Word Formation

A contested notebook

Full exam-style task: eight word-formation gaps, C2 Proficiency Part 3. Original independent practice, not an official exam paper.

Use the word in capitals beside each gap to form one word that fits the passage. Read beyond the gap to establish the writer's precise meaning.

When a notebook said to belong to a celebrated explorer appeared at auction, its (1) _____ was immediately questioned. Two accounts of its ownership were mutually (2) _____: according to one, it had never left Europe, while the other placed it in an overseas collection for decades. The seller was also accused of deliberately (3) _____ documents from investigators, although these might have resolved the discrepancy.

None of this amounted to (4) _____ proof of forgery. Several claims required independent (5) _____, but the records needed to check them had disappeared. A historian criticised the (6) _____ release of information, arguing that isolated details could be misleading without the complete archive.

She cautioned against assuming that every dealer involved was (7) _____; poor record-keeping could explain some of the confusion. Much of the case against the notebook was (8) _____, based on suggestive coincidences rather than direct evidence of fabrication. The museum therefore postponed its decision, acknowledging that responsible judgement sometimes requires uncertainty to be preserved rather than prematurely resolved.

Your answers

1 AUTHENTIC _____

2 RECONCILE _____

3 HOLD _____

4 REFUTE _____

5 VERIFY _____

6 PIECE _____

7 SCRUPLE _____

8 CIRCUMSTANCE _____

Answers & explanations

Question 1 | authenticity

"Its authenticity was immediately questioned": the possessive its needs a noun naming the quality under examination. AUTHENTIC becomes authenticity, meaning genuineness. The following disagreement about ownership explains why that quality is in doubt. Authentic is an adjective; authentically is an adverb, so neither can serve as the subject here. Add -ity to authentic to form authenticity; retain the final c of the adjective.

Question 2 | irreconcilable

"Two accounts ... were mutually irreconcilable": a predicative adjective is needed after were. One account says the notebook never left Europe, while the other places it overseas for decades; both cannot hold. RECONCILE becomes reconcilable, then ir- gives the required negative meaning. Irreconcilable contains two r letters where prefix and base meet. Reconciliation would be a noun, not the quality described.

Question 3 | withholding

"Accused of deliberately withholding documents from investigators": of requires a noun or -ing form; deliberately modifies the action. Withhold means refuse to provide something, which fits documents being kept from investigators. HOLD therefore becomes withholding, with prefix with- and ending -ing. Holding alone would mean possessing the documents and would not express refusing access in this construction.

Question 4 | irrefutable

"None of this amounted to irrefutable proof": an adjective modifies proof. REFUTE means disprove; irrefutable means incapable of being disproved. The writer says the evidence has not reached that standard. Refutable would reverse the intended distinction between suspicion and conclusive proof. Notice the change refute -> refutable and the doubled r produced by ir- + refutable.

Question 5 | verification

"Several claims required independent verification": independent modifies a noun naming a process. VERIFY becomes verification, the process of checking truth or accuracy. The absent records explain why that process cannot be completed. Verifiable would describe something capable of being checked, not the checking itself. Learn the spelling as verify -> verification, rather than adding -ation unchanged to verify.

Question 6 | piecemeal

"The piecemeal release of information" contrasts isolated details with "the complete archive". An adjective is needed before release; PIECE becomes piecemeal, meaning in separate or limited stages. Pieces is a plural noun and does not describe the manner of release. The criticism is about fragmentation, not necessarily the accuracy of every individual detail.

Question 7 | unscrupulous

"Assuming that every dealer involved was unscrupulous": a predicative adjective follows was. Unscrupulous, from SCRUPLE, describes someone unconstrained by moral principles. The warning and the alternative explanation of poor record-keeping show that dishonesty should not be assumed. Scrupulous would mean conscientious and would reverse this contrast. The formation is scruple -> scrupulous -> unscrupulous.

Question 8 | circumstantial

"Much of the case ... was circumstantial": the adjective describes evidence based on surrounding facts rather than direct proof. The phrase "suggestive coincidences rather than direct evidence" supplies the definition. CIRCUMSTANCE becomes circumstantial, with -ial; circumstances is a plural noun and cannot describe the case in this way. Circumstantial evidence can be relevant: it is not a synonym for worthless evidence.