



Cambridge IGCSE™

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

0500/13

Paper 1 Reading

October/November 2025

INSERT

2 hours

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 **8** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

Read **Text A** and then answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** on the question paper.

Text A: *Is there life on Mars?*

Mars looks like an inhospitable wasteland, where wintertime temperatures plunge to minus 153°C and the atmosphere is just one per cent of the density of Earth's and comprised principally of carbon dioxide.

However, Mars wasn't always so hostile to life. For the first billion years of its existence, the planet had many oceans and seas and was protected by a thick blanket of air, meaning it had ample opportunity to accommodate at least microbial life. Eventually, however, its magnetic field shut down, allowing the solar wind to claw away the atmosphere and the water to vanish into space.

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Most potential life forms undoubtedly perished at this point, but research has suggested that some lingering surface markers of ancient life may have been found – lying in plain sight, in fact – meaning that possibly some basic life forms retreated underground to continue thriving in deep, warm water-bearing rocks.

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Scientists have sent rovers to Mars's Gale Crater, a former lake, where the rovers study rocks for clues to the planet's history. The latest rover at Gale Crater has a large memory with the potential to hold significant amounts of data, but it has had some problems with both data storage and with sending data on to scientists. Nevertheless, it successfully uses its on-board drill to collect rock and soil samples for examination before transferring them to an oven within its body where they are quickly heated to high temperatures. Then its laser spectrometer gets to work, efficiently analysing the chemistry of the vapourised samples – looking especially for carbon, the elemental backbone of all life as we know it.

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And plenty of carbon has been detected!

This could be exciting news for many on Earth, though perhaps not all. Do we need to study Mars and its potential for life in order to understand our planet's early history and evolution? Some scientists would certainly say so. Meanwhile, the extraterrestrial life forms of science fiction stir imaginations to a point that starstruck fans actually dream of meeting real-life Martians for themselves. Equally, though, there are those who believe that human dreams of material gain and power through such ventures should not be encouraged and that revenue put aside for space exploration should be redirected to our own planet's more pressing concerns.

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Read **Text B** and then answer **Question 1(f)** on the question paper.

Text B: Life at Concordia Station

Scientist Beth recently spent a year at the Concordia International Research Station in Antarctica. In this text, she is interviewed about her time at Concordia.

Interviewer: I understand that Concordia Station is supposed to replicate the living conditions that astronauts experience on long flight missions. But I'm perplexed. Since Mars is known as the Red Planet, wouldn't an arid desert be a closer match than a freezing white environment like Antarctica?

Beth: (laughs) Mars looks red because of iron minerals in the soil that oxidise and rust, not because of its temperature. It is actually far colder on Mars itself than anywhere on Earth, but at least we got a taste of what it could be like. Travelling in Antarctica was by a huge tractor of the sort we will probably use on overland missions when we get out to Mars. Looking out at the huge spaces around Concordia, I was struck by how travel over the vast barren wastelands of a Martian landscape wouldn't be too dissimilar. Very few life forms can live in Antarctica – all the polar bears are in the Arctic, remember – and the expectation is we won't find much sentient life roaming around on Martian ground either. So nothing much to engage your eye or your mind once you've settled into the unknown alien environment that you must learn to call home. In Concordia, you have to work in conditions that many would describe as extreme. Some colleagues found it hard working during the months of total darkness you get in the Antarctic. At least on Mars, extremes though there are, you have day and night.

Interviewer: But you must have had contact with family and friends? You were able to video call them, surely?

Beth: Apart from my work colleagues, I didn't see any other humans for that year. Some of us found this stressful, and we had to develop our own strategies for managing both our privacy and working together professionally. Video calling home was unreliable: we were encouraged to immerse ourselves in the experience and keep such contact infrequent. Maybe one day we will connect phone lines or the internet from Mars, but who knows? Silly things like being unable to just go out and buy your favourite brand of shampoo or soap become bigger issues than they should. Same with food – though we did have a 5-star restaurant at Concordia.

Read **Text C** and then answer **Questions 2(a)–(d)** and **Question 3** on the question paper.

