Bargaining at Work

Weighing the effects of collective bargaining

E.C.7.7 "Analyze the role of labor unions and collective bargaining in market economies, examining how workers organize to negotiate wages, benefits, and working conditions..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two proposed contract terms, circle one reason to support and one reason to oppose unionization, and put a star beside a sentence about productivity. Use your marks to compare possible effects on workers and the business.

A Warehouse at the Bargaining Table

1. At a fictional grocery warehouse, packers notice that schedules change with little warning. A single packer can ask for steadier hours, but the manager may decline. Several packers instead meet after work, compare concerns, and consider forming a union. In the United States, workers may seek a union election; if a majority of votes cast favor representation in a valid election, the union can represent employees in the bargaining unit. The employer and union must bargain in good faith over wages, hours, and other working conditions, but neither side is required to accept every proposal. Organizing gives workers a shared voice rather than a guaranteed win.

2. At the bargaining table, the packers propose higher hourly pay, health coverage, and schedules posted two weeks ahead. The employer points to narrow profit margins and asks for flexible staffing during holiday rushes. Union representatives could offer a plan that allows extra shifts with advance notice. A contract might balance these interests, but negotiations could end without an agreement. Supporters argue that a union can give workers leverage to win safer conditions and reduce turnover. If experienced packers stay longer, the warehouse may spend less time training replacements and may fill orders more reliably. These gains depend on the terms reached and how work is organized.

3. Opponents argue that union dues reduce workers' take-home pay and that detailed work rules can make it harder for managers to shift staff quickly when orders spike. Higher labor costs might also lead an employer to raise prices, cut hours, or invest in machines, although those outcomes are not certain. Workers may see a strike as leverage if talks stall, but lost pay and missed shipments can hurt workers and the business. A union contract could improve productivity by keeping skilled staff, or reduce it if rules block useful changes. The effects depend on bargaining choices, market pressures, and how the employer responds.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does organizing change the packers' ability to negotiate compared with asking alone?

2. Which proposed schedule term could conflict with the employer's staffing concern, and what compromise does the passage suggest?

3. How might a union benefit both packers and the warehouse, according to supporters?

4. What concern do opponents raise about detailed work rules, and how might it affect productivity?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a neighborhood bakery where employees face last-minute schedules and sudden rushes. In one paragraph, recommend whether its employees should organize, explain a schedule term they could bargain for, weigh one argument on each side, and predict a possible effect on productivity.

ANSWER KEY

Bargaining at Work

HIGH SCHOOL · E.C.7.7

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two proposed contract terms, circle one reason to support and one reason to oppose unionization, and put a star beside a sentence about productivity. Use your marks to compare possible effects on workers and the business. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does organizing change the packers' ability to negotiate compared with asking alone?	**Organizing lets the packers negotiate with a shared voice. An individual can ask for a change, but the manager may decline.**
2	Which proposed schedule term could conflict with the employer's staffing concern, and what compromise does the passage suggest?	**Posting schedules two weeks ahead could limit flexibility during holiday rushes. The union could allow extra shifts with advance notice.**
3	How might a union benefit both packers and the warehouse, according to supporters?	**A union might help packers win safer conditions. Reduced turnover could leave the warehouse with experienced staff who fill orders more reliably.**
4	What concern do opponents raise about detailed work rules, and how might it affect productivity?	**Detailed rules could make it harder to shift staff when orders spike, which might slow the warehouse's response to demand.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would recommend that the bakery workers consider forming a union if they cannot secure predictable schedules individually. Together, they could bargain for schedules posted a week ahead while allowing extra shifts for busy weekends. Predictable hours could help employees plan child care and might reduce turnover, leaving more experienced workers to serve customers. However, union dues would lower take-home pay, and rigid shift rules could slow the bakery during sudden rushes. The workers should compare those costs with the value of a negotiated schedule. A contract with advance notice and a way to handle emergencies could protect workers without blocking quick service.

Accept either recommendation if it weighs a specific benefit against a specific cost and explains a plausible effect on bakery productivity. Predictions should be presented as possibilities, not guaranteed outcomes.