

1. Read and answer

Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites are a recent and, sometimes, controversial innovation. They enable people, by means of the internet, to get in touch with friends easily, without having to worry about interrupting them in the way that telephone calls might. People can keep in regular, even daily, contact with details of their friends' lives, such as the clothes they wear and the music they listen to, even sharing photos by way of illustration. The fact that messages can be posted on the site at any time of the day or night makes for almost instantaneous updates; every detail of a day's events – meals eaten, lessons attended – is there to be shared almost as it happens. Using such social networking sites is obviously much cheaper than long distance travel, and maintaining relationships with friends or family in faraway places becomes much easier, making the world seem a small place when, say, a friend goes to a foreign university to study or a daughter emigrates to take up a better job.

The internet can be accessed outside the home on smartphones, and on laptop or tablet computers, making social networking sites a useful way to utilise down time, which is time which might otherwise be wasted in, for example, the dentist's waiting room or on the bus. Because very many people can contact each other on the same site, social networking sites provide the opportunity to be introduced to new friends through existing contacts. In this way, these sites offer what is to some the attractive possibility of greatly increasing their circle of friends; why have one or two close friends when you can have hundreds?

Social networking sites have a role to play in the world of work too. In certain businesses and professions, employees rely on them to keep themselves up to date with the latest developments in their field. People with no jobs, or wanting new or better ones, do not have to wait for advertisements to appear in newspapers; they can be pro-active and advertise themselves on such sites. A converse situation exists for employers, who are able to recruit the best potential employees by examining information about their background, experience and qualifications posted, and so make an informed choice which does not rely on interview skills alone.

However, more importantly, social networking sites have many critics who say that relationships formed through them, unlike face-to-face friendships, are too impersonal to be described as real friendships. They argue that it is all very well to have a hundred cyber friends, but such a number of contacts devalues true friendship, which implies a certain exclusivity. Certainly, to describe a hundred people as your 'best' friends is absolute nonsense. Real meetings with friends for coffee or lunch might be trivialised; if your friend has read on screen every detail of your life that week, and she yours, what are you going to talk about? Information overload is another drawback of these sites, where readers are bombarded with intimate facts which might be best left unsaid because they are inappropriate. In fact, most information posted is utterly boring.

The constant desire to know what their contacts are doing leads networking site users to become almost addicted to checking for updates. And what could be more insulting than to be out with a friend who makes it clear that the friend he is contacting online is far more interesting than you are? People often cannot relax in the company of others because there is a persistent niggles about what their social networking contacts might be doing; there is a blurring in the distinction between the real and the virtual worlds. Instead of enjoying a social occasion, people might be thinking about whether or not it would be worth posting later on a social networking site.

In the business and professional sphere, there is often pressure for instant responses from social networking sites, so that taking even a short holiday becomes unthinkable. The fact that trivial information about people is posted on such sites might have repercussions in the world of work; seeing you having fun at a party might be amusing to your contacts, but your boss might not find it as charming as you do. Stricter regulation of social networking sites is long overdue.

1. What are the main advantages of social networking sites?

2. How are they used in the work world?

3. What are the main criticisms to these sites?

4. What does the author consider insulting?

5. Why is stricter regulation necessary?

2. Read about this eccentric old lady and fill in the blanks with a suitable connective

I could not decide whether or not Monica's odd behaviour was caused by old age. Obvious as that might have been, I could not avoid a suspicion: might it be caused by no more than her plan to get her own way – an old lady's prerogative? _____ she was highly intelligent and well-informed, _____ it was often hard to cope with the strands of her conversation _____ of the way in which memory and forgetfulness crossed and re-crossed each other. Who was the real Monica? I could not tell.

No doubt she had always been eccentric. For _____, she would cross roads without so much as glancing to left or right. Drivers would slam on their brakes, tyres would scream, lorries would come to a shuddering halt, _____ this elderly lady meandered across the busiest roads in town. _____ her idiosyncrasies must always have been there, perhaps they had become more accentuated _____ she became older. I remember well the occasion when my friend Cynthia and I took her to a concert. Cynthia and I had a night off work and thought how nice it would be to take Monica. Never again! To begin _____, she insisted on taking her knitting. _____ Cynthia nor I argued with her as we should have done, but that was only with the wisdom of hindsight. Knitting during a concert is not common; in _____ I had never seen anyone do it.

