

READING COMPREHENSION

C2 | Adults / Teens | Reading + Vocabulary | 45-60 minutes

Topic: Discussion | Skills: Reading, Vocabulary, Speaking

Read the text carefully. Then answer the questions on Page 2.

The Apology That Left Nothing to Chance

By the time the director apologised, the apology had acquired a working group. This was not, the group insisted, an attempt to delay matters. On the contrary, the seriousness of the error demanded that nothing be said hastily. A report issued to residents had described a consultation as **unanimous**, although several objections had been omitted. The organisation regretted, in principle, anything that might have given an incomplete impression.

The first draft said, "We failed to include your objections." Legal advisers preferred, "Your objections were not reflected in the published account." The second **formulation** was accurate, someone observed, and less accusatory. Since the accusation would have been directed at the organisation issuing the apology, this advantage required a little explaining. No explanation survived into the minutes.

A communications specialist proposed acknowledging how residents felt. This was warmly received until a junior colleague asked whether the problem was their feelings or the missing objections. The director assured her that both were important. The sentence became longer. What it acquired in inclusiveness, it lost in grammatical subjects: by the fourth draft, almost everything had happened without anyone doing it.

One committee member, whose usual role was to prevent premature promises, suggested a sentence committing the organisation to publish the omitted responses. This proved unexpectedly controversial. Publication would require checking permissions, reviewing personal details and admitting that the original document needed more than a clarifying footnote. The sentence was therefore moved to a separate action plan, to be considered after the apology had been approved.

When the statement finally appeared, it expressed profound regret for the disappointment surrounding the process. It was praised internally for striking the right balance. Residents asked when their objections would be published. The director, who had sincerely hoped the statement would allow everyone to move forward, found their insistence **dispiriting**.

It would be easy to conclude that nobody involved meant to apologise. That is probably too generous to the machinery of the episode. Several did mean it. What the drafting process demonstrated was how effectively a collection of individually **defensible** precautions could convert that intention into something requiring nothing of its author. The statement had left nothing to chance, including the chance that it might alter the position from which it was issued.

Key vocabulary

unanimous - agreed by everyone without dissent

formulation - a particular way of expressing an idea

dispiriting - causing loss of enthusiasm or confidence

defensible - capable of being justified with reasonable arguments

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

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Answer in complete sentences. Support interpretations with evidence from the text.

1. How does the opening sentence establish the text's satirical method?

2. What is lost when the first draft is rewritten in the passive voice?

3. What does the junior colleague's question reveal?

4. Why is moving publication to a separate action plan significant?

5. Why is the conclusion that nobody meant to apologise called 'too generous'?

6. Explain the double meaning of the final reference to leaving nothing to chance.

Discuss with a partner

- When does careful wording protect accountability, and when does it evade it?
- What concrete action would make this apology credible?

ANSWER KEY

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Suggested full-sentence answers. Accept other supported interpretations where appropriate.

1. How does the opening sentence establish the text's satirical method?

It treats an apology as something that acquires bureaucratic machinery, exposing disproportionate procedure through restrained, matter-of-fact phrasing.

2. What is lost when the first draft is rewritten in the passive voice?

The rewrite removes the organisation as an explicit responsible agent while preserving a technically accurate description of the omission.

3. What does the junior colleague's question reveal?

It reveals that acknowledging emotional reactions can displace acknowledgment of the concrete error that caused them.

4. Why is moving publication to a separate action plan significant?

It separates the expression of regret from the corrective action that would give the apology practical force.

5. Why is the conclusion that nobody meant to apologise called 'too generous'?

That conclusion would attribute the failure only to insincerity, underestimating a process capable of neutralising sincere intentions as well.

6. Explain the double meaning of the final reference to leaving nothing to chance.

It echoes procedural caution while ironically suggesting that the process eliminated even the possibility of changing the organisation's stance.

Teaching notes

Read once for the main idea, then reread for evidence. Compare answers before discussing the two open questions. Interpretive answers may vary; ask learners to justify their reading.

Language and reading focus: Satire, agency and passive voice; irony and implied criticism.

Text: Original commentary using a fictional scenario. Discussion questions have no fixed answers.