Text C: The Mars expedition

Bob, Rajah and Sarah belong to a team of astronauts who have landed on Mars. Their Captain has sent them out on the first ever Martian mission to look for signs of life. They are driving in a rover: a motor vehicle designed to travel on Mars's surface.

Bob stopped the rover, and Rajah and Sarah climbed out, Sarah carrying the shovel. Bob had decided to remain in the rover to receive communications from the Captain at the base some twenty kilometres back. Bob would also be testing any samples Sarah and Rajah brought to the rover.

This was the last site they would be visiting and then they would be finished. Bob was relieved about that. After putting Bob in charge of today's mission, the Captain had spoken to Sarah and Rajah about working together as a team and, apparently, they had assured her that they would. But their constant arguments today told another story: it was not supposed to be a competition to go down in history as the individual who first found life on Mars.

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Bob did chuckle to himself, though, as he remembered their spacecraft landing two days earlier and how both Sarah and Rajah had jumped from the door, arms outstretched to prevent anyone else passing them, each shouting something rather grandly foolish for the benefit of posterity. They'd ended up in an undignified heap together on Mars's surface, while Bob and the other astronauts had ambled over and past them to inspect the base that the rover had built.

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That base, along with the spacecraft, would be their home now for another three months. It was pretty basic living but sufficed if they gave each other space. Most of the other astronauts were respectful and professional which certainly helped.

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Suddenly, the communication device sounded in the rover: it was Rajah.

'I'm about to hit water!' cried Rajah.

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'Ridiculous. You've barely broken the ground surface!' Sarah's pained voice pierced Bob's ears.

Bob decided to leave the rover. He saw the two silhouetted figures ahead of him, apparently engaged in a struggle over a shovel.

Bob detached his own shovel from the side of the rover and walked in another direction. The ground was promisingly soft here. His booted foot sank the shovel blade through a surface layer of fine crimson crumbs. An unmistakably damp wedge of soil was removed, and clear liquid slipped gently into its place.

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'Incredible!' exclaimed Bob. 'Rajah, Sarah, can one of you get a canister out of the rover and come over here?'

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Sitting in the rover a minute later, the astronauts watched as Bob emptied the liquid from the canister into the testing receptacle. Bob felt his heart pound as he looked at the results. 'OK, Rajah, Sarah, the readings are positive: biological organisms are present. I'm going to prepare a slide and put some of this liquid under the microscope to see if I can view them.'

Seconds passed like hours as Rajah and Sarah hung over Bob's shoulder, both closely observing him place the slide under the intense scrutiny of the microscope's eye. Silence entered the cramped space of the rover and floated inquisitively around the three absorbed figures. Bob inhaled sharply as a clear image on the slide came into view. In front of him gyrated a dozen tiny worm-shaped life forms. Their movements were subtle and deliberate, as if choreographed.

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Rajah and Sarah both sprang simultaneously into action, grabbing the communication device that would connect them to the base.

'Captain, this is big!' yelled Sarah.

'I have just found the first ever evidence of life on Mars!' hollered Rajah.

Bob realised that the many years he had trained for this expedition had been merely a poor rehearsal for this one rapturous moment. He silently contemplated the enormity of the discovery. Meanwhile, Sarah began a frenzy of 'selfie' live-streaming, parading the microscope like a glorious trophy. Rajah emailed a solemnly worded message, delineating the grandeur of his achievement. He urged the Captain to upload this immediately to their captive audience of leaders, scientists and well-wishers on Earth.

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'Oh!' Rajah said, a minute later. He looked crestfallen. 'The Captain only wants to speak to you, Bob!'

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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH**0500/13**

Paper 1 Reading

October/November 2025**2 hours**

You must answer on the question paper.

You will need: Insert (enclosed)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Answer **all** questions.
- Use a black or dark blue pen.
- Write your name, centre number and candidate number in the boxes at the top of the page.
- Write your answer to each question in the space provided.
- Do **not** use an erasable pen or correction fluid.
- Do **not** write on any bar codes.
- If additional space is needed, you should use the lined pages at the end of this booklet; the question number or numbers must be clearly shown.
- Dictionaries are **not** allowed.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is 80.
- The number of marks for each question or part question is shown in brackets [].
- The insert contains the reading texts.

