



NANYANG JUNIOR COLLEGE

JC1 END-OF-YEAR EXAMINATION 2023

GENERAL PAPER

8881/02

PAPER 2:

Friday 22 September 2023

INSERT

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THIS INSTRUCTION FIRST

This insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

Passage 1: *An author writes about the negative aspects of being under pressure.*

- 1 Most of us have never competed in the Olympic Games, but we know what it is like to work under pressure. It is not uncommon for people to push past their limits — or at least their perceived limits — in order to deliver in a high-pressure situation. The outcomes that people are able to achieve when up against a deadline lead many to say, “I work better under pressure.” However, the idea that the looming deadline, last-minute scramble, or superhuman effort improves performance is a fallacy — and a destructive one at that. There is no evidence that we work better under pressure. In fact, working consistently under pressure and stress can erode our mental health and well-being. 5
- 2 Unfortunately, prioritising our mental health is not normalised, especially at the highest levels. That conversation is changing. When four-time gold medal gymnast, Simone Biles, dropped out of the competition at the 2021 Olympic Games after experiencing immense stress, her actions showed the world what it looks like to speak up, take action and take care of your mental and physical health. Perhaps most of all, Biles showed what it looks like to know yourself and to really understand how your own performance works. 10
- 3 Performance pressure has typically been seen as a necessary part of performing at a high level. We tell people that in order to excel, they have to learn to deal with pressure — and that the way they handle it would make or break their career. We never talk about whether the pressure would make or break them. People are taught and coached to succeed. Far fewer have been taught how to fail and bounce back. In the process of prioritising success, we are told that we only need to push ourselves physically in order to perform. But the connection between mind and body has been proven. So, why are we not talking more about the mind-performance connection? 15 20
- 4 Interest in the social science of performance and well-being is not new. During the Industrial Revolution, employers focused on maximising productivity — factories were a dangerous place to be. Henry Ford is best known for revolutionising the assembly line, but that was not his only contribution to the modern workplace. He also standardised the (shorter) 40-hour work-week and increased employees’ weekly wages. Incredibly, when work hours went down and pay rates went up, efficiency and productivity skyrocketed. 25
- 5 The insight about worker well-being and productivity has led to innovations like employer-sponsored health insurance but has been slow to translate into holistic well-being for employees. Ultimately, Ford’s employees were ‘just workers’, with their performance measured as units produced, their work safety, happiness and fulfilment something left uninvestigated. And, 100 years later, we still treat higher-level performance as something elite, attained and maintained through endurance, toughness, and sheer force of will. Yet we know that human beings are more than just their talent, skills, knowledge, abilities, and strength. They feel stress. They feel doubt and fear. They get distracted and frustrated. They get excited, hopeful and inspired. It affects how they show up and what they do. 30 35
- 6 Performance and well-being are not mutually exclusive, and they do not exist in spite of one another. Trees do not bear fruit without water and sunshine. Olympic athletes do not perform without rest and care. Biles was the one on the world stage, but her experience resonated with so many. The pressures that people feel to excel and perform are eroding their ability to actually do so. If we want to empower people to be their best and most productive selves, we have to see them as our most valuable resource — and one worth taking care of. 40

Passage 2: *An author explores the benefits of managing pressure.*

- 1 There is this perception that being under pressure is always bad for the brain, but that is not true. Psychologists and neuroscientists are keen to arm us with the knowledge that stress, if managed well, can do immense good. This type of positive stress is known as ‘eustress’ (the ‘eu’ prefix is from the ancient Greek for ‘well’ or ‘good’).
- 2 When it comes to the effects of stress, perspective is king. Stress can be distressing if our emotions burgeon out of control and anger, anxiety and self-doubt take over our minds. This is where we end up talking about ‘emotion regulation’, which is the idea that, rather than being at the beck and call of our emotions, we apply different strategies to experience favourable outcomes of being under pressure. These include things like mindfulness, reframing or just avoiding certain situations. Anything else that helps elevate mood is helpful here, too – exercise, a healthy diet, getting enough rest. 5 10
- 3 We can also look at our response and use what is called ‘emotional acceptance’. In such a case, we should not try to modify emotions but to leave them alone. We should get used to our emotions and learn to live with them and be more accepting of them rather than trying to over-manage them. Of course, we would get used to challenging situations too. That is the way to become more resilient. And then, when we are used to it, we would be able to prevent ourselves from tipping the balance from eustress to distress. 15
- 4 Once we convert distress into eustress by reframing stressful situations as positive challenges, we would be able to reap the benefits. Eustress is crucial to our survival: it serves to elevate our performance, is super-important for alertness and prepares us to adapt to the next thing that comes along. 20
- 5 If you are struggling to see the positive aspects in a situation and that is giving you knots in your stomach, remember, some pressure is desirable and even necessary, because that is how we demonstrate agency, that we are active in the world. Without challenge comes boredom. A life with zero stress is not a life worth living. 25

Passage 3: *A CEO views pressure as a privilege.*

- 1 I have come to view the inevitable periods of pressure that accompany leadership and life as a golden opportunity to do some of my best work when it matters most — and to engage with the people around me in a most meaningful way. It is in those moments where the odds are stacked against us, when the heat is palpable and the stakes feel high, that we can delight in rising to the challenge and prevailing. Or, at the very worst, in the words of Teddy Roosevelt — if we fail, at least we fail while ‘daring greatly’. 5
- 2 Ultimately, you cannot win if you do not play. If we want to win in life and leadership, we cannot skirt pressures by playing it safe. We have to step into the ring, lean in to the punches, and do our darndest to come out on top. With that in mind, here are some reasons why pressure is a privilege. 10
- 3 They say ‘necessity is the mother of invention’. I would also argue that ‘pressure is the mother of performance’. It is widely accepted that we must thrust ourselves into unfamiliar situations to truly develop. While having to work in a pressure cooker all the time can certainly take its toll and become counter-productive over time, brief periods of high pressure can meaningfully help us further hone our skills, perform better, and achieve breakthrough performance. 15
- 4 Secondly, pressure helps us engage with life more meaningfully. Pressure gives us the opportunity to experience the joys and pitfalls of life more fully and to savour them more completely. Life is short. We cannot let opportunities to test ourselves pass us by. Pressure is the privilege to try ever harder, to win (and lose) bigger, and to experience the full range of feelings that life has to offer us for the brief time we are here. We ought to grab onto it. 20