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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/22**

Paper 2 Directed Writing and Composition **February/March 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.

This document has **4** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

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

Text A

The following text is taken from an online blog about hobbies.

I've been surfing for almost 20 years now, but you wouldn't know it if you saw me. I'm the 30-something-year-old woman whooping like a kid when I manage to stand up on a wave.

Friends have insisted I take lessons, saying that I could improve if I trained harder. The implication is if I'm passionate about something, I should also be proficient. I say thanks, but I'm happy being a below-average surfer.

My career in medical sciences allows little room for error. Perfectionism and productivity have been drilled into me from a young age. Being busy, getting better, giving it 100 per cent, leads us to think that our precious spare time should be spent honing our skills or increasing our output; anything less is lazy.

Then there's the influence of people spurring us to 'monetise our hobbies'. While that can certainly be a great way to make some extra cash, the definition of a hobby is 'a pursuit engaged in for relaxation'. Introducing commercial pressures can kill that all-important 'relaxation' factor. Our downtime becomes just extra work time.

My hobbies are for imperfect pleasure. Psychologists have been highlighting the positive effects of hobbies on well-being for years; we get those essential happy hormones from losing ourselves in a chosen activity while being distracted from everyday stresses. I make clay earrings that often turn out mismatched or lumpy. Yet I still enjoy the process, the feeling of the clay between my fingertips and the pleasure of creating something uniquely mine. I'm lucky if my vegetable garden yields enough to make one salad every six months, but I still harvest portions of delight every time a new leaf unfurls or a flower blooms. It helps make up for other hobbies that aren't so environmentally friendly.

A friend and I recently agreed to try a new activity every month, regardless of how good we'd be at it. This has led to some amusing adventures and to lots of hilarious videos on my social media of karting and of tai chi, for example. Judo struck a particular chord with her, and she's decided to persevere with it, but I'll keep giving new things a try for as long as my budget and all the resources in this wonderful city allow. Who cares if I'm the worst one there? The joy is in giving it a go and relishing a fresh experience.

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Text B

The following text is an online blog on the concept of ‘niksen time’.

As I hastily leapt from the sofa to answer the door, I flushed with embarrassment at the thought of my friend seeing me sitting motionless, staring into space. I had three assignments to complete in a week and books to read.

Now, I wonder why I was ashamed for having a brief rest during those intense early days of university in the big city. Our ‘always on’ culture makes even leisure time feel pressured and competitive.

I was bored and stressed at the same time, not just with my studies but with the endless activities I’d lined up for my ‘free’ time. Gym with friends, learning a musical instrument, building my own computer – it all seemed suddenly oppressive. It also ate into my meagre funds and my time.

It was around then that I came across the concept of ‘niksen’ – the Dutch term for consciously taking time to do nothing, just gazing out of the window or sitting still. No reading, no watching TV, no scrolling, nothing.

But the first time I tried niksen, it was much harder than I anticipated. I found myself making a mental list of all the things I had to do. Trying to just be, to just sit quietly on the sofa was hard. I kept glancing at the clock on the wall to see how much longer I had left.

After some online niksen tutorials, eventually I noticed an improvement. I looked at the trees outside, the shape and colour of the leaves. Instead of listening to music all the time, I’ve found silence. I’m going to take an advanced niksen course as soon as I have the funds. I still have days when I can’t make it work or I miss the laughs with my friends but it’s worth the effort.

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