This document has **16** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

Read **Text A, *Is there life on Mars?***, in the insert and then answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** on this question paper.

Question 1

- (a) What temperature can Mars reach in wintertime, according to the text?

..... [1]

- (b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:

(i) 'inhospitable wasteland' (line 1)

..... [2]

(ii) 'comprised principally' (lines 2–3).

..... [2]

- (c) Reread paragraph 2 ('However, Mars ... vanish into space.').

Give **two** factors that could have made life a possibility in the first billion years of Mars's existence.

•

•

[2]

- (d) Reread paragraphs 3 and 4 ('Most potential ... as we know it.').

(i) Identify **two** suggestions of what could have happened to life forms on Mars.

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[2]

(ii) Explain what the rover currently on Mars has been able to do well.

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..... [3]



(e) Reread paragraph 6 ('This could be exciting ... more pressing concerns.').

Using your own words, explain why some humans might want to find evidence of life on Mars.

.....

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..... [3]





Read **Text B, *Life at Concordia Station***, in the insert and then answer **Question 1(f)** on this question paper.

- (f) According to Text B, in what ways can living and working in Concordia Station help a person to understand what it might be like to go on a long-term mission to Mars?

You must **use continuous writing** (not note form) and **use your own words** as far as possible.

Your summary should not be more than 120 words.

Up to 10 marks are available for the content of your answer and up to 5 marks for the quality of your writing.

[illegible]



[15]

[Total: 30]



Read **Text C**, *The Mars expedition*, in the insert and then answer **Questions 2(a)–(d)** on this question paper.

Question 2

(a) Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:

(i) Bob was grateful that he, Sarah and Rajah would not be visiting any more sites after this one.

..... [1]

(ii) Sarah and Rajah had promised the Captain that they would cooperate with each other while out on this mission.

..... [1]

(iii) Sarah and Rajah both jumped up at the same time because they wanted to be the first to speak to the Captain.

..... [1]

(iv) Rajah had a very sad expression on his face after the Captain told him she wanted to speak to Bob, not him.

..... [1]

(b) Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:

They'd ended up in an undignified heap together on Mars's surface, while Bob and the other astronauts had ambled over and past them to inspect the base that the rover had built.

(i) undignified [1]

(ii) ambled [1]

(iii) inspect [1]



- (c) Use **one** example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests what Bob experiences as he searches for water.

Use your own words in your explanation.

The ground was promisingly soft here. His booted foot sank the shovel blade through a surface layer of fine crimson crumbs. An unmistakably damp wedge of soil was removed, and clear liquid slipped gently into its place.

.....

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.....

..... [3]





(d) Reread paragraphs 12 and 16.

- Paragraph 12 begins ‘Seconds passed ...’ and is about the astronauts watching as Bob puts the sample under the microscope.
- Paragraph 16 begins ‘Bob realised ...’ and is about the astronauts’ reactions to their discovery.

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose **three** examples of words or phrases from **each** paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.

Write about 200 to 300 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer.

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary-ruled notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



..... [15]

[Total: 25]





Reread **Text C**, *The Mars expedition*, in the insert and then answer **Question 3** on this question paper.

Question 3

You are the Captain. After speaking to Bob about the mission of today, you write a journal entry about the progress of the Mars expedition so far.

In your journal entry, you should:

- describe what the mission today involved **and** your feelings about how it has gone
- describe your thoughts and feelings about your team of astronauts **and** the working and living arrangements on Mars
- explain what you did after you received the news of today **and** what your hopes are for the rest of the time you spend on Mars.

Write the words of the journal entry.

Base your journal entry on what you have read in **Text C**, but be careful to use your own words. Address each of the three bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer and up to 10 marks for the quality of your writing.

[illegible]



[25]



[illegible]



Additional page

If you use the following page to complete the answer to any question, the question number must be clearly shown.

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