The language of signs and notices

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1 Match each notice feature with its description.

1 ellipsis	____	a leaving out the person responsible for an action
2 nominalisation	____	b using must, required to or similar forms
3 passive voice	____	c omitting predictable grammatical words
4 modal obligation	____	d presenting an action through a noun
5 conditional warning	____	e packing several content words into little space
6 mitigating politeness	____	f stating a consequence if a condition is met
7 agent suppression	____	g foregrounding what happens rather than who does it
8 lexical density	____	h softening a directive with please or considerate wording

2 Complete the functional language labels.

conditional | density | ellipsis | mitigating | modal | nominalisation | passive | suppression

1 notice-board _____

2 _____ obligation

3 a _____ warning

4 the _____ voice

5 agent _____

6 directive _____

7 _____ politeness

8 high lexical _____

3 Choose the analysis that best fits the notice.

1 *No parking* omits a full clause: *ellipsis / modal obligation*.

2 *Payment required before entry* uses *passive voice / conditional warning*.

3 *Failure to comply may result in removal* begins with a *nominalisation / mitigating phrase*.

4 *If the alarm sounds, leave immediately* contains a *conditional warning / nominalisation*.

5 *You must display a permit* expresses *modal obligation / agent suppression*.

6 *Please avoid unnecessary noise* uses *mitigating politeness / lexical density*.

7 *Vehicles will be removed* suppresses the *agent / condition*.

8 *Authorised personnel access point* has high *lexical density / politeness*.

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4 Complete the style analysis with terms from the box.

agent suppression | conditional warning | ellipsis | lexical density | mitigating politeness | modal obligation | nominalisation | passive voice

The notice *Permit required* uses **1** _____ and **2** _____: a fuller version would identify who requires it. *You must display a permit* makes **3** _____ explicit. *Please display your permit* adds **4** _____. The phrase *failure to comply* is a **5** _____, often followed by a **6** _____. In *vehicles may be removed*, the **7** _____ foregrounds the consequence. Several compressed noun phrases can create excessive **8** _____.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Efficiency can become ambiguity

Notice language often compresses because readers have little time and signs have little space. Compression works when the missing information is predictable. It fails when readers cannot identify the required action, the relevant group or the consequence. Passive forms can usefully foreground danger, but they may also conceal responsibility. Testing a notice means asking representative users what they think it requires, not merely asking its author whether it seems clear.

1 Why is notice language compressed? _____

2 When does compression work? _____

3 Name three things unclear notices may hide. _____

4 What can passive forms foreground? _____

5 What may passive forms conceal? _____

6 How should an organisation test a notice? _____

6 Rewrite to improve clarity and economy.

1 Non-compliance with requirements is prohibited. _____

2 It is requested that noise be kept to a minimum. _____

3 In the event of activation, evacuation is required. _____

4 Unauthorised vehicle removal may occur. _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a **120-150 word** style audit of four public notices. Diagnose ambiguity, tone and grammar, then propose clearer versions.

[ ] Use at least six analytical terms. [ ] Preserve necessary legal meaning. [ ] Justify each revision.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Notice-language features

1 **c** 2 **d** 3 **g** 4 **b** 5 **f** 6 **h** 7 **a** 8 **e**

2 Functional labels

1 **ellipsis** 2 **modal** 3 **conditional** 4 **passive** 5 **suppression** 6 **nominalisation** 7 **mitigating** 8 **density**

3 Feature analysis

1 **ellipsis** 2 **passive voice** 3 **nominalisation** 4 **conditional warning**
5 **modal obligation** 6 **mitigating politeness** 7 **agent** 8 **lexical density**

4 Style analysis

1 **ellipsis** 2 **agent suppression** 3 **modal obligation** 4 **mitigating politeness**
5 **nominalisation** 6 **conditional warning** 7 **passive voice** 8 **lexical density**

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Readers have little time and signs have little space. 2 When omitted information is predictable. 3 Action, group and consequence.
4 Danger. 5 Responsibility. 6 Ask representative users what it requires.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 **Follow these requirements.** 2 **Please keep noise to a minimum.** 3 **If the alarm sounds, leave immediately.** 4 **Unauthorised vehicles may be removed.**

Over to you: Answers will vary. Check diagnosis, precision and justified revisions.