Cambridge International Examinations
Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/33**

Paper 3 Directed Writing and Composition **May/June 2014**

READING BOOKLET INSERT

2 hours

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READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Reading Booklet Insert contains the reading passage for use with **Section 1**, **Question 1** on the Question Paper.

You may annotate this Insert and use the blank spaces for planning. This Insert is **not** assessed by the Examiner.

This document consists of **2** printed pages and **2** blank pages.

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Read the following magazine article carefully, and then answer Question 1 on the Question Paper.

Goodbye to the Letter

An email is good for conveying information quickly, but it cannot compete in other ways with a carefully handwritten letter sent by a friend, relative or loved one. The heart leaps when one finds an envelope on the door mat which a well-known hand has addressed. Opening such an envelope creates pleasurable suspense and is physically gratifying. The elderly, especially those without technology, must feel marooned and bewildered by the disappearance of letters from their lives. All they get by post these days is impersonal, typed, computer-generated business and commercial mail which they have no desire to receive or open: bills and offers of things they do not wish to buy from people they do not wish to know.

Many of us still judge people by their handwriting, as well as by aspects of their appearance, and it's important, especially when assessing their suitability for jobs, to be able to see how they write. If people are not in the habit of writing by hand, because they never write letters, they may not do it well when required to do so. Sloping lines of untidy scrawl, or fat, round childish writing with circles instead of dots over the letter 'i', can lower the recipient's estimation of the writer. When one is out of practice, one's hand starts to ache very quickly and the writing soon becomes illegible – and this could be a problem in long exams requiring lengthy answers to questions.

Everybody used to write by hand all the time: notes, memos, shopping lists, postcards, homework. Novelists used to write whole books in longhand. Nowadays, even teachers don't write; they have smartboards in the classroom, and exam papers are marked online. Nowadays, you're lucky if even your birthday card contains ink. Hand-eye coordination is a skill being lost to our brains, along with that of being able to hold and control a pen. Some people seem to have trouble even signing their name these days, and certainly do not manage to do so with an individual, stylish flourish, so rarely do they have a chance to practise their signature. There's something sad about the fact that a large proportion of children below the age of 14 have never written or received a hand-written letter. Touch-typing is a useful accomplishment, but it's not the same as being able to form attractive letters in a straight line.

The diary you keep electronically will never have the same emotional weight as the bound book with a lock to prevent prying eyes; a thank-you email is not as personal as the real thing in an envelope with a stamp on; the message from a deceased relative will not have a physical presence to remind you of them if, like the family photographs, it is stored somewhere on your computer and you are unlikely ever to look at it – or even to remember where you saved it. Soldiers and those away from home and family for long periods need a piece of handwriting to wear next to their heart, not a paragraph of Times New Roman. Your grandparents would prefer to receive something which shows thought and care, and that you have bothered to walk to the post box. Handwriting is often in itself an act of love, and one that can be treasured and kept for ever. History, global not just personal, owes much to collections of letters, kept in shoeboxes or tied with ribbon. They have revealed a lot about human relationships.

So the loss of the handwritten letter is serious. It is leading to a change in physical skills. Perhaps our hands will adapt to computer keyboards and grow huge, splayed fingers, or tiny ones, the easier to text with. It has also caused a change in mental skills, such as patience and respect. It is changing our relationships and the way we view each other. We are losing – or may have already lost – poetry, romance, beauty. A practice which began in Ancient Egypt 5,000 years ago is now almost dead.

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