The letter of the law

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each precise term with its definition.

1 statute ____	**a** a law formally passed by a legislative body
2 precedent ____	**b** an earlier court decision used as a guide for later similar cases
3 litigation ____	**c** the process of taking legal action through the courts
4 burden of proof ____	**d** the obligation to prove a claim, typically resting with the prosecution or plaintiff
5 plea bargain ____	**e** an agreement where a defendant pleads guilty to a lesser charge in exchange for a reduced sentence
6 injunction ____	**f** a court order requiring someone to do or stop doing a specific act
7 liability ____	**g** legal responsibility for an act or omission
8 tort ____	**h** a civil wrong causing harm, for which the injured party can seek compensation
9 arbitration ____	**i** a private, out-of-court process for resolving a dispute
10 indictment ____	**j** a formal accusation of a serious crime

2 Choose the word with the most suitable connotation.

1 For a law formally passed by parliament: statute / an informal custom.

2 For an earlier decision guiding future cases: precedent / a one-off exception.

3 For pursuing a dispute through the courts: litigation / informal negotiation.

4 For the obligation to prove a claim: burden of proof / presumption of guilt.

5 For pleading guilty to a lesser charge: a plea bargain / a full trial.

6 For a court order requiring specific action: an injunction / a casual request.

7 For legal responsibility for harm caused: liability / immunity.

8 For a private, out-of-court dispute resolution: arbitration / a public trial.

3 Complete the legal collocations with one word.

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1 set a legal _____ (= establish a guiding decision)
2 the _____ of proof (= the obligation to establish facts)
3 a _____ bargain (= pleading guilty to a lesser charge)
4 seek an _____ (= a court order to stop an action)
5 civil _____ (= legal responsibility for harm)
6 pursue _____ (= taking a dispute through the courts)
7 binding _____ (= a private dispute-resolution process)
8 face _____ (= a formal accusation of a serious crime)

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4 Complete the case notes with words and phrases from the box.

arbitration | burden of proof | indictment | injunction | liability | litigation | plea bargain | precedent | statute | tort

Case A: The court's ruling established an important 1 _____, later cited in several similar disputes.
Case B: Under the relevant 2 _____, the company faced significant 3 _____ for the damage caused.
Case C: Rather than proceed to a lengthy trial, the defendant accepted a 4 _____, pleading guilty to a lesser charge.
Case D: The plaintiff sought an 5 _____ to prevent further harm while the case proceeded.
Case E: The prosecution carried the 6 _____, and had to establish guilt beyond reasonable doubt.
Case F: The two companies avoided costly 7 _____ by agreeing to binding 8 _____ instead.
Case G: A grand jury issued a formal 9 _____ against the executive.
Case H: The injured party filed a 10 _____ claim, seeking compensation for damages.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Why so few cases go to trial

Contrary to popular perception shaped by courtroom dramas, the vast majority of legal disputes never reach a full trial. In criminal cases, plea bargains resolve most prosecutions, as defendants weigh the certainty of a reduced sentence against the risk of a harsher outcome if convicted at trial. In civil litigation, parties frequently choose arbitration or settle privately, avoiding the expense, delay and unpredictability that a full trial entails. Critics argue this system creates pressure on defendants, particularly those with limited resources, to accept plea bargains even when they might have a legitimate defence, since the burden of proof and cost of a full trial can feel prohibitively risky regardless of actual guilt.

1 What does courtroom drama shape a popular perception of? _____
2 What resolves most criminal prosecutions? _____
3 What do defendants weigh when considering a plea bargain? _____
4 What do parties in civil litigation frequently choose instead of a full trial? _____
5 What pressure does this system create, according to critics? _____

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6 Why might this pressure exist regardless of actual guilt? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence using the word in capitals. Do not change the meaning.

1 The ruling established a decision used to guide future cases. PRECEDENT _____

2 He agreed to plead guilty to a lesser charge. PLEA BARGAIN _____

3 The company was legally responsible for the damage. LIABILITY _____

4 The dispute was resolved privately, outside court. ARBITRATION _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 120-150 word account analysing why most legal disputes are resolved without a full trial, distinguishing observation from evaluation.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Control connotation carefully. [ ] Avoid unsupported assumptions.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Precise terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Connotation

1 statute 2 precedent 3 litigation 4 burden of proof 5 a plea bargain 6 an injunction 7 liability 8 arbitration

3 Collocations

1 precedent 2 burden 3 plea 4 injunction 5 liability 6 litigation 7 arbitration 8 indictment

4 Case notes

1 precedent 2 statute 3 liability 4 plea bargain 5 injunction 6 burden of proof
7 litigation 8 arbitration 9 indictment 10 tort

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 That most legal disputes go to a full trial.
2 Plea bargains.
3 The certainty of a reduced sentence against the risk of a harsher outcome if convicted at trial.
4 Arbitration or private settlement.
5 Pressure on defendants to accept plea bargains even when they might have a legitimate defence.
6 Because the burden of proof and cost of a full trial can feel prohibitively risky regardless of actual guilt.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 The ruling set a precedent. 2 He accepted a plea bargain.
3 The company faced liability. 4 The dispute went to arbitration.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check lexical precision, appropriate connotation and separation of fact from inference.