDICATIONS

Prison has a whole 'justice' system of it's own. If you get nicked for anything, whether it's having a phone, brewing hooch, fighting or whatever it may be, you'll end up in front of a governor. This is called an 'adjudication'. You can be given anything from a week suspension of canteen to months down the block (solitary confinement) or extra months on your sentence if it's particularly serious. They can also put you on closed visits where you're separated from your family by a big plate of glass.

Prison law is like normal law, you have a right to legal representation and if you don't take it the governor (who serves as a judge) will take you for an idiot and do you over. Do not pass up the chance of legal representation, however minor your charge. The library holds all procedural information and, in my experience, they were very helpful. This might entail reading through a whole page of mind-numbing legal drear but once you've found out that the screws didn't follow some little guideline and your case gets thrown out, trust me you'll be very happy.

## INCENTIVE EARNED PRIVILEGES

The IEP system is a divisive punishment system used to control prisoners. IEPs are given out for anything from smoking cigarettes on the landing to not attending a medical appointment. They put a black mark on your record and after three of them you lose certain privileges and get put on 'basic regime'... they'll confiscate your tobacco, they'll take your television, limit your wages, no association, no courses, no work and no opportunity to make phone calls.

As far as I was concerned the prison could keep their poxy privileges – they can't confiscate your books. But if you're serving a sentence where you need to pass parole hearings or your release is subject to 'progressive moves' (to move from A-Cat to B-cat to C-cat to D-cat and then home leaves etc) a single IEP warning can prevent you from being released.

This means that totally reformed prisoners in for a violent crime who haven't been violent or even aggressive towards anyone in their whole sentence are being denied release because they have had IEP warnings for something irrelevant like brewing hooch or smoking cigarettes on the landing.



**SECURITY** Security comes in all shapes and sizes... from a standard cell 'spin' (search) by dud wing screws, to a dedicated search team locking off the whole wing and searching every cell with dogs. The funny thing is you'll get searched MORE If you're not using or selling drugs because it suits them to not find anything... this way the staff have less paperwork and the statistics look as though there are no drugs in the jail.

Just a word of warning: if dedicated security team screws want to find something they will find it... secret compartments in cupboards and matchbox-jewellery-box-things do not work, stuffing it in your sink pipes wont work. They're pretty wiley, you need to be creative if you want to out do them.

Also remember that it's not as simple as just being spun, they have obvious methods of intelligence like if you buy 10 batteries each week they will know you're charging a mobile phone. As I've already said, you should never mention anything surreptitious on the 'blue-box', and don't think that the censors don't understand slang. Unfortunately nowadays they are not so stupid. They also like to have a highly illegal root through your legal documents so if you have any sensitive paperwork containing information that is best kept from the prison or prosecutors you should keep it in someone else's cell.

## MANDATORY DRUG TESTING

MDTs are a joke. Not only did their introduction in the early 90s encourage the use of heroin (heroin clears out of your system in 24 hours, weed takes up to 30 days) but they are also easily swerveable; when everyone finds out the MDT unit are on the wing it's comedy the way everyone skidaddles back to their cell in a very obvious fashion to drink two litres of water, then passes with flying colours despite the fact you seen them smoking 'bobby' (Bobby Brown = Heroin, Barry White = Crack) on the landing only last night.

MDTs catch you smoking weed and that's about it. If you fail an MDT you'll have an adjudication.

By the way you should avoid taking any drugs that you haven't been prescribed; a friend of mine borrowed cocodamol from his friend for his toothache, had an MDT a couple days later, tested positive for opiates and ended up having his television taken away and getting put on various compulsory drug treatment courses as punishment.



**STAFF MEMBERS** There are three main types of screw you need to know about: your personal officer who will know slightly more about your case (many prisoners never meet theirs), general wing officers and, lastly, senior officers.

But really there are only two types of screws... firstly those who are malevolent from the start and secondly those who are quite reasonable with you but then show their true colours. The former is preferable because at least you know what you're getting. Never ever trust a screw.

