

**2017 JC2 GP Preliminary Examination  
Paper 2 Suggested Answers**

**1. What is the purpose of the author's opening question?**

**[1]**

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How amazing is it that today we live in a culture that not only has something called the Food Network but now has a hit show on that network called "The Next Food Network Star," in which thousands of 20- and 30-somethings compete eagerly to become? (l. 1–3)</li> </ul>	<p>The author uses the opening question to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>introduce the topic of the passage.</li> <li>introduce the topic of the passage in an interesting way/ to engage the reader/attract the reader's attention.</li> <li>make the point that cooking programmes have become such a sensation/ become so popular.</li> <li>invite the reader to acknowledge/reflect on the remarkable proliferation of food shows in recent times.</li> <li>emphasise that cooking has now become a form of entertainment.</li> <li>indicate his disbelief/ incredulity that cooking programmes are so popular.</li> <li>highlight that cooking has become something where people pit their skills against one another.</li> <li>to express disbelief that so many young people would be interested/ enthusiastic in contending with/ challenging one another in a cooking competition to be a cooking champion.</li> </ul>

**2. How does the author illustrate the popularity of cooking programmes in lines 3–5? Use your own words as far as possible.**

**[2]**

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Food Network can now be <b>seen in nearly 100 million American homes</b> (l. 3–4)</li> <li>on <b>most nights</b>, commands <b>more viewers than any of the cable news channels</b>. (l. 4–5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many/ A large number of people/ Americans watch/ tune in to cooking programmes. [1]</li> <li>News/ other programmes have become less popular due to cooking programmes. [1] <b>OR</b></li> <li>They forgo watching news/ other programmes in favour of cooking programmes. [1]</li> </ul>

3. Explain why 'culinary combat' (line 8) is an apt description of cooking competitions on prime time television. Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On prime time television, famous restaurant chefs wage <b>culinary combat</b>... (l.8)</li> <li>...concoct the most <b>spectacular</b> meal... (l.9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Similar to how a combat involves fighters battling for supremacy against opponents, [1]</li> <li>on prime time food shows, celebrity chefs try to outdo/ defeat/ beat one another // strive to come up with the best/ winning dish/ to outperform rivals. [1]</li> </ul> <p><i>(Bullet 1 should not mention 'chef/ culinary combat'. Bullet 2 must mention 'chefs', and the idea of being victorious over opponents must be captured.)</i></p>

4. In paragraph 2, what similarities does the author see between cooking on television and sport? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On "Iron Chef America," a <b>running commentary</b> is given (l.11)</li> <li>...in sixty minutes...(l.8-9); as the iron chefs and their teams <b>race the clock</b> (l.12)</li> <li>to <b>peel, chop, slice, dice, mince, boil, double-boil, pan-sear, sauté, deep-fry, pressure-cook, grill, deglaze, reduce and plate</b> (l.12–13)</li> <li>A particularly <b>dazzling</b> display of cheffy knife <b>skills</b> will earn an <b>instant replay</b> – an onion minced in slow motion (l.14–16)</li> <li>The commentator asks in a <b>hushed tone</b>, "Can we get a camera on this? It looks like Chef Flay's going to try for a last-minute garnish grab before the clock runs out! Will he make it? [The buzzer sounds.] Yes!" (l.16–18)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>[A]</b> During both events, a concurrent explanation/ description of the action/ development is provided.</li> <li><b>[B]</b> There is a time limit imposed on both sports teams and chefs and their teams. <i>(For Bullet B, 'as fast/ quickly as they can' is not accepted.)</i></li> <li><b>[C]</b> A myriad/ an array of/ many skills are showcased during/ required for both events.</li> <li><b>[D]</b> In both cooking and sport, demonstrations of prowess/ ability are rewarded with an immediate encore of the action/ repeat telecast/ playback. <i>(For Bullet D, the answer should reflect 'instant' replay, and the cause and effect must be reflected.)</i></li> <li><b>[E]</b> The commentators create suspense/ excitement /sensationalise the action/ creates a sense of anticipation.// The atmosphere is filled with suspense/ excitement before the outcome is known.</li> </ul> <p>1 – 2pts=1m, &gt; 3pts=2m</p>

5. What is the author implying about cooking competitions by his use of the word 'sadistic' in line 26? [1]

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When in real life are even professional chefs required to conceive and execute dishes in twenty minutes from ingredients selected by a third party exhibiting obvious <b>sadistic</b> tendencies? (l.24–26)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The author is implying that cooking competitions are based on producers/ viewers deriving enjoyment/ pleasure/ entertainment from watching chefs struggle/ suffer/ fail./ Producers/viewers like to watch/ are happy when chefs suffer/ fail. [1]</li> </ul>

