

**2023 JC2 General Paper Preliminary Examination**  
**Paper 2 (Excellence)**  
**Suggested Answer Scheme**

From Passage 1

Paragraph 1

Question 1

From lines 3-7, what is the author's attitude towards the phenomenon of 'tangping' and how does he convey this? [2]

Question Type: Inference (Author's tone/attitude)		
From Passage	Suggested Answer	
<p>They position it as a rejection of societal pressures to overwork and over-achieve, and <b>this act – of doing nothing!</b> – has been lauded by others for taking a stand against the perceived injustice of societal expectations to constantly better themselves and choosing instead <b>to languish in</b> what they believe to be good enough. <b>Another name for what these people call 'good enough'?</b> Mediocrity.</p>	(a)	<p><b><u>Identification of attitude ('what'):</u></b></p> <p>The author is <b>highly critical</b> / <b>has a low opinion</b> / <b>disapproves</b> of the movement.</p>
	(b)	<p><b><u>Method used ('how'):</u></b></p> <p><i>(Word Choice)</i>  This is conveyed by his <b>choice of words</b> such as <u>languishing</u>.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>This is conveyed by his use of <b>diction</b> / <b>stark accusation</b> of them <u>languishing in what they believe to be good enough</u> / <u>lying to themselves</u>.</p> <p>OR</p> <p><i>(Use of Punctuation)</i>  This is conveyed through his use of the <b>exclamation mark</b> to <u>show exasperation at the act of 'doing nothing!'</u></p> <p>OR</p> <p><i>(Use of Irony)</i>  This is conveyed by his use of <b>irony</b> in <u>'the act of doing nothing' as a means of protest</u>.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>This is conveyed by his use of <b>reframing</b> of the idea of <u>'good enough' as mediocrity</u>.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>1m for (a) and 1m for any point in (b)</b></p>

## Question 2

In paragraph 1, explain how the phenomenon of ‘tangping’ is an apt metaphor for ‘our acceptance of mediocrity’. **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

Question Type: Literal & Inference		
From Passage	Suggested Answer	
In such a position, one has <b>given in to gravity</b> . There is <b>no intention of resisting the pull of stagnation, no potential energy for forward movement, no potential.</b>	(a)	<b><u>Identification of the image:</u></b>  Just as the passivity of lying flat shows/indicates <b>surrender / letting go / no effort to withstand the desire to do nothing...</b>
	(b)	<b><u>How it transfers:</u></b>  ... likewise, our acceptance of mediocrity reflects a <b>lack of drive.</b>  OR  ... likewise, our acceptance of mediocrity reflects a <b>lack of motivation / effort for progress / growth / development.</b>  <p style="text-align: right;">1m for each point</p> <p style="text-align: right;">In (b), ‘drive’ captures the idea of ‘for progress’</p>

## Paragraph 2

### Question 3

In paragraph 2, why does the author call the rejection of excellence ‘an act of cowardice’? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

Question Type: Inference (Use of Language)		
From Passage		Suggested Answer
Those who <b>don’t dare</b> to pursue excellence endure mediocre performances because they want to keep the <b>status quo</b> . Mediocrity is their <b>comfort zone</b> , and <b>excellence is alien to their system.</b>	(a)	He views it as an act of cowardice because it shows a <b>lack of courage or fear</b>
	(b)	... in facing change.  <p style="text-align: right;">1m for each point</p>

#### Question 4

What is the author implying about mediocrity by her use of the word 'festering' in line 16? [1]

Question Type: Inference (Use of Language)	
From Passage	Suggested Answer
When we don't choose excellence, we are choosing mediocrity because we do not care. What is worse is that what we tolerate perpetuates. When we allow mediocre performances to continue, we signal that festering in mediocrity is okay.	The author is implying that remaining mediocre will <u>result in the worsening of negative consequences</u> .  DNA: Spread

#### Summary Question

##### Question 5

Using materials from paragraphs 3-5 only (lines 17-48), summarise why it is important to strive for excellence and how to do so.

Write your summary **in no more than 120 words**, not counting the opening words which are printed below. **Use your own words as far as possible.**

*Being 'okay' is not enough for our societies. We...*

require outstandingly intelligent and gifted individuals as they drive societal progress in any areas of life. Those who do not pursue excellence do not encounter anything truly important, and waste countless chances to improve our way of life. All our societal systems and structures flourish based on the vigour that arises from the quest for being excellent. Schools and workplaces must encourage us to have ambition. Leaders should have the responsibility to plan success for our societies and truly fulfil their vows. In order to progress, we need to succeed, or we could be forgotten. Mediocrity is already too prevalent in society for us to contribute further to it. Pursuing excellence counteracts the lure of dawdling and to find diversions. (18 points, 120 words)

Points	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8	9	10-11	12-13	14 and above
Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