Despite me telling you this, you probably still will lapse into a false sense of friendship at some point – you'll have decent conversations with them, you'll see them almost every day, you'll spend more time with them than your friends and family... but then the most minor thing and they'll happily nick you, lie about you, send you to the block, or write some malevolent report about you that prevents you from getting parole or early release.

At the same time don't go out of your way to piss them off, especially if you're up to something, you know, keep your enemies closer as they say. Be jocular if you can stomach it – just never, ever think they are your friends.

**JOBS** Prison jobs include being a wing cleaner, library orderly, wobble (a litter picker), religion rep, 'biohazard' (that's where you clean up blood, puke and suicide attempts...), wing painter, gardener, visit room cleaner and about 10 other various job titles.

Some prisons also offer positions with private companies, where instead of providing jobs for unemployed people in society, they profit off the cheap captive labour force provided by prison. This deeply screwed-up situation is called 'the prison industrial complex' if you're interested in reading further.

Wages range from £2.50 a week to a bit more than a tenner... so you're not in it for the money, it's only useful if you want to be unlocked. I personally didn't mind 'riding bang-up' (being locked in my cell) so I was indifferent, but having a job does mean you can travel between wings and go to places you can't otherwise go.

You can also train to be a 'toe-by-toe mentor' or a 'listener'. The former is a paid job whereby you teach less literate inmates to read and write, and the latter is an unpaid job listening to people on behalf of Samaritans. Both are valiant things to do whilst you're inside.



## MISCELLANEOUS

Here are a few miscellaneous bits-and-bobs and how-tos. I could write a whole book about this stuff but I'm going to try and keep it brief...

### KETTLES

Some prisons have an urn from which you have to collect your hot water in a flask before bang up. As everyone always collects their water at the same time and the urn is tiny, only about 10 people on the whole wing get hot water. One way to get round this is to make your own kettle using the technique I mentioned before to make beans of toast but instead of a can of beans you connect the kettle lead to one of the tin containers that lunch often comes in.



### PIPES

If you want to smoke a pipe you wrap up a section of those tin containers, then just fold it slightly at the smoking end so the smouldering whatever doesn't just fling down your trachea.

### MAKING ROPE

Half the bedsheets you get in jail are frayed on one side and too narrow to tuck in. It took me a while to realise this is because people make rope by tearing off horizontal sections then tying these pieces together.

### HOW TO TRANSFER STUFF CELL TO CELL

So once you've been banged up if you need a lighter or some rizlas you're pretty screwed. One way to transfer stuff is to attach a rope to a mirror (in prison you get small square plastic mirrors with holes in the corner) and spin it out on to the landing – if you get the right angle it will bounce off the opposite skirting-ledge-thingy and skim under your next-door neighbour's door. They then tie a lighter to the string or put the tobacco on the mirror, reel it back in, and there you have it.

### STICKING STUFF UP

You're not allowed blutack in jail for some reason unbeknownst to me. Instead you can use toothpaste (lasts about 2 days and soaks through your pictures), coffee-whitener mixed with a dab of water (as strong as super glue, also messes up your pictures) or jam sachets (somewhere in-between, and you guessed it, it also messes up your pictures).

### LEAVING YOUR DOOR ON LATCH

If you need to go to the shower or to get food a good technique is to leave your door on latch: twist the handle fully inwards, pull your door to and let the bolt sit just on the edge before it clunks into the hole. This way your door looks as though it's shut, and if someone tries to open it the spring will release and the bolt will lock. It's kind of difficult to explain but it will become apparent once you're there.

### KEEPING WARM IN THE WINTER

If corrupt screws don't bring in the drugs and phones, they normally get thrown over the fence and then reeled through the windows using afore-mentioned ropes made of bedsheets. Therefore most jail cells don't have windows, they have vents that often don't close or properly open. To close them you have to glue cardboard over them using coffee whitener paste.

### PLUG

Plug is jail slang for putting contraband in your 'Chatham Pouch'. If you need to do it I'm sure you'll work it out. Anyway. I'm talking about the type of plugs you put in a sink. Some jails have washing machines but in most you have to wash your clothes by hand. I have no idea why but there were never any plugs so you have to just scrunch some toilet tissue up and stuff it in the hole...