6. In paragraph 4, identify three reasons why it is difficult to learn how to cook from watching cooking competitions. Use your own words as far as possible. [3]

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are no <b>recipes to follow</b> (l. 30)</li> <li>the contests <b>fly by much too fast</b> (l.30)</li> <li>and the kind of cooking on television is <b>far more spectacular</b> than anything you would ever try at home (l. 31–32)</li> <li>...“<b>How much do you learn</b> about playing basketball by watching the NBA?” (l. 33–34)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[A] There are no instructions as to the ingredients used/ the method of food preparation/ on how to replicate the dish.</li> <li>[B] The rapid pace of the competition makes it difficult for viewers to follow and learn something from it.</li> <li>[C] The difficulty/ complexity/ standard of such cooking is beyond the capabilities of most home cooks.// The types of dishes are much more impressive/ splendid/ fantastic/ elaborate than home cooked ones.</li> <li>[D] The skills/ practices of professional chefs are not easily transferrable to home cooking/ picked up/ acquired (inferred).</li> </ul> <p><i>Any 3 points for 3 marks</i></p>

7. Explain why cooking shows 'captivate' (line 35) viewers. Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<p>Yet, cooking shows captivate us because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>food is <b>attractive</b> to humans ... (l.35)</li> <li>and that attraction can be enhanced by <b>food styling</b>. (l.35–36)</li> </ul>	<p>Cooking shows captivate viewers because food is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>alluring/ inviting/ appealing/ tempting to people// food draws our attention/ interest [1]</li> <li>and it is made even more so by the way in which food is presented/ displayed/ arranged/ fashioned/ designed/ decorated/ served. [1]</li> </ul>

8. In lines 43–46, what explanations does the author offer for the ‘direct and satisfying’ (line 42) nature of kitchen work? Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...get to put their <b>hands on real</b> things, not keyboards and screens but <b>fundamental</b> things like plants and animals (l.43–44) ... <b>material</b> world (l.46)</li> <li>ends with such a <b>gratifying</b> and <b>tasty</b> sense of closure (l.46)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cooking allows us to connect/ work with concrete/ tangible/ material/ actual/ physical/ natural things. [1]</li> <li>We are rewarded with a delicious/ delectable dish.// We get to cook/ eat delicious food/ enjoy food. [1]</li> </ul> <p><i>(Bullet 2 should include both parts: ‘gratifying’ + ‘tasty’.)</i></p>

9. Explain the paradox in paragraph 7. Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

Lifted Answer	Suggested Paraphrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <b>rise</b> of celebrity chefs has, paradoxically, coincided with the rise of fast food, home-meal replacements and the <b>decline of everyday home cooking</b> (l.48–50)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>[A]</b> With more celebrity chefs demonstrating their cooking prowess/with the popularity of chefs and their cooking shows today,</li> <li>▪ <b>[B]</b> it would be logical to assume that more people would be inspired to cook/ it is expected that people would be doing more cooking/ there would be more interest in home cooking.</li> <li>▪ <b>[C]</b> However/ Paradoxically/ The contradiction is that an increasing number of people instead opt not to cook/ do not cook/ settle for pre-cooked food/ prefer ready-made meals.</li> </ul> <p><i>(Note: A contrast linker should be used to indicate the paradox. [A] is the premise which must be present; [C] should also be present to explain the paradox. [A] + [C] = 1 mk [A] + [B] = 0 mk [A] + [C] = 0 mk [A] + [B] + [C] = 2mk</i></p>

**10. Using material from paragraphs 8–11 (lines 51–82) only, summarise the reasons for the decline of home cooking, and how this has contributed to the increase in obesity.**

