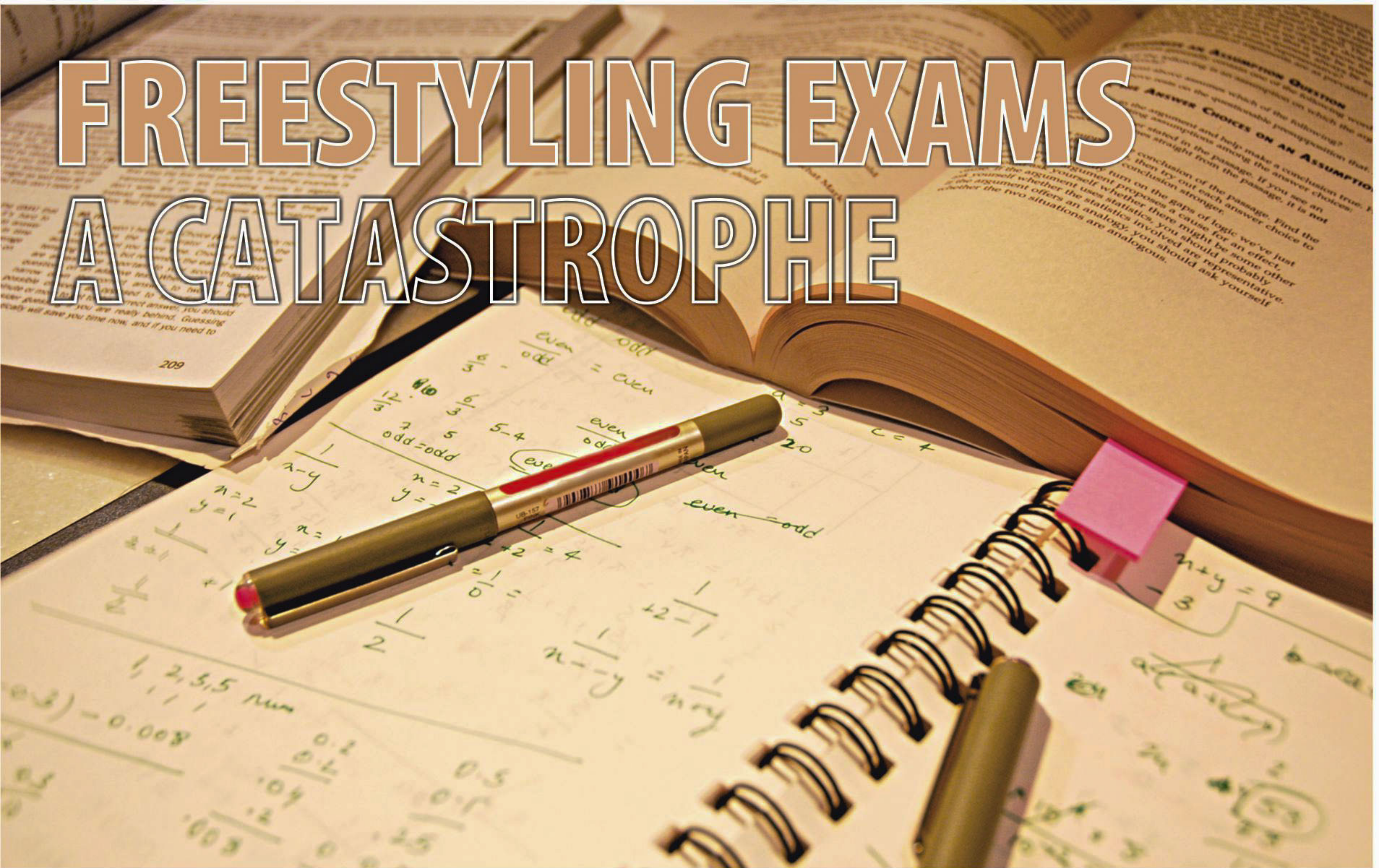


# FREESTYLING EXAMS

## A CATASTROPHE



DEEPARGHYA DUTTA BARUA

Attending an exam with absolutely no preparation is a harrowing experience. It always starts with uploading pictures of books piling on your desk at the beginning of the year. Soon enough, the layers of dust on top of the books get thicker as one gets stuck in the loop of procrastination. I myself had committed the fallacy of assuming that I'd do fine in exams without any effort and for the amount of nausea it had caused at that moment of my life, I can proudly say that I have learnt nothing from my mistakes and am still continuing to waste hours of my life by watching nonsensical videos on YouTube.

