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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH **0500/21**

Paper 2 Directed Writing and Composition **October/November 2025**

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: Can we really change the habits of a lifetime?

Your habits (what you repeatedly do and spend time thinking about each day) ultimately form the person you are, the things you believe, and the personality you portray. But what if you want to stop giving in to your bad habits and form new ones to lead a happier, healthier life? Is it even possible to change with so many reasons and excuses not to? Understanding how habits work is key.

Experts say habits involve four simple stages: cue, craving, response and reward. First, there's the cue. The cue is the bit of information that predicts a reward, triggering your brain. Our prehistoric ancestors were paying attention to cues that signalled the location of primary rewards like food and water. Today, we spend most of our time craving less-essential rewards like money, fame and approval. Cravings are the next step of the habit loop. Without some level of motivation or desire, wanting some kind of difference, we have no reason to complete that gruelling run before breakfast, spend less time on mobile phones or separate our rubbish for recycling.

How you respond next depends on how motivated you are and how much friction is associated with the behaviour you want to become a habit. If a particular action requires more effort than you're willing to expend, you won't do it. Simple. Your response also depends on your ability. A habit can occur only if you're capable of doing it, no matter how much you admire others who are.

Feelings of disappointment are part of the feedback mechanism that helps your brain distinguish useful actions from useless ones, so most of us give up at a sniff of failure. Simplifying the habit, starting with those parts you can do, is the answer. When you do something successfully, you're more likely to do it again. Rewards (progress or achieving what you wanted) close the feedback loop, building the habit bit by bit.

As adults, we rarely notice the habits that are running or ruining our lives. Most of us never question why we don't unplug the phone charger after use or put things back in the right place. After decades of mental programming, we automatically slip into these patterns of thinking and acting. Now scientists have shown it doesn't have to be like that, isn't it time to change?

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Text B: Could following influencers be good for you?

Looking up to any role model may have a positive impact, inspiring us to consider what we want in our lives and set positive goals. Even influencers – people who are paid cash or other incentives to promote a brand, a product, or a service – could make a positive impact if what they are promoting turns out to be good for us and our habits.

Picture this. You're scrolling through your favourite social media recommended feed when a perfectly curated picture catches your eye. You open the profile. You're intrigued. Maybe it's a perceived similarity between you and the person in front of you, maybe you want to be more like them, maybe you both share a niche interest in vintage clothes; so, interested in hearing more, you opt to 'follow' them. After that their pictures pop up on your timeline, and you're drawn into commenting, watching their videos, listening to their podcasts, greedily consuming everything this influencer has to offer.

Suddenly, you feel a sense of fondness. You start referring to them by their first name instead of their username. You know what they ate last night – in fact, you voted in their poll to help them choose between a fast-food delivery and a home-cooked meal. They 'confided' in you the last time they had a really bad day. All this happened without you meeting them.

In the months following this, you become an avid follower, eagerly taking their advice on the amount of exercise you should be doing, the music you should be listening to and all the while you start to regard this person as someone you know. You trust their judgement.

Don't feel bad: we all do it. Humans are social beings. We pick up cues from those around us and we mirror their behaviours and habits. The things that the celebrities, influencers and role models in our lives pay attention to, we also pay attention to. The things they ignore, we ignore. The things they do, we want to do.

So, why not make use of that the next time we want to make a change?

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