**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. [8]**

*Home cooking is in decline because...*

Lifted Answer		Suggested Paraphrase
<b>Reasons for the decline in home cooking</b>		
▪ it does not <b>pay the rent</b> (l.51)	<b>A1</b>	▪ it provides no financial returns.
▪ our work <b>does not leave us</b> the time (l.51–52)... putting in <b>longer hours at work</b> (l.52–53)	<b>A2</b>	▪ Work/jobs/careers/earning a living consumes our time/ makes us busy/busier,
▪ <b>enjoying</b> less time at home (l.53)	<b>A3</b>	▪ reducing time at home.
▪ The <b>entrance of women into the work force</b> is responsible for the <b>collapse</b> of home cooking (l.57)	<b>A4</b>	▪ Furthermore, more women have their own careers
▪ So do women <b>without jobs</b> (l.59)... the same rapid rate among women who do not <b>work outside</b> the home (l.60–61)	<b>A5</b>	▪ and even homemakers/housewives cook less.
▪ <b>rising income</b> (l.61) ... more <b>money</b> (l.62) ... greater <b>financial means</b> (l.63)	<b>A6</b>	▪ As people become richer/ more affluent,
▪ has also led to increased spending on <b>restaurants or takeout food</b> (l.61–62) ... <b>pay corporations</b> to do their cooking ... allow <b>corporations to cook for them</b> (l.62–64)	<b>A7</b>	they spend more money dining out/ more people dine out more often/ they buy/ purchase commercially-prepared meals  (accept 'outsource')
▪ the food industry <b>laboured mightily</b> to <b>sell</b> American women on (l.65)	<b>A8</b>	▪ Food businesses aggressively market to women (degree of marketing must be reflected as in 'mightily')
▪ all the processed food <b>wonders</b> it had <b>invented</b> (l.65–66)	<b>A9</b>	▪ remarkable/ amazing/ novel innovations of
▪ <b>Instant everything</b> (l.67)	<b>A10</b>	▪ ready-made food/ convenient food/ easily prepared food.
▪ <b>keeping</b> it <b>looking attractive</b> (l.68)	<b>A11</b>	▪ Food technology has improved the presentation/ appearance of such food// makes such food look delicious/ appealing/ alluring/ tantalising,
▪ and <b>seemingly fresh</b> (l.69)	<b>A12</b>	▪ making it appear just-prepared/ cooked/ newly prepared/ so that it does not look stale. (look 'new' is not accepted)
▪ the <b>rapid acceptance</b> of microwave ovens ... (l.69)	<b>A13</b>	▪ The prevalence/ popularity of microwave ovens/ cooking appliances/devices/ kitchen technology also

		<i>('technology' is not accepted unless it is cooking technology)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>opened up <b>vast new horizons</b> of home-meal <b>replacement</b> (l.70–71)</li> </ul>	<b>A14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>gave rise to endless/ infinite/ never-ending/ myriad/ diverse alternatives/ substitutes/ options to home cooking. (<i>answer must include 'vast' + 'replacement'</i>)</li> </ul>
<b>How it has contributed to the increase in obesity</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Mass</b> production has <b>driven down the cost</b> of many foods (l.72–73)... for <b>less than a dollar</b> (l.76)</li> </ul>	<b>B1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This has contributed to obesity because factory/ bulk production of food/ food produced in great quantities has decreased the price of food/ made food cheaper</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Driven down... the <b>amount of time</b> required to obtain them (l.73–74)...<b>wait</b> to enjoy these items (l.78)</li> </ul>	<b>B2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>and more convenient to buy/ more readily accessible/ has reduced the duration needed to obtain it. (inferred)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All these <b>hard-to-make-at-home</b> foods (l.74) ... <b>transformed</b> into <b>everyday fare</b> (l.76)</li> </ul>	<b>B3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food that is labour-intensive/ difficult/ complicated to prepare has become commonplace/ ordinary/ regular/ available everywhere/ the norm, (<i>answer must include 'hard-to-make' + 'everyday fare'</i>)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we can buy <b>on a whim</b> (l.76)... <b>impulsively</b> (l.79)...we no longer have to <b>plan</b> (l.77)...<b>delay</b> in <b>gratification</b> (l.80)</li> </ul>	<b>B4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>and is purchased on the spur of the moment/ with little thought/ at the drop of a hat.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>we <b>eat more</b> of them (l.77)... <b>indulge</b> (l.79)</li> </ul>	<b>B5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hence/ Therefore/ As a result, we tend to overeat/ gorge ourselves/ binge.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The question is, can we ever put the genie back into the bottle? (l.81–82)</li> </ul>	<b>B6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This trend seems to be irreversible/ impossible to stop/ we may not be able to stop this situation. (inferred)</li> </ul>

**Mark scheme (20 points)**

1 point	1 mark	5-6 points	4 marks	11-12 points	7 marks
2 points	2 marks	7-8 points	5 marks	≥ 13 points	8 marks
3-4 points	3 marks	9-10 points	6 marks		

- 11. Michael Pollan discusses the reasons for the decline of home cooking. How far do you agree with his observations, relating your arguments to your own society? [10]**

### QUESTION ANALYSIS

#### **the reasons for the decline of home cooking**

- Pollan observes that people cook much less at home and supports his observation by giving reasons
- Students need to identify the reasons that Pollan gives in support of his stand

(Note: While Pollan also discusses some consequences arising from the decline of home cooking, these observations are not relevant to the question.)