### CELL WORKOUTS

Even if you're not usually the type to spend hours in the gym it's good to get in to a regime whilst you're in prison to avoid becoming a complete vegetable. Do press ups, sit ups, squats, turn a chair upside down and do dips, benchpress the bunkbed, do headstand press ups against the wall.

### CUTTING A HOLE IN YOUR MATTRESS

One for the lifers.

## RETURNING TO THE REAL WORLD

To be honest, the moment of freedom was totally underwhelming because I'd spent every waking hour building it up in my head. They just called my name one day and deposited me outside the gate somewhere on an industrial estate in the Midlands with forty quid, a prison issue bin bag full of clothes and a train ticket back home. For a lot of people £40 buys 40 cans of beer or some smack; I guess a weekend of getting trashed is a quick-fix substitute for real rehabilitation.

I remember how incredible food and milk tasted, how good it was to hear a phone ring, how light doors felt, how fast trains and cars moved, how sci-fi the internet was... and how quickly I got complacent about all these amazing things. Freedom took a long time to seep into my mindset – it didn't just happen the moment I walked out of jail. I'd been fed, clothed, given a place to sleep and a rigid structure. I was institutionalised. Jail takes your responsibilities, or lack of them, away from you – I guess that's what people who have an addiction problem or have grown up without family subconsciously find reassuring about that shitty environment.

Prison's legacy for me, aside from still being refused jobs and still being uninsurable, wasn't an affiliation to the Crips or Aryan Brotherhood or whatever stupid stuff people hear about jail from the movies: it was alienation from the outside world and an inability to communicate. I'd spent SO much time locked up inside my own head that I had to learn everything again, including how to be myself. I felt warped and self-conscious, raw but dulled, aggressive and cold-hearted but at the same time vulnerable. I felt disconnected from myself – and the girl I had been in love with. Luckily I didn't have kids like many inmates do.

It would've been good if people had asked me more questions but they were either scared to probe or didn't know where to go beyond asking 'so... err... how was it?', they wanted to know about the fights and the gore but maybe didn't even consider the emotional disconnection. It's good for the people close to you to ask as many questions as possible in order to give you the chance to unpack your emotions and understand the experience you just went through. It's hard for British people and especially those who've just come from an environment where you wear a mask 24/7 to be open about emotions in this way but it's necessary if you want to reconnect with your friends, family and erstwhile self.

Anyway... this is when your 'licence' starts. Licence is a joke, you attend probation who are so underfunded and unsupported by the government that they can't do anything to help you even if they want to. You've just got to make sure you do attend (if you miss appointments with them they'll send you straight back to jail) and grin and bare it. Pretend you're very sorry. Pretend that the system works. Pretend that you regret it. Licence is better than jail so like I said, you've just got to "yes miss, no miss" it. Tell them you have a job, your housing is stable, you don't take drugs and you've got a good relationship with your girlfriend and family and

they'll go from weekly appointments to monthly ones and stay off your case.

If you break the terms of your licence or commit another crime you get recalled. It doesn't matter how minor it is; you can be recalled if you get caught pissing on a wheelie bin. One guy I met served half of a seven year sentence for drug importation, got released, went straight and narrow and was in full time employment, always attending probation, he'd had a baby daughter... but a couple months after his baby daughter was born he was recalled for smoking a spliff, so back he went to jail for the remainder of his licence (roughly three years). Doesn't make any sense but that's how it is.

Before your cell-bye-date distribute your belongings among your friends. It's a weird vibe when you're walking down the corridor towards the gates with all your stuff in big HMP bags, there's an understandable longing and jealousy from all the people who you've made friends with.

Don't forget these people – it's easy to do when there's so much to do in the outside world but you've got to make a conscious effort to keep in touch. Write down their prison numbers. Send them CD's (they're only a fiver on Amazon so you haven't got an excuse) and try to visit them.