Like always, I walked into the exam hall brimming with confidence. As these people were out there losing their minds over something so petty, I, an intellectual, had already started making plans for vacation (none of which would get fulfilled) even though there were at least five more exams for me to cover, which also happened to be the number of courses I took that semester.

My bubble of self-admiring thoughts burst when the bell rang. The questions got handed out eventually and like always, I got a seat at the back of the middle column, making me one of the last examinees to get the question. As I went through the entire question paper once, I assured myself a decent grade on the basis that I was able to determine that the words were in English. I started to approach the questions one by one.

Fifteen minutes in and I had started

chewing the bottom of my pen. Yes, I was still on the first question but that's not the point; time is a construct, after all. However, the question I intended to solve was a calculus problem but somehow my answers were showing me a result of 59.82 grams of sodium carbonate. As I wasted the next five minutes blankly staring at the paper, a sudden bite on the pen sent tremors through my neurons and reactivated my analytical capabilities. If I were a pesky examiner, I'd obviously try to nerf the students by making the very first question nearly impossible to solve, which they obviously tried to pull off. I skipped that one. But to my misfortune, I found myself in the same rut and this time it involved plotting a graph but my vertices seemed to span from one corner of the page to the table where one of the invigilators were discharging a highly judgmental gaze towards me.

My profound confidence in solving things with infinitesimal preparations had started to shudder. Every single question I touched pulled off a Mr. Meeseeks without providing a solution and on the other hand, my pen was giving the impression that it went through another Chernobyl disaster. All it took was a second mind-opening chew and I had automatically regained my perceptibility. No, I didn't solve a single problem but I could see my inner social reformist start to roar out of its cage. Had I been given a keyboard in front of me right then, I would have written a five-thousand-word status update on how we all are being framed by the broken educational system and that the way of

distributing questions is flawed, of which the backbenchers of the middle column are the worst victims. I started to see myself as the poster child of the single most marginalised community — mid-column backbenchers.

The second bell rang and my fantasy drowned itself in the gloomy puddle of black ink. All the problems were still half-answered and I only had an hour in hand. My expectations lowered down from 'Decent grades' to 'Minimum grades required to pass this exam'. This called for a strategic timeout but my two remaining neurons were barring me from doing so by repeating that one annoying Hindi song that had been played by my neighbours the previous night, something that I wanted to delete off of my brain instantly. It seemed that science is only interesting when the guys on YouTube explain it. But, what if I was not the only one who had been going through such misery? I looked around this time to look for anxious faces that would provide ration to my own insecurities. To my surprise, everyone had their heads buried three feet deep into the desks, writing and possibly increasing their chances of getting severe back pain in the future. Nope, my unrealistic thought of being the class topper for being the best among the worst won't be coming true this time.

There was only one possible outcome. My low CGs would most likely restrict me to two job choices; one of them being 'Eminem' and the other one being a typist, the only skill I've acquired in my short, yet tiring 20-year-long run. I took a trip down

my memory lane — how I had wanted to be a big scientist when I was a child, a phase in which the word 'Scientist' basically stands for shaking a coke bottle with mint in it. Flashes of the SpaceX logo along with Elon Musk's fake tweets started dancing around in my vivid daydreaming ephemera, a dream so distant that even Musk himself would not dare to send rockets to chase it.

I began to accept things for how they were. I understood that my preparations were not adequate and that I should have not stayed up till 3 a.m. binging on Star Wars just to get the references made by that one girl who's completely out of my league. "Grades won't come the easy way," I gasped, something I'd tell myself again in a week from then, and then in the week following that. "No-one learns anything, because no-one lives long enough to see the pattern, I guess." At that point I pictured myself as a Greek philosopher, with a two-foot-long beard hanging from my chin, birds chirping in the background and my own thoughts reverberating between distant mountains which would most likely get detonated in the future for coal reserves.

The final bell rang. I asked the guy behind me if there were marks for partial answers or not. Met with the most centrist answer possible — "It depends."

*Deeparghya Dutta Barua likes to feel apprehensive whenever there are more than two people around. Help him in finding new ways of butchering his name at [deeparghya@rantages.com](mailto:deeparghya@rantages.com)*