#### **How far do you agree with his observations, relating your arguments to your own society?**

- **how far** → students should clearly state the degree of agreement/ disagreement with the author's stand, using appropriate qualifiers.
- **his observations** → students should identify author's overall stand in the passage + reasons given to support his stand.

#### **relating your arguments to your society**

- The society must be identified at the start of the answer.
- All aspects of the AQ answer must relate to the society identified and should not discuss issues in general.
- The answer must be contextualised in the society identified, right from the start.
- Residents of the society identified should not be referred to vaguely as 'people'; instead, specific nationalities such as 'Singaporeans', 'Malaysians', 'Chinese' (or other relevant nationalities) should be used throughout the answer.
- Answers should not vaguely describe what is happening in the society identified. Instead, answers should offer:
  - clear reasons and evaluation to support *how relevant* the authors' opinions are to that society.
  - some consideration/ evaluation whether and why different groups in the society identified might react differently: the elderly, young people, working adults, people with different educational levels, etc .
  - reasons why the situation in that society may have changed/ intensified/ abated in recent times: people's changing mindsets/ evolving social and economic realities/ creative business innovations/ technological advancement, etc.

### SUGGESTED APPROACH

**R:** The extent to which the student agrees with the observations Pollan makes which explains the decline of home cooking in the society he/she comes from.

**OB1–5:** Observations made by Pollan to support his stand (with relevant quotes from the passage). The chosen observation should be clearly stated with para/line reference at the start of each body paragraph.

- EX, EV:** Explaining, developing and evaluating arguments with reference to 'your own society', making the link clear to OB and R.
- EG:** Supporting ideas with relevant examples from the society identified, and making the link from the examples to OB, EX, EV and R.

## INTRODUCTION

- In my society Singapore, inexpensive local hawker food, usually in shopping malls and open-air complexes, has historically been a staple in the Singapore food scene.
- This shows no signs of slowing down as more women join the workforce, and fewer households cook at home due to the busy lifestyles of Singaporeans.
- **The observations of Pollan explaining the decline of home cooking do reflect the situation in Singapore. I am mostly in agreement with his observations, although it cannot be said home cooking in Singapore has altogether disappeared because people do still cook in the weekends and especially when they have domestic helpers to cook meals at home.**

## OBSERVATION 1

**Pollan argues that one of the reasons home cooking is in decline is that for most people, 'it does not pay the rent' (line 51). While I do not entirely agree with his view in the context of my society, it is undeniable that many Singaporeans still hold this view.**

- Certainly, there are many in my society who opt not to cook because they feel that their time can be more lucratively spent elsewhere. Living in a society which largely values pragmatism, coupled with the rising cost of living, many Singaporeans are very concerned with making the most of their time financially. As reported by AIA Singapore in 2016, 85% of working Singaporeans aged 25–45 feel that the increasing cost of living is their top financial concern. Singaporeans have also acquired a reputation for being materialistic, with the 5Cs – car, cash, condo(minium), credit card and country club – being goals to achieve for many ambitious young Singaporeans. Given such concerns and mindsets, it is no surprise that many Singaporeans are too busy making money in lucrative careers to cook at home.
- In fact, in 2016, Singaporeans clocked 2,371.2 hours of work, the longest hours anywhere in the world. Millennials, too, work very long hours - according to a 2015 international survey by Millennial Careers, Singaporean millennials are amongst those who work the longest hours, taking 4<sup>th</sup> place with an average of 48 hours a week, ahead of countries like Japan and the United States. That these long working hours are the result of a desire to make more money is supported by research by Randstad Awards 2016 which found that the prospect of making more money is primarily what motivates Singaporean workers to work more, as highlighted by 80% of respondents. Since whipping up meals at home diverts time away from their jobs and does nothing to meet their financial goals, many Singaporeans, then, choose to forgo home cooking, contributing to its decline.