3. Go on reading and fill in the gaps with ONE suitable word

We entered the village hall, _____ was almost full, and Monica wanted to sit in the front row. _____ a duchess she sailed down the central aisle, and sat down directly opposite the chair placed in readiness for the pianist, while we sat on _____ side of her. Everyone knew Monica, and from the outset I felt conspicuous and mortified.

Soon the musicians arrived and the concert was _____ to begin. 'I think the pianist made her dress out _____ old curtains,' said Monica. The pianist glared at her, offended and embarrassed. Monica fidgeted beside me, trying to get comfortable. I was squirming, trying _____ vain to keep calm. The concert started and Monica, comfortable _____ last, took out her knitting.

Now, knitting is not generally considered to _____ a noisy occupation. I had often seen Monica knitting elsewhere but, when she dropped her knitting needles, as she often did, it had never caused a problem. But on this occasion the atmosphere in the room was different. Each _____ the knitting needles fell they clattered on to the wooden

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PAPER 1 / 15

floor. Cynthia or I had to retrieve them, depending on _____ side they dropped.

The ball of wool fell and rolled under several chairs!

4. Put the verbs in brackets in the right tense. When you see a + use a modal

My mother did not tell me they were coming. Afterwards she said she did not want me to appear nervous. She need not have worried. Only she _____ (+ notice) the tightness along my jaw, the widening of my eyes. I _____ (chop) vegetables in the kitchen when I _____ (hear) voices outside, the kind of voices heard rarely in our house. I _____ (+ hear) luxurious carpets in them, books and pearls and plenty of fine food. I was glad that earlier I _____ (scrub) the front step so hard. My mother's voice approached from the front room; they _____ (come) to the kitchen. I pushed the leeks I _____ (chop) into place, then set the knife on the table and wiped my hands on my apron. My mother appeared in the doorway, her eyes _____ (flash) a warning. Behind her, the woman _____ (+ bend) her head because she was so tall, as tall as the man following her. All our family, including my father and brother, were small.

The woman _____ (wear) a hat. She made an elaborate show of watching me hard, but _____ (+ not fix) her attention on me. 'This _____ (be) the girl, then,' she said abruptly. 'This is my daughter, Griet,' my mother replied, icily. Realising she had been corrected, the woman turned _____ (look) at her husband. A fold of her coat caught the handle of the knife I had been using, _____ (knock) it off the table so that it spun across the floor. The woman cried out.

'Catharina,' the man said calmly. He _____ (speak) her name as though he held honey in his mouth. I stepped over and picked up the knife, _____ (place) it back on the table and setting a piece of carrot back in its place. They both looked at me, his eyes grey like the sea and his expression steady, in contrast to his wife's, which flickered like a candle. He looked at the chopped vegetables, each type in its own section; as I always did, I _____ (lay) them out in a circle, like a pie. '_____ (you spend) much time setting out the vegetables in a pattern before you make the soup?' he asked. Thrown, I said that I did not. I _____ (not want) him to think I was idle. From the corner of my eye I saw my sister, who _____ (look) round the doorpost and had shaken her head at my response. I did not often lie. I looked down.

5. Complete the following conversation between two friends who have just been to the cinema.

Mel: What an amazing film! _____ of it?

Sara: Rubbish! _____ that I almost fell asleep.

Mel: Oh. I'm sorry to hear that. _____ American films?

Sara: Yes, I do like them – but I didn't like this one. There were no big stars and nothing really happened for two hours.

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PAPER 1 / 15

Mel: _____ nothing happened. I mean, they
did visit lots of lovely locations, _____?

Sara: _____ so. They spent nearly the
whole time in Los Angeles.

Mel: They went to the beach ...

Sara: True. They did go there. But where _____?

Mel: Er. They went to the hills and the desert.

Sara: But _____? That
part of the film was really pointless.

Mel: They went to find the boy's father. I thought it was exciting and very atmospheric.

Sara: Well, _____ been atmospheric, but it
certainly wasn't exciting at all!

Mel: Well, there's no _____.
We always disagree about films anyway!

6. Composition. Write about 300 words on ONE of the following

- Write a story that shows that "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence".
- OR
- "Appearance is more important than personality." Discuss.