Red tape

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each precise term with its definition.

1 administrative burden ____	**a** the time, effort and expense a person or business must spend to meet regulatory requirements
2 red tape ____	**b** excessive, often unnecessary bureaucratic procedure that slows down official processes
3 rubber-stamp ____	**c** to approve something automatically without genuine scrutiny
4 streamline ____	**d** to simplify and speed up a process by removing unnecessary steps
5 deregulation ____	**e** the reduction or removal of government rules governing an industry or activity
6 compliance cost ____	**f** the financial and time cost businesses or individuals incur to comply with regulations
7 statutory requirement ____	**g** a legal obligation specifically established by a written law or statute
8 accreditation ____	**h** formal recognition that an organisation or individual meets a required standard
9 procedural formalism ____	**i** an excessive, rigid attachment to procedure over the substance of what the procedure is meant to achieve
10 discretionary power ____	**j** the authority given to an official to make judgement calls within certain limits

2 Choose the word with the most suitable connotation.

1 For the time and expense of meeting regulatory requirements: administrative burden / a simple task.

2 For excessive, unnecessary bureaucratic procedure: red tape / efficient process.

3 For approving something automatically without real scrutiny: rubber-stamp / carefully review.

4 For simplifying and speeding up a process: streamline / complicate.

5 For reducing government rules governing an activity: deregulation / increased regulation.

6 For the cost of complying with regulations: compliance cost / a one-time fee.

7 For a legal obligation established by written law: statutory requirement / an informal custom.

8 For an excessive, rigid attachment to procedure: procedural formalism / practical flexibility.

3 Complete the bureaucracy collocations with one word.

1 reduce the administrative _____ (= time and cost of compliance)

2 cut through the _____ (= excessive bureaucratic procedure)

3 simply _____ the request (= approve without scrutiny)

4 _____ the process (= simplify and speed up)

5 push for _____ (= reducing government rules)

6 face high _____ costs (= cost of following regulations)

7 meet a _____ requirement (= a legal obligation from statute)

8 gain official _____ (= formal recognition of meeting a standard)

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

accreditation | administrative burden | compliance cost | deregulation | discretionary power | procedural formalism | red tape | rubber-stamp | statutory requirement | streamline

Case A: Small businesses reported that the 1 _____ of licensing had grown considerably heavier over the past decade.
Case B: Critics accused the committee of simply choosing to 2 _____ every application without genuine review.
Case C: The agency announced plans to 3 _____ its approval process, cutting the average waiting time in half.
Case D: Industry groups lobbied for 4 _____, arguing existing rules imposed unnecessary restrictions on competition.
Case E: The organisation calculated its annual 5 _____ at several hundred thousand pounds, largely spent on legal and administrative staff.
Case F: The inspection was a 6 _____, mandated directly by statute rather than discretionary policy.
Case G: Officials were granted considerable 7 _____ in deciding how strictly to enforce minor infractions.
Case H: Applicants complained about excessive 8 _____, insisting the committee valued correct paperwork more than the substance of their proposal.
Case I: The clinic finally received its official 9 _____ after months of inspection, cutting through considerable 10 _____ along the way.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

The debate over cutting red tape

Policy debates over reducing red tape frequently pit efficiency advocates against those concerned about the erosion of genuine safeguards. Proponents of deregulation argue that excessive administrative burden imposes disproportionate compliance costs on smaller businesses, which typically lack the dedicated staff larger firms use to navigate complex statutory requirements, effectively favouring incumbents over new market entrants. Critics counter that streamlining processes too aggressively risks converting legitimate oversight into little more than a rubber-stamp exercise, since regulations often exist precisely because unregulated markets have historically produced serious harms, ranging from unsafe products to environmental damage. Genuine reform, most researchers agree, requires distinguishing procedural formalism that serves no real purpose from substantive safeguards that remain genuinely necessary.

1 What do policy debates over reducing red tape frequently pit against each other? _____

2 What do proponents of deregulation argue excessive administrative burden imposes? _____

3 Why does this effectively favour incumbents over new market entrants? _____

4 What do critics counter about streamlining processes too aggressively? _____

5 Why do critics say regulations often exist in the first place? _____

6 What does genuine reform require, according to most researchers? _____

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

1 The committee approved every request without real scrutiny. RUBBER-STAMP _____

2 The agency simplified and sped up its approval process. STREAMLINE _____

3 The industry pushed for a reduction in government rules. DEREGULATION _____

4 The organisation spent a large sum meeting regulatory requirements. COMPLIANCE COST _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 120-150 word account analysing the tension between reducing red tape and preserving genuine regulatory safeguards, distinguishing observation from policy argument.

[ ] 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 administrative burden 2 red tape 3 rubber-stamp 4 streamline 5 deregulation 6 compliance cost 7 statutory requirement 8 procedural formalism

3 Collocations

1 burden 2 red tape 3 rubber-stamp 4 Streamline 5 deregulation 6 compliance 7 statutory 8 accreditation

4 Case notes

1 administrative burden 2 rubber-stamp 3 streamline 4 deregulation 5 compliance cost
6 statutory requirement 7 discretionary power 8 procedural formalism 9 accreditation 10 red tape

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Efficiency advocates against those concerned about the erosion of genuine safeguards.
2 Disproportionate compliance costs on smaller businesses.
3 Because smaller businesses lack the dedicated staff larger firms use to navigate complex statutory requirements.
4 That it risks converting legitimate oversight into little more than a rubber-stamp exercise.
5 Because unregulated markets have historically produced serious harms.
6 Distinguishing procedural formalism that serves no real purpose from substantive safeguards that remain genuinely necessary.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 The committee gave a rubber-stamp approval. 2 The agency streamlined its process.
3 The industry pushed for deregulation. 4 The organisation faced a high compliance cost.

Over to you

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