**That being said, in recent years, an increasing number of Singaporeans have come to realise that they can, in fact, marry the joys of home cooking with the pleasure of earning money. Home cooking can, for such Singaporeans, indeed 'pay the rent' (line 51).**



- Many workaholic Singaporeans do realise the less-than-rosy long term health effects of eating out on a constant basis. However, many of these same Singaporeans also do not want to forgo their time spent earning money to prepare healthy home-cooked meals. Enterprising Singaporeans have stepped in to fill this gap by charging for home-cooked meals, allowing busy Singaporeans to enjoy healthy, home-cooked meals without the hassle of having to prepare them.
- The burgeoning success of the meal-sharing industry in Singapore has also largely been facilitated by the rapid rise in the number of online applications dedicated to matching time-starved Singaporeans to passionate home cooks. Being generally technologically-savvy, Singaporeans have been quick to avail themselves of these apps and develop even more of them. Recently developed apps like Dine Inn, Share Food Singapore and Hcook allow diners to search for food by cuisine or location, browse food photos, descriptions and customer reviews, and chat with home cooks. Diners can then either pick up their food from the home cook or enjoy a meal hosted by the home cook.
- Many of these apps report a healthy demand for meal-sharing amongst Singaporeans, with up to 200 orders received a week. Each of these apps also boasts up to 400 home cooks on their rosters, and the number of enterprising home cooks continues to rise. According to Luke Lee, founder of Dine Inn, there has been a 50% increase in sign-up rates for home chefs in early 2017.
- In fact, a significant proportion of home cooks registered on these apps come from low-income backgrounds and view meal-sharing as a means to support themselves and their families. For instance, about 20% of Hcook's home chefs are from low-income backgrounds, having been identified through regular talks with grassroots and non-profit organisations and encouraged to enter the meal-sharing industry.
- It can be seen that the decline of home cooking amongst many working Singaporeans who want to earn more in their careers has, conversely, contributed to other Singaporeans taking up home cooking for the same income-making reason. Home cooking in Singapore has clearly become, now more than ever, a rather viable source of income for those who are looking for novel ways to 'pay their rent' (line 51).

## OBSERVATION 2

**Pollan observes that longer hours at work (lines 52–53) and the entrance of women into the workforce (line 57) have led to the decline of home cooking. I agree that this situation has contributed to the decline of home cooking in several households in my society Singapore.**

- A generation or two ago, it used to be a must for Singaporean women to learn how to cook from their own mothers and mothers-in-law. However, with increasingly better and now equal educational opportunities for women in Singapore, more women are pursuing a career of their own. As such, many better educated Singaporean women do not see themselves relegated to the role of cook in the family.
- In 2016, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) for women in Singapore was 60.4%, according to the Ministry of Manpower. This is a significant increase from 54.3% a decade ago in 2006, indicating that today more than half of Singaporean women spend their day at the workplace rather than in the kitchen.
- However, it is still lower than the rates in many Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries which achieve 70% or more. The Singapore government recognises that there is another 40% of women to tap on for the economy

and has been encouraging more women to enter the workforce. In view of this, it does seem that home cooking will continue to decline.

- Furthermore, with the rising cost of living in Singapore, dual income families are becoming the norm here. In 2016, nearly 54 per cent of married couples in Singapore were dual-income couples, and the figure rose to over 75 per cent for those where the husband was under 35, and 70 per cent for those where the husband was aged 35 to 49.
- Perhaps even worse than the situation in America, Singaporeans spend long hours at work, clocking 2371.2 hours in 2016, the longest hours in the world.
- As a result of these factors, many Singaporeans have no choice but to eat out for lunch and are certainly too tired to prepare dinner after work, preferring to spend whatever time they have after work with their families or on leisure activities, which also include eating out with family and friends.
- According to a survey conducted by household and professional appliances company Electrolux in 2014, one-third of Singaporeans eat out more than they do at home – the second-highest figure among 10 Asia-Pacific countries polled. Those surveyed cited reasons such as cooking being a hassle and eating out due to necessity rather than out of preference. Similarly, the National Nutrition Survey conducted by the Health Promotion Board in 2010 showed that six in 10 Singaporeans eat out at least four times a week.
- Companies offering meal subscription services to busy CBD workers, such as Food Matters, FitThree and Kim's Kitchen, have sprung up in recent years. Similarly, weekday tingkat dinner delivery services are popular among harried Singaporean workers who have neither the time nor energy to cook. Such services have been around for more than 10 years and remain popular today with more than 30 caterers providing this service. In fact, companies such as Tong Chiang and Select Catering report an increase of 10 to 18 per cent in subscription rates over the last few years.