From the Text		Suggested Paraphrase
Para 3		
1	need <u>exceptionally</u> smart	require <u>outstandingly</u> intelligent/ clever/ wise,  DNA: uncommonly (lacking precision)
2	and talented people	and gifted/ skilled/ accomplished individuals
3	They are the ones who push <u>civilisation forward</u>	as they drive/ thrust/ propel <u>societal progress/ advancement</u>
4	<u>cure diseases</u> <u>make discoveries</u> <u>compose brilliant music and artwork</u> <u>move millions of people</u>	(sense-for-sense)  in many areas/ every aspect of life.  DNA: mere paraphrases of the text
5	<u>nothing of any real significance</u> happens to people who linger in the status quo	(sense-for-sense)  Those who do not pursue excellence do not do/ encounter anything <u>truly consequential/ important</u> , and
6	<u>lose out on</u> innumerable opportunities	<u>fail to grasp/ waste</u> countless chances
7	to <u>better our lives</u>	to <u>improve/ benefit</u> our way of life.
8	all our <u>social institutions</u> thrive	All our <u>societal systems and structures</u> flourish/ prosper
9	on the <b>spark</b> that comes from the pursuit of excellence	on the <b>vigour/ inspiration/ drive</b> that arises from the quest/ chase/ journey/ search of being excellent.
10	schools and workplaces must <b>embolden</b> <u>us</u>	Schools and workplaces must <b>encourage/ empower</b> <u>us</u>
11	to <b>aspire</b> <u>to greater heights</u>	(sense-for-sense)  to <b>push ourselves</b> further / have <b>ambition</b> .
12	Our leaders should be <b>expected</b> <u>to chart a grand course</u> for our societies,	(sense-for-sense)  Leaders should have the <b>responsibility</b> <u>to plan success</u> for our societies,
13	and then actually <b>live up to</b> their <u>promises</u>	and truly <b>fulfil</b> their <u>vows</u> .
14	the way forward has always been clear – excel, or be <b>left behind</b>	(sense-for-sense)  In order to progress, we need to succeed, or we would be <b>forgotten/ held back</b> .
Para 4		
15	mediocrity is a <b>privilege</b>	(inferred)  Being average is an <b>entitlement/ a luxury</b> .
16	<u>when so many rise to the daily struggle of seeking excellence</u> so as to <b>not to let down</b> their communities	<u>When so many work hard every day to achieve excellence</u> in order to <b>not disappoint</b> those around them,

17	<u>merely settling</u> for mediocrity is <u>downright disrespectful</u> <b>OR</b> With such advantages, <b>how dare we not be great?</b>	<u>simply accepting</u> mediocrity is <u>utterly ungracious/ rude</u> .
18	<u>The world is already filled with mediocrity</u> , and we <b>should not settle</b> for adding more white noise	<i>(inferred)</i>  Mediocrity is already too prevalent in society for us to <b>contribute further to it</b> .
Para 5		
19	pursuit of excellence is an attitude that <b>cultivates a fertile field</b> for success	<i>(sense-for-sense)</i>  Striving for excellence <b>encourages/ breeds/ nurtures further triumph/ more opportunities</b> for triumph, and
20	presupposes an <b>openness</b> <u>to feedback</u>	presumes <b>receptiveness</b> to <u>critique/evaluation</u> .
21	Many years ago, while American car manufacturers avoided mistakes on their assembly lines by slowing down and introducing slack, the Japanese manufacturers sought breakdowns by putting the line to its paces and pushing its boundaries, receiving feedback by studying the breakdowns, taking corrective action, and then pushing boundaries again. Today, the rigour of the production process has translated into the excellence of the product, and Japanese vehicles are renowned for their reliability.	<i>(Inference)</i>  <u>Striving</u> for <b>constant improvement</b> is another way of pursuing excellence
22	Pursuing excellence also <b>staves off the temptations</b>	Pursuing excellence <b>counteracts/ averts the lure/ seduction/ pull</b>
23	of <b>procrastination</b>	of <b>dawdling/ holding off/ putting off something</b>
24	and <b>distraction</b>	and to <b>find diversions / be interrupted in our work</b>  DNA: preoccupation (more a sense of focus elsewhere rather than the scattered focus that captures the idea of distraction)
25	<b>reducing stress</b> in our lives when we finish what needs to be done	<b>lowering the pressure</b> we face
26	and leave <u>no reason to doubt</u> its <b>quality</b>	<i>(sense-for-sense)</i>  <u>without compromising on</u> <b>standards</b> of our tasks. <b>OR</b> <u>and makes us certain of</u> the <b>standards</b> .



## Paragraph 6

### Question 6

Using your own words as far as possible, explain the irony which the author describes in lines 51-52. [2]

Question Type: Inference (Use of Language)		
From Passage		Suggested Answer
Lapsing into mediocrity stems from a <b>self-defeating fear of failure</b> . To the souls resigned to kidding themselves about the bravery of their (lack of) movement, I say, stand up. Stand against the irony of being so <b>paralysed by the desire to not fall short of one's own expectations that we lower our expectations to the ground</b> .	(a)	<b>Expectation:</b>  a1) One would expect that to meet our goals, we would <b>work towards them</b> .  OR  a2) It is ironic because when we strive for excellence, one would expect to be <b>adamant about meeting (high) standards</b> of ourselves.
	(b)	<b>Reality:</b>  b1) In reality, we are so afraid of failing that we <b>prevent ourselves from having the chance / trying to succeed</b> .  b2) Instead, we end up <b>bringing our standards down</b> in order to avoid disappointment.  <b>All-or-Nothing</b> <b>(2m for clear explanation of irony)</b>

