This introductory chapter discusses the theme of this volume, which is about the principles and structure of criminal law. It begins with a discussion on the definition of crime and explains the fundamental principles of criminal law such as actus reus and mens rea, the source of criminal law in general, and procedures involved in a criminal trial as distinct from civil proceedings. The chapter explores the four main reasons for criminalising conduct, the burden of proof in criminal proceedings and the classification of crimes and courts. It discusses four theories concerning criminal punishment, reviews several recent cases, and evaluates the criminal justice system in Great Britain based on statistics and public perception.
1. Introduction and general principles

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