**While longer working hours and more women in the workforce are certainly responsible for less home cooking in many Singaporean families compared to the past, this does not mean that home cooking is non-existent in Singaporean households.**

- With more Singaporean households hiring domestic helpers, coming home to a home-cooked meal is not so rare. Furthermore, with many Singaporean grandparents lending a helping hand to care for their grandchildren and housing schemes to help married Singaporeans live near their parents, the possibility of having a home-cooked meal is higher for a number of working Singaporeans.
- The 107 wet markets (cum hawker centres) across Singapore are a clear indication that home cooking has not died out in Singaporean homes. These thriving wet markets are still the preferred place among home cooks to shop for the freshest vegetables and meat.
- Supermarkets such as Giant and NTUC Fairprice reported that Singaporeans are spending more than ever at supermarkets, particularly on fresh produce such as fruits, vegetables, seafood and meat, despite a weaker economic climate. Purchases from supermarkets hit \$2.3 billion in 2015, nearly double the \$1.2 billion in 2005. This is the highest spending in a decade, part of which can be attributed to a rising interest in home cooking.
- Shops such as Mayer, ToTT and Sia Huat which specialise in kitchen appliances and cookware sections in department stores which stock brands such as Le Creuset, Scanpan and WMF are well-patronised by Singaporean shoppers with an interest in home cooking.

- Furthermore, The Straits Times features regular columns about home cooking on Sundays. These include 'Singapore Cooks' which focuses on recipes shared by ordinary Singaporeans with a passion for home cooking, and 'Hunger Management' where journalist Tan Hsueh Yun has been sharing her recipes for a wide range of dishes since 2008. Even though the space taken up by these columns is small compared to the several pages in The Straits Times dedicated to places for eating out, home cooking is still alive in Singapore, despite some decline over the years.
- The array of recipe books stocked by local bookstores and libraries are also testimony to the interest in home cooking, at least among some, if not all, Singaporeans. These cookbooks range from local ones such as The New Mrs Lee's Cookbook to foreign ones such as Gordon Ramsay's Ultimate Home Cooking.
- Another indication that home cooking is not on the way to extinction in Singapore is the growing interest in cooking classes among many Singaporeans. Among the slew of cooking studios in Singapore are CulinaryOn, ABC Cooking Studio and Coriander Leaf which teach a variety of Asian and Western cuisine. At cooking studio Palate Sensations at Biopolis, registration for classes has grown by at least 20 per cent year on year since it started a decade ago in 2006.

**Although home cooking has declined with more women working outside the home, it has far from disappeared in Singapore and people do still prepare meals at home.**

### **OBSERVATION 3**

**Pollan argues that home cooking has declined because the food industry has 'laboured mightily to sell American women on all the processed food wonders it had invented' (I.65–66), and food scientists 'have gotten better and better at simulating real food, keeping it looking attractive and seemingly fresh' (I.67–69). Although I generally agree that these reasons also explain the decline of home cooking in my society Singapore, Singaporeans still do cook whenever they can because many feel that it is still the most healthy way of preparing and consuming food especially for the family.**

- Instant meals are appealing, especially to working adults who are strapped for time and appreciate the convenience of eating on the go. Food may be available around the clock in Singapore, but that has not stopped companies from producing and advertising processed food aggressively to busy people, especially working adults. Food companies such as Prima Taste Ready Meals are catering to busy, time-starved Singaporeans who want convenient meals and healthier food products. Many people who work lack sufficient time to prepare a meal from scratch which they can enjoy at any time of the day.
- To prepare an instant meal, one simply opens the packet, pours out the contents and heats them up in the microwave. Such processed food options are attractively packaged and look much like fresh meat and vegetables. Instead of dehydrated ingredients or MSG-laden instant noodles, French fries, nuggets and hot-dogs, ready-to-eat meals with meat and vegetables are hitting the shelves. Some even come with healthier mixed grain rice.
- Such food options making their entrance include briyani by House Brand, Chinese-style chicken soup from Freshen Food and curry chicken from Foodbox. Foodbox also offers Soy Ginger Chicken, Curry Chicken and Black Pepper Chicken to provide spicy and non-spicy choices. Prima Taste recently launched its Ready Meal range which features four flavours – Curry Chicken, Nonya Sambal Chicken, Beef Rendang and

Chicken Claypot Rice. The rice component is a mix of white basmati rice, wholegrain basmati rice and multi-grains.

