

# Routine activity theory

## crime prevention

Routine activity theory is one of the main theories of “environmental criminology”. The theory states that a crime occurs when the following three elements come together in any given space and time:

1. an accessible target
2. the absence of capable guardians that could intervene
3. the presence of a motivated offender,

### An accessible target

An accessible target can include a person, an object or a place. The following acronyms have been used to describe accessible targets:

- VIVA – Value, Inertia, Visibility, Access
- CRAVED – Concealable, Removable, Available, Valuable, Enjoyable, Disposable,

Routine activity theory as a crime prevention methodology focuses on essential elements that make up a crime. This theory provides a framework within which to prevent crime through altering at least one of these elements (the offender, the target or the presence of capable guardians). The most effective crime prevention strategies will focus on all three of these elements.

### Absence of a capable guardian that could intervene

A capable guardian has a ‘human element’, that is usually a person who, by their mere presence, would deter potential offenders from perpetrating a crime. A capable guardian could also be CCTV, providing that someone is monitoring it at the other end of the camera at all times.

Some examples of capable guardians are:

- police patrols
- security guards
- doorstaff
- vigilant staff and co-workers
- friends
- neighbours,

Some of the guardians are formal and deliberate, like security guards; some are informal and inadvertent, such as neighbours.

It is also possible for a guardian to be present, but ineffective. For example, a CCTV camera is not a capable guardian if it is set up incorrectly or in the wrong place or is not monitored. Staff might be present in a shop, but may not have sufficient training or awareness to be an effective deterrent.

## A motivated offender

Routine activity theory looks at crime from an offender's point of view. A crime will only be committed if a likely offender thinks that a target is suitable and a capable guardian is absent. It is the offender's assessment of a situation that determines whether a crime will take place.

## Crime triangle

(also called Problem Analysis Triangle.  
Adapted from [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk))

Routine activity theory introduces an important tool in crime analysis, the crime triangle (which has also been called the problem analysis triangle). The crime triangle analyses both the elements of crime (target, location, offender) and potential responses/interventions for each of the elements of the crime (as depicted on the bigger triangle).

## Further information

For more information on crime prevention theories and methodologies, please visit [www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au](http://www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au)