On your way out don't forget to remind the screws that you've done your time but they are doing a life sentence. If you've got outstanding complaints follow them up. Write to me, tell me about your experience and anything you have to add to this guide. If you enjoyed it please like this on Facebook, Tweet it or share it with your friends. Consider joining prisoner support projects such as London ABC and Action For Prisoners and Offenders Families, or contribute your time to the Howard League or the Prison Reform Trust.

And if you're going to commit a crime, utilise your newfound criminal mastery that you learnt in jail and don't get caught. But more than anything enjoy and value your freedom!



## STUFF TO TAKE WITH YOU

As I said right at the start, it's a very good idea to take a packed bag with you to court if you think you may be getting remanded or found guilty. As I have also said before though, every prison is different so you may not be allowed to have some (or ANY) of the things I've listed. The rules change every day and with every staff member so it's totally unpredictable.

The thing is that once you're inside you have to buy items for an extortionate price through a mini Argos catalogue available from the wing office (a nice little earner for the prison service and Argos but especially harsh for inmates when they are earning around a fiver a week).

So on one hand take as much as you can because there is a chance they'll let you have it, on the other don't go with a transit van full of outfit changes.

You won't be allowed anything that obscures your identity such as a hoody, anything black or blue that resembles staff uniform, or anything relating to teams such as football shirts to prevent arguments. You'll only be allowed a certain amount of stuff at any one time, the rest will be kept in your stored property. Keep a very close eye on exactly what you have in your 'prop'; I had various pieces of property stolen by screws, from CDs to my best shirts and brand new trainers that were sent in but I wasn't allowed to have. They steal your stuff, edit the property record, then deny all knowledge of it ever existing.

- \* Alarm clock
- \* Pictures for the wall
- \* Stamps and envelopes
- \* Notepad or diary
- \* Pair of shorts for the gym
- \* Over-ear headphones
- \* Smelly trainers for the gym
- \* Comfy trainers for the wing
- \* Stationery, including colouring pens and decent writing pens (it hits home that you're in prison when you can't even find a decent biro for weeks on end)
- \* Flip-flops for the shower (so you don't contract a prison issue verruca)
- \* Stereo (not too big – most B-cats don't allow detachable speakers, a model like Panasonic RX-ES27 is perfect)
- \* CDs and tapes (they might not allow copied CDs or tapes that aren't see-through)
- \* Jumper (hoodies aren't allowed in most prisons)
- \* Nice tracksuit bottoms are a must
- \* Hair clippers are an investment – you can stack the tuna if you set yourself up as



a wing barber, or just keep them for yourself

- \* All the basic toiletries like toenail clippers, a toothbrush, towel (prison towels are GRIM... people have been known to get body lice and crabs off them) etc
- \* Bed sheets and pillow covers (as with towels)
- \* List of phone numbers, addresses and dates of birth of friends you'll want to have visit you
- \* Cash (so you've already got it in your account ready for first canteen and don't have to wait for a postal order or cheque)
- \* Books (some prison libraries are quite decent though)

## PRISON LEXICON

A-Cat – maximum security prison

Adjudication – where you appear before a governor for some wrongdoing

B-Cat – medium security prison

Bang-up – period of time when your door is locked

Barry – cocaine

Basic-rider – someone who loves being on basic regime

Bent-up – to be assaulted by screws

Bird – a prison sentence i.e. 'Sime is doing a bird'