- Food scientists have been producing healthy processed food sold in supermarkets using retort technology, a heatsterilisation process that keeps food shelf-stable without the use of preservatives. The meals are cooked from scratch and vacuum-sealed before sterilisation. By adjusting the heat parameters, flavours and nutrients are preserved, while bacteria is destroyed. These foods come in retort pouches and can be stored at room temperature and are shelf-stable for at least one year.
- Fuss-free instant mala or spicy hotpot meals from China have also become increasingly popular in Singapore. Although not yet currently available in major supermarkets, many Singaporeans who enjoy mala hotpot can buy it on websites such as Qoo10 and Shopee Singapore. Joneve Trading sold its entire first shipment of 600 instant hotpots online in just two days, and in June 2017, it sold more than 10,000 individual packs of Ba Shu Lan Ren hotpots online.
- These instant spicy hotpot meals come in three mala flavours: original, rice and meat, and beef. They come complete with a heat pack that, when activated by room-temperature water, generates enough heat to steam a small bowl of ingredients for 15 to 20 minutes. Although the ingredients were not freshly packed, customers found mala hotpot to be flavourful and authentic. The vegetables such as fungus, potatoes and mushroom did not look stale and were palatable. Even the rice tasted surprisingly fragrant and soft. Customers like the convenience that instant self-heating meals provide, especially if they are strapped for time.
- Besides purchasing instant meals online, students and working adults are also turning to vending machines to buy ready-to-eat meals sold at convenience stores to satisfy their hunger pangs. Singapore's first all-vending machine cafe, VendCafe, was an instant hit when it opened in August in 2016, with long queues forming to try its hot meals. A second and third VendCafe outlet opened at Ang Mo Kio MRT station and Lakeside station in July 2017.
- Leveraging on technology, meals from vending machines feature a special vacuum skin packaging which would ensure preserved flavour and colour, keep portions fresh and unmixed on the tray, and extend shelf life with no compromise on nutrition.
- Many are rather impressed by the taste and quality of food offerings from vending machines which have become increasingly sophisticated: seafood hor fun, salted egg yolk pasta, popiah and even spaghetti carbonara can be obtained from a vending machine. Cheers also recently teamed up with consortium The Common Good Company to provide a new line of ready-to-eat meals from prominent local brands like Pastamania and The Soup Spoon.

**Even though the increasing popularity of such instant processed food has caused a decline in home cooking, Singaporeans generally still feel that home cooking is more healthy even though they may not always have the time to cook at home.**

- While single working adults may try instant food from vending machines or buy them online, families generally prefer to cook meals at home so that the entire family can interact and bond over a meal eaten together. Many working adults with families in Singapore are weekend chefs. They enjoy cooking simple meals for the family when there is more time to shop for fresh, nutritious ingredients and cook them in healthier ways. Additionally, a good number of families in Singapore have domestic helpers who cook for the family every day, and the family eats out only occasionally. Extended families with grandparents usually prefer home-cooked food and almost never buy instant food online.
- Dietitians have cautioned against consuming ready-to-eat meals on a regular basis, pointing to the higher salt content these meals tend to have. Salt adds to the flavour of

the food, but also acts as a preservative to prevent bacteria growth and extend the shelf life of the product. High salt content could put people at risk of hypertension or cardiovascular diseases. Due to the perishability of vegetables, these meals also tend to have fewer greens, which affects their nutritional value.

- Additionally, the cooking and storage processes involved in preparing these instant meals may also reduce the nutrients in the food, particularly vitamins like Vitamin D and E, which are temperature-sensitive.
- Instant processed meals such as TV-dinners (pre-packaged frozen or chilled meal that usually comes in individual portions) which can be taken from the fridge and reheated for dinner, are not all that popular among Singaporeans who generally prefer to eat out affordably at food courts and fast food chains.

**Thus, although dining out and instant meals are gaining popularity among busy working adults in Singapore, Singaporeans are generally knowledgeable about the dangers of consuming processed food, and they still do enjoy more healthily prepared home-cooked food even though they do not cook very often.**

## OBSERVATION 4

The author points out that the rapid acceptance of the microwave opened up “vast new horizons of home meal replacement” (lines 73–75). **While this may be true in more Western countries as evidenced by the ubiquitous microwave TV-dinners, I definitely do not agree that this phenomenon is relatable to my society, Singapore.**