## From Passage 2

### Paragraph 1

## Question 7

Explain the author's use of inverted commas in line 5-6. [1]

Question Type: Inference (Use of Language)		
From Passage		Suggested Answer
Even the most ordinary institutions also are expected to be nothing less than excellent. Companies want to be "world class" and schools have become "academies of excellence".	(a)	<b>Function:</b> a1) The inverted commas are <b>used to quote</b> as the author wishes to <b>distance</b> himself from the phrases. <b>OR</b> b2) To <b>cast doubt</b> on...
	(b)	<b>Context:</b> b1) This is because the author <b>disagrees</b> with the <u>imposition of exceptional standards on ordinary institutions</u> . b2)... the <u>exceptional standards</u> that <u>organisations aspire towards</u> . <div style="text-align: right;"><b>All-or-Nothing</b> <b>(1m for both function and context)</b></div>

## Paragraph 2

### Question 8

What reason does the author suggest in paragraph 2 for why pursuing excellence creates 'huge inequalities' (line 8)? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

Question Type: Literal + Simple Inference (option 2)		
From Passage		Suggested Answer
When <u>high performers</u> are <b>showered with rewards</b> , the <u>great mass of us who are average</u> <b>miss out</b> . OR This can spark resentment in those who <b>feel that they do not measure up</b> .	(a)	a1) When <u>top achievers</u> are <b>given a great amount of benefits</b> ... a2) When high performers are likely get to <b>grow in confidence</b> ...
	(b)	b1) ... <u>the majority of us who are mediocre</u> <b>get nothing</b> . b2) ... while the masses instead experience <b>lowered self-esteem</b> . <div style="text-align: right;"><b>1m for each point</b></div>



## Paragraph 4

### Question 9

What negative consequences of pursuing excellence are implied in paragraph 4? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [3]

Question Type: Literal + Simple Inference		
From Passage		Suggested Answer
But they would not make <b>outlandish promises about being everything for staff.</b>	(a)	<p><i>(sense-for-sense)</i>            They <b>exaggerate</b> their <b>value</b> to their <u>employees'</u> lives            OR            they <b>exaggerate</b> about what they can <b>offer</b> <u>their employees</u>.  <i>Note: Any reasonable interpretation</i></p>
nor would they <b>make outlandish demands</b> <u>on them</u> .	(b)	<p>When organisations aim to be exceptional, they <b>place preposterous/ unfair expectations/ pressure on</b> <u>their employees</u>.</p>
Good-enough schools provide a safe and stimulating environment for students to learn in, but they would <b>not do the learning for</b> <u>the students</u> .	(c)	<p>When schools aim to be exceptional, they <b>take away</b> <u>students' ability/ opportunity to gain knowledge independently</u>.  <i>Note: Any reasonable interpretation</i></p>
Good-enough healthcare would provide the support we need when we are ill, but it does not <b>constantly intrude into</b> <u>people's lives</u> to ensure they are well.	(d)	<p>When healthcare systems aim to be exceptional, they <b>persistently infringe on</b> <u>people's privacy/lives</u> to guarantee their health.</p>
		3m for any 3 points

### Question 10

How does the author support his argument that ‘being good enough does not just apply to our individual lives’ in paragraph 4? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

Question Type: Inference (Author’s craft)		
From Passage		Suggested Answer
Being good enough <b>does not just apply to our individual lives. It also can inform how we think about our institutions</b>	(a)	<b>Method:</b>  The author supports his argument by providing a <b>range of examples...</b>
<u>Good-enough</u> workplaces would...  <u>Good-enough</u> schools...  <u>Good-enough</u> healthcare...	(b)	<b>Context:</b>  ... that being ‘good enough’ applies in <b>different domains beyond the individual.</b>  <i>Note: Accept as long as they recognise more than one domain.</i>  <b>1m for each point</b>

### Question 11 (Application Question)

Charlie Bing makes the case that we must strive for excellence, while André Spicer argues that we should embrace being good enough. How far do you agree or disagree with their observations? Support your answer with reference to your own experience and that of your society.

Unpacking the question requirements:

- **The AQ preamble guides the selection of claims.** Taking the AQ preamble as a whole, the point of contention here is about the value of striving for excellence (Passage 1) as opposed to embracing being good enough (Passage 2). Candidates should address at least one claim from each passage and the chosen claim needs to address either the need to strive for excellence or its damaging effects.
- **“How far do you agree or disagree”** is an invitation to consider the logic of the arguments, beyond just whether the claims are applicable in the societal context or not.
- As with any AQ, students needed to **relate their arguments to that of their society and their personal experiences.** This could look like examples/observations explained with reference to deeper underlying societal characteristics (i.e., ‘chasing the whys’).

Notes about a Double Passage Application Question:

- Note that while identifying common threads across the two passages can lend to an insightful response, this is not required and is not the only way to achieve insight.