

The Most Underrated Invention in Economic History — Answer Key

C1 Business English | Fluency Space | Answers for Exercises B & C

Exercise B — Key Words & Phrases

Answers to the matching and example-sentence gap-fill in the vocabulary exercise. Some forms change slightly to fit the example sentence (e.g. tense, form).

No.	Answer
1	to be caught off guard — “The board was caught off guard by the sudden resignation of the CEO.”
2	to stem from — “Most of our customer complaints stem from a single faulty product line.”
3	to spearhead — “Our R&D team spearheaded the company’s move into renewable energy.”
4	to contend with — “Many retailers are having to contend with rising shipping costs this quarter.”
5	soaring — “With energy prices soaring, the finance team is reviewing the budget.”
6	to take its toll — “The constant travel really started to take its toll on her health.”
7	to stifle — “Rigid hierarchy can stifle creativity in a team.”
8	to point out — “She pointed out that the figures hadn’t been checked.”
9	to foster — “Open-plan offices are designed to foster collaboration.”
10	slow off the mark — “Our competitors were slow off the mark on digital marketing, and we gained an early advantage.”
11	counterparts — “She meets with her counterparts in the New York office every Monday.”
12	a silver bullet — “There’s no silver bullet for improving morale — it takes time and consistent effort.”

Exercise C — Comprehension & Discussion

Model answers only — learners' own wording will vary. Look for the key facts below rather than exact phrasing.

1. According to Lee Kuan Yew, what role did air conditioning play in Singapore's development?

Model answer: He said air conditioning was key to Singapore's transformation, changing “the nature of civilisation by making development possible in the tropics.” As prime minister, one of his first acts was installing air conditioners in civil service buildings, which he saw as key to public efficiency.

2. How has the geography of the world's fastest-growing cities changed over time, and why?

Model answer: Before air conditioning, the cities that led economic development — London, Paris, New York, Tokyo — all shared a mild climate. Today's fastest-growing megacities, such as Bangkok, Lagos, Jakarta and Dubai, are in much hotter regions. What changed was not geography but the ability to control indoor temperature.

3. What connection does the article draw between this summer's heatwaves and Mario Draghi's report on EU competitiveness?

Model answer: Draghi's report pointed to a widening productivity gap between the EU and the US but did not mention air conditioning. The article argues that since heat measurably reduces cognitive performance, sleep and output, and only around 20% of European homes have AC (against 80–90% in the US), Europe's slow adoption of cooling technology may be worsening the very competitiveness gap Draghi described.

4. What criticisms are raised against relying too heavily on air conditioning?

Model answer: Thought leaders point out that AC-dependent cities can lose vibrant street life compared with their southern European counterparts, and that people used to constantly cool interiors suffer more when they step outside. Air conditioning could also foster inequality, since those who can't afford it are left at a disadvantage. The article concludes that AC works best as one part of a broader adaptation strategy, not a silver bullet.

Exercise C — Gap Fill Answers

"A Difficult Meeting About Office Conditions" — correct form of each key word/phrase, in order.

No.	Answer
1	contending with
2	take its toll
3	pointed out
4	counterparts
5	caught off guard
6	soaring
7	stemmed
8	a silver bullet
9	foster
10	slow off the mark
11	spearhead
12	stifle