- Singapore is well-known internationally as a food paradise through the marketing efforts of the STPB and true to this reputation, there are many more alternatives than what can be found in the frozen section of microwave meals at supermarkets or convenience stalls like 7-11 where there is a reasonable variety of such microwaveable meals that boast local dishes such as chicken rice to shrimp wanton soup. **However, in my society, the microwave may be more likely to be used for thawing frozen food to re-heating food than for such microwave meals.**
- Typically, Singaporean families which do not cook at home for various reasons are **much more likely** to turn to the conveniently located neighborhood coffee-shops which have ‘zi-char’ or literally ‘stir-fry’ stalls offering dishes reminiscent of home-cooked meals like sambal kangkong (local greens in spicy chilli paste) to sweet-and-sour ribs and everyday fare like fried-rice or ‘hor-fun’ (broad rice noodles) served piping hot and at very reasonable prices.
- In addition, there are also food-courts or hawker centers in every HDB estate or shopping malls where stalls offer local favorites like chicken-rice to ‘mee-soto’ (Malay spicy soup noodle dish) or ‘nasi-briyani’ (Indian basmati rice cooked in spices with chicken or mutton) which are all freshly made, mostly cooked on the spot, at prices that are even more friendly on the wallet. Any true-blue Singaporean would be able to rattle off a few of their favorite stalls from Tian Tian to Wee Nam Kee for local favorites like Hainanese Chicken Rice.
- The popularity and demand for hawker centres is so strong that the government announced in 2011-2012 that ten new hawker centres will be built in newer and even more mature HDB housing estates, from Woodlands to Pasir Ris, to ensure that affordable local fare will be readily available to all.
- **On top of such almost-home-cooked alternatives**, Singaporean families, especially dual-income families, typically hire foreign domestic workers who are usually expected to prepare meals for the family as well. Out of a population of more than five and a half million, there are slightly more than a quarter of a million foreign domestic workers

in Singapore, all of whom have some basic training in cooking and taking care of household chores.

- **Last but not least**, there is another social phenomenon whereby working couples may have meals after work with their parents or in-laws who may be helping to look after their younger children, sometimes assisted by said foreign domestic workers. This phenomenon can be partially attributed to deliberate housing policies for HDB flats such as the Proximity Housing Grant of \$20,000 which has been introduced to further help families who want to buy a resale flat, to live in with or near their parents.

**With such mouth-watering dishes and value for money alternatives available, on top of deliberate government policies, it is not difficult to see why microwave meal-replacements have not taken off in a big way in my society, Singapore. Ironically, it may be such ready availability of affordable and ready sources of local fare that contribute to the decline of home-cooking instead of the microwaveable home meal replacement.**

## OBSERVATION 5

**Pollan also observes that ‘rising income has also led to increased spending on restaurants or takeout food’ (lines 61–62). I do generally agree with this observation as I find this happening in Singapore.**

- As the Singaporean economy has grown over the years, the average Singaporean has become more affluent. At the individual level, Singaporeans are typically hardworking, pragmatic with their finances and often career-oriented, all of which surely contributes to increasing income level of the average Singaporean.
- Singapore’s adult population had an average wealth of about US\$276,885 (S\$395,000) per person in 2016, an increase of 1.4% from 2015, as reported by Global Wealth Report which ranked Singapore top in Asia and seventh globally among major economies.
- With such personal wealth at their disposal, coupled with long working hours, it is no wonder that many Singaporeans have no qualms about eating out regularly and pampering themselves at restaurants and other eateries. The huge number of food offerings ranging from fast-food outlets and hawker centres to fine dining establishments does also play a part in encouraging Singaporeans to eat out, with food offerings matching any budget one might have.
- In a survey conducted by MasterCard, Singaporeans emerged the top spenders on dining out among South-east Asian countries, with an average monthly amount of US\$198 in 2013.
- Furthermore, at least 12 per cent of Singapore respondents indicated that they plan to dine out at more expensive venues, while a quarter of respondents said they plan to eat out more in the next six months, at the time of the survey. Millennials think nothing of splurging on fancy healthy food like avocado toasts which cost about \$14–\$16.
- The trend of eating out and cooking less at home is also evident in the long queues that form when new food outlets open. Food at these outlets does not come cheap, but Singaporeans appear to have the financial means to indulge.
- For example, the opening of Pablo, a well-known Japanese cheese tart outlet at Wisma Atria in August 2017, attracted long queues that formed as early as 9am, three hours before it opened. Prices for the cheese tarts are about \$15–\$18 each, which is hardly cheap, but many Singaporeans clearly are affluent enough to afford it.

**These findings do indicate that more Singaporeans have the means and are willing to dine out, which does come at the expense of cooking and eating meals at home.**