

Theranos – A Silicon Valley Nightmare – Answer Key

C1 Business English | Fluency Space | Answers for Exercises 1–3

Exercise 1 – Key Words from Context

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

No.	Answer
1	buy into — “The sales team won’t buy into the new strategy unless we explain the reasoning behind it.”
2	reputable — “Before we sign anything, let’s make sure the supplier is reputable — ask them for at least two references.”
3	flag up — “Please flag up any risks to the timeline as early as possible so we can adjust the plan.”
4	drawback — “The proposal looks strong overall; the only real drawback is the length of the implementation period.”
5	in the dark — “Our regional managers were kept completely in the dark about the restructuring until last week.”
6	cutting-edge — “Our clients expect cutting-edge analytics, so we can’t keep relying on spreadsheets.”
7	modelled myself on — “When I first became a manager, I modelled myself on my old boss — she ran the best meetings I’ve ever seen.”
8	get away with — “Could we get away with increasing our prices by a further 10% without losing our key accounts?”
9	at the forefront — “Our aim over the next five years is to be at the forefront of sustainable packaging in Central Europe.”
10	misleading — “Some of these figures are misleading because they don’t include the returns from the second quarter.”
11	are drawn to — “Most of our new clients are drawn to our flexible pricing rather than the brand itself.”
12	behind the curtain — “The launch looked smooth to customers, but behind the curtain the team was working until midnight to fix bugs.”

Exercise 2 – Comprehension

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

1. In what ways did Elizabeth Holmes try to imitate her idol?

Model answer: She modelled herself completely on Steve Jobs: she copied his famous sweaters and even adopted an unusually deep voice in interviews.

2. What 2 factors attracted investors to Theranos?

Model answer: Holmes' confidence, and the potential to disrupt the \$70 billion laboratory testing industry.

3. True or false? Theranos' machine was not able to test blood.

Answer: False. The Edison machine could test blood, but it could only run a small number of tests compared to what Theranos promised, and the results were often inaccurate and misleading.

4. True or false? Scientists working at Theranos didn't care to acknowledge the problems with the technology.

Answer: False. Engineers and scientists repeatedly flagged up serious problems, but no-one listened to their concerns.

5. Based on the article, list 5 reasons why Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos were not caught sooner.

Model answer: Any five of: employees were forbidden from sharing information across departments; anyone who opposed Theranos' methods was threatened with legal action or followed by private investigators; the board was full of respected people (e.g. two former US secretaries of state) who had bought into Holmes' vision; their reputations kept the regulators away; board members never asked questions about the technology, so were left in the dark; the Walgreens partnership made Theranos appear more reputable; results were secretly produced on traditional machines in a back lab, hiding the Edison's failures; Holmes' media profile (covers of Forbes, Fortune and Inc.) made her seem credible.

6. How did journalists react when they found out what was really happening at Theranos?

Model answer: Journalists, who had once been drawn to Holmes's charisma, turned on her completely.

7. Based on the final paragraph of the article, what do you think is the broader message that the article offers?

Model answer: Open answer. Learners might say that Silicon Valley's culture can reward a good story over hard science: the myth of the genius founder and the appeal of "disruption" led investors and the media to believe in Holmes without asking for evidence. Hype is no substitute for proof, and proper due diligence matters.

Exercise 3 — Fill in the Gaps: Answers

“Due Diligence on a New Partner” — correct form of each key word/phrase, in order.

No.	Answer
1	flag up
2	cutting-edge
3	misled
4	reputable
5	bought into
6	drawback
7	get away with
8	in the dark