Under Pressure: Decisions That Define Us

The Woman in Tower 4

At 36, Elena Moreno had seen her share of tense situations, but nothing compared to what happened on a rainy March afternoon at San Vicente Airport. As a veteran air traffic controller, she'd guided dozens of flights through storms, mechanical failures, even bird strikes. But this was different.

The radar system flickered and went dark just as a charter plane requested an emergency landing. Communication was patchy. Protocol dictated she wait for a technician, but her gut told her waiting wasn't an option. Without radar, Elena relied on her mental map of the airspace and a brief, crackling message from the pilot: "Descending fast. Low visibility."

In seconds, she rerouted two outbound planes and cleared runway 4. Her colleagues stared, frozen. Only later did they learn the extent of the crisis: the charter's hydraulic system had failed mid-air. Had Elena waited, the runway would've been occupied. Her deviation from protocol was technically a breach — but one that saved 58 lives. She never called it heroism. "I just did what needed doing," she said. "Anyone would've."

Comprehension Questions:

1. Who is Elena and what is her role?

   _____

2. What technical issue occurred during her shift?

   _____

3. What was the protocol, and why didn't she follow it?

   _____

4. How did she manage the situation?

   _____

5. What was the result of her actions?

   _____

6. How did she justify her decision afterwards?

   _____

Matching Exercise:

Match the vocabulary to the meaning:

Word/Phrase

    a- **gut told her**

    b- **frozen**

    c- **had seen her share of**

    d- **mental map**

    e- **what needed doing**

    f- **I just did what needed doing**

    g- **deviation from protocol**

    h- **patchy**

Meaning

    1. ____ Acting instinctively rather than logically

    2. ____ A humble phrase for necessary action

    3. ____ Inability to move from shock

    4. ____ Breaking expected rules

    5. ____ Internal understanding of layout

    6. ____ Experienced difficult events

    7. ____ Irregular or incomplete communication

    8. ____ Required but unspoken action

Vocabulary in Context:

Use at least 5 of the above expressions in the following short narrative:

"Captain Rena had _____ turbulence, but when the engines failed mid-air, she was forced to act fast. The radio connection was _____, but her _____ she needed to descend immediately. Trusting her _____, she headed for the closest airstrip. She knew it was a _____, but it was _____. Later, she shrugged off the praise, saying: _____.'

Grammar Focus: Ellipsis & Substitution

Explanation:

Ellipsis and substitution are advanced grammatical tools that help avoid repetition and improve fluency in both writing and speech. They make communication smoother by avoiding redundancy when information is already understood from context.

Ellipsis means omitting part of a sentence because it is clear from context.

- "She guided dozens of flights, and her colleague **did** too."
- ("guided dozens of flights" is understood and omitted)

Substitution means replacing repeated information with a short word or phrase such as "do," "so," "one," or "that."

- "Elena acted fast. Her colleagues **did so** as well."
- "The radar failed. **That** didn't stop her."

Common Substitution Words: so, do, one, ones, that, those

These techniques are common in formal and informal English.

Practice 1: Ellipsis (Rewrite the second sentence using ellipsis)

1. Elena made a risky choice. Her colleague made a risky choice too.

   _____

2. The team responded immediately. The other crew responded immediately.

   _____

3. She knew the protocol. I knew the protocol.

   _____

4. The radar failed. The backup radar failed.

   _____

5. The pilot radioed in. The co-pilot radioed in.

   _____

6. Elena cleared the runway. Her trainee cleared the runway.

   _____

7. She saved the plane. Another controller saved the plane.

   _____

8. She broke protocol. I broke protocol.

   _____

Practice 2: Substitution (Complete with "so," "do," "that," "one," etc.)

1. Elena acted on instinct. Her colleague _____ too.
2. The technician delayed. _____ made the crisis worse.
3. The radar was unreliable. The backup was even more _____.
4. She showed bravery. No one else did _____.

5. She cleared the runway. Another controller did _____.

6. Elena stayed calm. I hope I would _____ too.

7. She made a judgement call. _____ was controversial.

8. The plane needed landing. Elena made sure it got _____.

Wrap-Up & Reflection

- What would you have done in Elena's place?
- Can protocol and intuition work together?
- Which vocabulary or grammar tools from today could help you in professional writing?
- Is humility in heroic acts a form of strength?