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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/21**

Paper 2 Directed Writing and Composition **May/June 2026**

INSERT **2 hours**

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INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading texts.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.

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Read **both** texts, and then answer **Question 1** on the question paper.

Text A

The following text is an article written by a person who keeps a diary.

I still get funny looks when I mention that I keep a diary. What exactly have I got to tell this black book? What secrets can I possibly be keeping?

The answer: nothing of any great note, yet so much of my life is in it. For twenty years I've kept it every day. You can't hold back time, but you can try to save the past from being completely erased. It may feel trivial to record things as they happen, but later they may prove instructive or amusing. A diary is good exercise for the writing muscle, the way a pianist practises scales or a runner practises sprinting, but it doesn't have to be well written.

For whom are you writing? Diary writing is the most private form of literary creation because often you are both the author and the sole reader. There are great advantages to this, especially in an age when so many lives are lived online for anybody to read, criticise and judge. On the other hand, there's a long tradition of published diaries: nowadays you can even read people's diaries online as they write them. Politicians' diaries can shed a very different light on events from the formal record, and diaries kept by travellers and adventurers provide fascinating insights into places and people in a way which is less curated than in a travel book. Published diaries have sometimes given a voice to people whose lives would otherwise be lived unnoticed and on the margins, like the servants of the wealthy or like people living in remote rural communities in the past. Publishers know that readers like poking their noses into other people's lives. There's even a whole genre of fictional characters who write diaries.

A diary's long perspective furnishes a picture not just of what you did but of who you were. Sometimes I happen on a diary entry from years ago and think: did I write that? We evolve and acquire new selves. Memory will blur, whereas a diary can claim: 'I was there at the time.'

Diaries can shape our futures too. We can set goals and monitor our progress towards meeting them or chastise ourselves when we don't. Gratitude diaries, to record the things you're grateful for that day, are common these days: it's your diary to do what you want with.

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Text B

The following text is taken from a blog written by a different person giving their views on diary writing.

I've kept a digital diary for 10 years. In the process, I've written hundreds of pages filled with emotions, rants, stories and experiences, good and bad. People ask me if this habit of journalling can be harmful. For example, do I ever get lost in negativity if I keep writing about it?

When you are in a rough spot and want to write down the negativity that's in your life, doing so can be very confronting. For some, this venting can result in a negative mindset. You can sometimes prevent this by simply keeping that negativity out of your diary or journal.

Some people feel such an extreme urge to keep a journal that it consumes their lives. My digital diary so far contains around 400 000 words. Some people's diaries amount to a lot more than that. Do you really want the majority of your life to be about how you've been journalling about your life? Life is right in front of us, not inside our journals. If we want something to journal about then, paradoxically, we have to switch off our devices and start living instead.

People can stumble upon your diary, whether a physical diary or a digital one, and read everything you thought was private. And, because it's private, you've written things that others might view as hurtful, embarrassing or just weird. Even trustworthy friends and family can upend relationships as a result. There are ways to keep your journal safe and hidden from view, both online and offline. It might seem like an extreme precaution, but it is necessary if you want your diary to reflect your honest, truthful feelings about your life.

So can journalling be harmful? The answer is 'yes', but a journal or diary is only harmful if we allow it to be. These situations are easily avoided if we understand why we journal our lives and how to benefit from doing so.

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