Words Before Weather

How sentence choices shape a public warning

12.5.R.1 "Students will apply their knowledge of syntax (e.g., parallel structure, active and passive voice, and phrases/clauses) to analyze and evaluate a variety of texts, understanding that usage and convention change over time."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one passive construction, circle a series of parallel actions, and number two clauses whose order affects what readers notice first. Use your marks to compare how the notices guide people during a storm.

Three Versions of a Harbor Warning

1 Imagine a harbor town posting a storm notice in 1912. The notice reads, "When the bell sounds, all vessels remaining at the east pier shall be secured, and the gates will be closed by the harbor keeper." Beneath it, a clerk adds, "Passengers are requested to remain within the waiting room, to keep clear of the gangway, and to await further instruction." The sentences take up nearly the whole sheet. For a traveler watching the tide climb the steps, the notice offers rules, but it does not say when someone will check on the waiting passengers.

2 A present-day alert for the same imagined harbor might say, "Harbor staff will close the east gates at six. If you are on the pier, leave now and wait inside the terminal." A second line could read, "We will update the departure board when the water drops." The message will appear on phones as well as on paper. But "at six" becomes useless if the storm cuts the power before anyone can check the time. A worker suggests posting copies at both entrances, where visitors without phones can see them before they reach the water.

3 By evening, the harbor staff drafts a third version for a notice beside the exit: "If the lights fail, follow the painted arrows to the upper hall; staff will check each room." A volunteer asks whether the line should begin with "Follow the painted arrows," so a frightened visitor sees an action first. Another points out that the warning about darkness could keep someone from relying on the electronic board. Neither argues that the older sign was grammatically wrong. They must decide which order and tone fit a crowded building, a paper sign, and a storm that may arrive before the next boat.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Compare “the gates will be closed by the harbor keeper” with “Harbor staff will close the east gates at six.” Which uses passive voice, and how does the change affect what readers notice first?

2. Find the three actions requested of passengers in the 1912 notice. How does their parallel structure help a reader follow the request?

3. In the third version, what condition appears before the instruction to follow the arrows? What would readers encounter first if the volunteer’s suggested order were used?

4. Compare “Passengers are requested to remain within the waiting room” with “If you are on the pier, leave now.” How do their syntax and tone differ, and which might work better for someone still on the pier?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence alert for visitors when dense fog hides the pier exit. Include an if-clause, a series of three parallel actions, and a deliberate choice of active or passive voice; use your fourth sentence to explain how one of your choices helps readers.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 12 · 12.5.R.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one passive construction, circle a series of parallel actions, and number two clauses whose order affects what readers notice first. Use your marks to compare how the notices guide people during a storm. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Compare "the gates will be closed by the harbor keeper" with "Harbor staff will close the east gates at six." Which uses passive voice, and how does the change affect what readers notice first?	**The 1912 wording is passive and puts the gates first. The present-day wording is active and puts the responsible staff first.**
2	Find the three actions requested of passengers in the 1912 notice. How does their parallel structure help a reader follow the request?	**The actions are "to remain within the waiting room," "to keep clear of the gangway," and "to await further instruction." Their repeated "to" structure makes the three duties easy to recognize as a list.**
3	In the third version, what condition appears before the instruction to follow the arrows? What would readers encounter first if the volunteer's suggested order were used?	**The condition is "If the lights fail." With the suggested order, readers would encounter the action, "Follow the painted arrows," before the condition.**
4	Compare "Passengers are requested to remain within the waiting room" with "If you are on the pier, leave now." How do their syntax and tone differ, and which might work better for someone still on the pier?	**The older notice uses a formal passive request, while the newer one addresses the reader directly and gives a brief command. The newer wording may work better for someone on the pier because it identifies their situation and tells them to leave at once.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

If fog hides the pier exit, follow the rail, keep to the marked path, and enter the terminal. Harbor staff will guide visitors who cannot see the path. The outer gate will be locked until visibility returns. I named the staff in the second sentence so visitors know whom to ask for help.

Accept reasonable judgments about effectiveness when students connect them to wording in the passage. For the open task, check for four sentences, a conditional clause, three grammatically parallel actions, and an explanation of an active or passive construction.