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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/22**

Paper 2 Directed Writing and Composition **May/June 2023**

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: What are you sorry for?

Yesterday, after complaints I'd made to an online retailer for their very poor customer service, I finally received an email in reply. 'At last,' I thought, 'an apology.' And indeed, it was an apology of sorts: a careful set of stock phrases which expressed some limited awareness of their shortcomings with a flourish at the end, hoping that I would 'return very soon to purchase from our unique range of bestselling rugs and soft furnishings.' Now, I know saying sorry is never easy, but I was left with the impression that this writer had been schooled in some business training session that taught employees how to turn an apology into a marketing tool!

There's a lot of apologising these days. But, like my email, is there any real substance to such acts of contrition if they are merely designed to reflect well on whoever is making them?

Everyday apologies are part of polite discourse in many cultures, of course. We apologise for interrupting people in meetings – as we interrupt them – and we often apologise for things that aren't even our fault, just to keep the wheels of civilised life turning. I taught my children to apologise for their misdemeanours as soon as they could speak, though it rarely prevented further incidents of snatching toys from their siblings or having a tantrum in a shop. However, in adult life, and especially at work, apologies (even for glaringly obvious errors) are often considered the ultimate weakness.

Perhaps the online company who offered me their 'apologies' yesterday for wasting my time, sending me the wrong item, taking my money and refusing to return it for weeks were reluctant to admit their faults for fear I would require some compensation as a token of their sincerity. Actually, a real apology would have been sufficient, and I might well have been more disposed to peruse their unique ranges again as a result. As things are, I'll be staying well clear of their soft furnishings and their grudging apologies.

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Text B: The power of an apology

Saying ‘I’m sorry’, even when you’re not at fault, is an automatic reaction. You’ve probably said it many times this week. Over-apologising for things you can’t control can make people think less of you. Apologising for sneezing, being pushed into someone else or being interrupted could backfire on you.

A leading psychotherapist says that over-apologising, or apologising because you think you should, is harmful: you may think you’re presenting yourself as a caring person, but you’re sending the message that you lack confidence and are ineffectual. ‘It can give some people permission to treat you poorly,’ she warns.

Such behaviour can also lessen the impact of a necessary apology. If you say ‘I’m sorry’ for every little thing, it will carry less weight for situations that warrant a sincere apology. We all know someone who constantly apologises, and it can be irritating.

One study found that apologising for intentionally rejecting someone, such as cancelling plans you’ve made, could make the other person feel that they have to forgive before they are ready. Apologising for your own sake, rather than to acknowledge the hurt caused, can be perceived as insulting.

Choosing not to apologise may even have psychological benefits. Researchers found that people who refused to express remorse showed signs of greater self-esteem.

However, there are some circumstances in which a sincere apology is beneficial. A professor of behavioural science explained that some apologies can encourage forgiveness and repair relationships, but they require more than just saying ‘I’m sorry’: the person must express genuine remorse and offer to make amends in a meaningful way. We protect ourselves from facing the possibility that we messed up and from rejection. An apology, no matter how heartfelt, does not always elicit forgiveness.

The debilitating effects of the shame we may feel when we’ve hurt another person can eat away at us. By taking responsibility for our actions, we help rid ourselves of self-reproach and guilt. Some people feel that genuinely apologising can help us develop self-respect if we have the courage to admit we are wrong and don’t offer excuses. Saying sorry helps us remain emotionally connected to others. Knowing we have wronged someone may cause us to distance ourselves from the person, but once we have apologised, we can become closer.

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