McEwan presents Joe as being characterized by rationalism from the outset of the novel.

 ‘…we were in a state of mathematical grace.’

This early use of ‘mathematical’ suggests that throughout his storytelling Joe is searching for a way of expressing his version of events as a truth, which can be shared. Mathematical theory, being a truth that can be proven, by its very nature, must be accepted as accurate. Interestingly, this mathematical state is combined with ‘grace’, which can mean elegance and beauty of movement, form or expression. Perhaps for Joe, ‘mathematical grace’ suggests a moment of equilibrium to be retrospectively savoured before the dramatic events that were about to unfold and change the course of his life, creating a new unwelcomed beginning. This might also suggest a moment of perfection in his mind, where making sense of things in an emotionless way is an apparent reassurance to Joe’s characteristic rationalism. This idea is supported throughout the novel with the prominence of geometric motifs and images, whenever Joe strives to make sense of a situation, ‘comforting geometry’, and ‘ruthless gravity’. However, ‘grace’ has a multitude of meanings and might also be interpreted as a condition of being favoured or sanctified by God, thus moving beyond the realm of geometric reason, and perhaps instead creating a conflicting juxtaposition between the emotionless ‘mathematical’, and the opposing emotionally powerful ‘grace’ of God. In this sense, ‘mathematical grace’ might be seen almost like an oxymoron and be likened to the seemingly opposing characteristic traits of Joe, the scientific rationalist, and Jed, with his strong faith in God’s loving grace. These contrasting personalities might be interpreted as paralleling ‘mathematical grace’ as they seamlessly merge together in McEwan’s narrative ‘rushing towards each other like lovers’ only moments earlier in the midst of the eventful chaos unfolding on the field.

ALAAL – How to do it

* Which parts of the Q suggest importance/notability?
* What mood/feeling/colour/flavour is suggested by any word, pause, definite or indefinite article, omission, line length, order of words?
* Where is the pace in the Q? Remember the effect of commas, cadence, length of lines or paragraphs.
* Where does the figurative lie?
* What associations can you think of with a word/idea/omission?
* Use BABOP and other such words like however, may be, on the other hand,
* Use the verbs ‘suggests’, ‘implies’, ‘emphasises’
* Ask a question
* Use the author’s name.
* Careful noun phrasing to aid your writing to become sophisticated/and impressive.