Bitty – an addict or generally rattling person

Block – solitary confinement

Blue-box – payphone

Bobby – heroin

Burn – ubiquitous jail term for tobacco

Burn cat – someone who chain smokes

C-Cat – lower security prison

CRD – conditional release date

D-Cat – an open prison

Dipping – stealing

Dog ends – cigarette butts

DTU – drug testing unit

EPP – extended public protection sentence

E-Suit – green and yellow suits worn by attempted escapees

Escape – don't even mention this word for a joke

Ghosted – to be moved from one prison to another unexpectedly

Guv – a prison officer

HDC – home detention curfew

Hooch – homebrewed alcohol

IDTS – integrated drug treatment system

IEP – incentive earned privileges

IMB – independent monitoring board



IPP – indeterminate public protection sentence  
 Jam roll – parole or rhyming slang for Polish person  
 JR – judges remand  
 Kanga – rhyming slang for a prison officer (screw – kangaroo – kanga)  
 Kick – sludgy sediment for making hooch  
 MDT – mandatory drug testing  
 Meds – medicine or the medical hatch  
 NACRO – national association for the care and resettlement of offenders  
 NOMS – national offender management system  
 OASys – offender assessment system  
 OMU – offender management unit  
 Pelly, pad or peter – your cell  
 Plug – hiding things in your Chatham Pouch  
 PO – prison officer  
 Pony – crap, in both senses  
 Prop – your stored property  
 PSR – pre sentence report  
 Remand – when you are awaiting sentencing or charge and have been denied bail  
 ROTL – release on temporary licence  
 Rub down – a cell search  
 Scooby – someone who is over friendly with screws  
 Screw boy – same as above  
 Seg – segregation unit  
 Send-out – someone who is made to do things by other inmates  
 Shank – a homemade knife  
 Shipped out – to be moved from one prison to another  
 Shit 'n' a shave – a brief sentence  
 Shitted up – when a screw has a bucket of shit thrown over them  
 Snout – a cigarette or tobacco  
 SO – senior officer  
 Spin – a cell search  
 Sweatbox – prison van  
 Tear up – a fight  
 Tech – mobile phone  
 Tick – to borrow drugs or tobacco  
 VDT – voluntary drug testing  
 VO – visiting order  
 VPU – vulnerable prisoners unit  
 Window warrior – someone who anonymously shouts insults out the windows after the cell doors are shut  
 Wire – something for charging your phone  
 Ting – any of the above

## USEFUL CONTACTS WHILE YOU'RE INSIDE

[assisted.prison.visits@noms.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:assisted.prison.visits@noms.gsi.gov.uk)  
 0300 063 2100

### Offenders Families Helpline

0808 808 2003

### Action for Prisoners' and Offenders' Families

49-51 East Road, London, N1 6AH

### Partners of Prisoners

1079 Rochdale Road, Manchester,  
 M98AJ [mail@partnersofprisoners.co.uk](mailto:mail@partnersofprisoners.co.uk)

### Prison Reform Trust

15 Northburgh Street, London  
 EC1V 0JR 0808 802 0060

### Howard League for Penal Reform

1 Ardleigh Road, London, N1 4HS  
 0207 249 7373

### Prisons & Probation Ombudsman

Ashley House, 2 Monck Street,  
 London, SW1P 2BQ

### Cruse Bereavement

Unit 1, 1 Victoria Villas, Richmond,  
 TW9 2GW 0844 477 9400

### Prisoners Advice Service

PO BOX 46199, London, EC1M 4XA  
 020 7253 3323

### The Home Office

2 Marsham Street, London, SW1P 4DF  
 020 7035 4848

### Samaritans

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK,  
 PO BOX 9090, Stirling, FK8 2S  
 08457 90 90 90

### Vegan Prisoner Support Group

BM 2107, London, WC1N 3XX  
[info@vpsg.org](mailto:info@vpsg.org)

**Bent Bars Project** provide additional support to LGBT prisoners

P.O. Box 66754, London, WC1A 9BF  
[bent.bars.project@gmail.com](mailto:bent.bars.project@gmail.com)

[prisonerben.blogspot.co.uk](http://prisonerben.blogspot.co.uk) blog by an ex-prisoner that's funny and on-point

[prisonersfamiliesvoices.blogspot.com](http://prisonersfamiliesvoices.blogspot.com) blog written by the families of prisoners

### prisonchatuk.com

An online community for those with a loved one inside the British prison system

**Make Justice Work** is a campaign to highlight the wastefulness of short-term prison sentences and promote community sentences  
 020 3538 8365

**NACRO** aim to reduce crime and assist resettlement in the sensible way... housing support, education provision, addiction support and lobbying the government to convince them it's a good idea 020 7840 6464

**Koestler Trust** helps prisoners to lead more positive lives by encouraging them to make art and music  
 168a Du Cane Road  
 London  
 W12 0TX

**Anarchist federations** are full of good people who want to help prisoners (and burn down the prison system). They often list prisoners addresses if you'd like to write to someone or add someone's name to the list...

**Empty Cages Collective** fight for prison abolition and against prison expansion  
info@prisonabolition.org

**A-Fed**  
BM ANARFED, London, WC1N 3XX  
bristol\_abc@riseup.net

ABC **Brighton**, PO Box 74, Brighton, BN1 4ZQ, UK  
brightonabc@riseup.net

ABC **Bristol**, Kebele, 14 Robertson Rd, Easton, Bristol, BS5 6JY  
www.bristolabc.wordpress.com  
bristol\_abc@riseup.net

ABC **Cardiff**, Red & Black Umbrella, 57-58 Clifton St, Cardiff, CF24 1LS  
www.abccardiff.wordpress.com  
cardiff\_abc@riseup.net

ABC **Leeds**, 145-149 Cardigan Road, Leeds, LS6 1LJ  
www.leedsabc.org  
leedsabc@riseup.net

ABC **London**  
www.network23.org/londonabc/  
london\_abc@riseup.net

**Unlock** provides information, advice, training and advocacy to those dealing with the ongoing effects of criminal convictions i.e. still not being able to get a job for something you did 10 years ago  
01634 247350 advice@unlock.org.uk

**Shannon Trust** an excellent charity that helps the massive number of illiterate prisoners to read and write  
89 Albert Embankment  
London  
SE1 7TP

**Inside Time** newspaper for prisoners that's available in the prison libraries and in visitors centre.  
PO BOX 251, SO30 4XJ,  
08443 356483

**Haven Distribution** charity that provides text books for inmates  
27 Old Gloucester Street,  
London WC1N 3XX  
info2015@havendistribution.org.uk

**RAPT** (Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust) works to help people with drug and alcohol dependency in order to help both afflicted individuals and society  
The Foundry, 2nd Floor, 17 Oval Way,  
London, SE11 5RR 020 3752 5560

**Prisoners Education Trust**  
The Foundry, 17-19 Oval Way, London,  
SE11 5RR



The author relaxing in HMP Wandsworth

If you enjoyed this PDF please go to [prisonism.co.uk](http://prisonism.co.uk) and spend £4 on a nice risograph printed copy for your bookshelf... it's a not-for-profit project... all proceeds go back into prisoner support!

Despite a prison population of over 85,000 people (the highest incarceration rate per-capita in Western Europe), most Britons think that prison is either a hell-on-earth where you get robbed, attacked and raped as soon as you get through the door or it's a Butlins for burglars and sex offenders.

It is neither. It's time to re-evaluate the prison experience: it's plain sailing in ways people don't think it is and it's terrible in ways you never considered.

Carl Cattermole, a 20-something Londoner who served time in some of Britain's most notorious jails, has teamed up with illustrator Banx and Ditto Press to make this not-for-profit, no-nonsense guide to prison.

HMP – A Survival Guide covers it all: how to stay in touch with your loved ones, how to negotiate the prison economy run on tobacco and tins of tuna, how to steer clear of violence, how the prison system encourages you to take heroin and become part of a captive workforce and how to re-integrate yourself with the real world after spending so much time locked up inside your own head.

*"This is the essential guide to prison. It's witty, informative and comprehensive – vital reading for both expectant inmates and the law-abiding citizen"*

**Will Self**

*"I work with defendants facing prison and I always give them a copy of this book. Its funny yet real tone breaks the fear and helps people feel more prepared for getting sent down. Prison can be a scary world because of the unknown, the Survival Guide shines a light on what really happens behind bars"*

**Nicole Vosper**

*"The guide really helped us, my husband felt more in control of what was happening and was better prepared for each step. It helped answer the questions that we all have about prison life."*

**Louise Blissett**



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