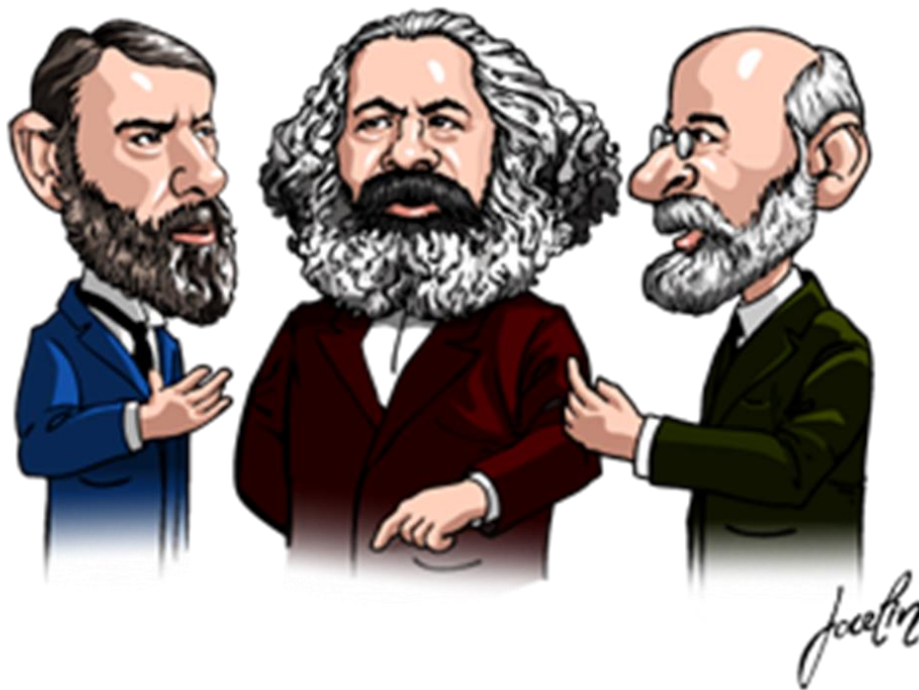


# Theory and Methods Question Bank



Theory and Methods is examined in both the AS and the A Level. The AS questions focus mostly on research methods and at A Level include sociological debates, perspectives and methods.

In the AS exam you will be asked 2 questions as part of Paper 2, You should spend about 20 to 25 minutes on this section and the questions will be a 4 mark and a 16 mark question.

In the A Level exams you will be asked a theory and methods question in paper 1 which will be worth 10 marks . You will also have a 10 and 20 mark theory and methods question in paper 3.

This booklet contains multiple example questions for both the AS and the A Level exams, along with generic mark schemes which can be used for assessment or for private practice.

## AS Question Type 1: Outline TWO..... – 4 marks

### Generic Mark Scheme

Two marks for each of two appropriate ways clearly outlined or one mark for appropriate ways partially outlined.

1. Outline **two** problems of using structured interviews in sociological research
2. Outline **two** advantages of using postal questionnaires in sociological research.
3. Outline two problems with using laboratory experiments in sociological research.
4. Outline two problems with using unstructured interviews in sociological research.
5. Outline two reasons why it may not be possible to create a representative sample.
6. Outline two advantages of using the comparative method.
7. Outline two ways of improving the rate of response to questionnaires.
8. Outline two reasons why a sociologist might choose to use group interviews.
9. Outline two types of questionnaire.
10. Outline two disadvantages of using participant observation.
11. Outline two advantages of using covert observation.
12. Outline two practical problems with using historical documents in sociological research.
13. Outline two factors which would influence a sociologists choice of research topic.
14. Outline two characteristics of the positivist approach to research.
15. Outline two ethical issue that need to be considered when undertaking sociological research
16. outline two problems of using longitudinal studies.
17. Outline two problems of using qualitative data in sociological research.
18. Outline two differences between macro and micro approaches to the study of society.
19. Outline the problems with the types of research that might be used by interpretivist sociologists.
20. Outline problem with the types of research methods that might be used by positivist sociologists

21. Outline two practical factors that may influence a sociologist's choice of research topic.
22. Outline two ethical issues researching should consider before carrying out a sociological study.
23. Outline two differences between public and personal documents.
24. Outline two problems of using secondary data in sociological research.
25. Outline two reasons why sociologists might undertake a pilot study.
26. Outline two reasons why sociologists might use a sample when doing a survey.
27. Outline two advantages that sociologists may find when using a postal questionnaire.
28. Outline two examples of primary data.
29. Outline two types of validity.
30. Outline two reasons why social research is more trustworthy than 'Common sense'.
31. Outline two practical issues that can affect the choice of method apart from money.
32. Outline two reasons why research based on comparative research is less convincing than findings based upon experiments.
33. Outline two problems of using unstructured interviews in sociological research.
34. Outline two reasons why a positivist would see participant observation as unscientific.
35. Outline one advantage and one disadvantage of using personal diaries in sociological research.
36. Outline two problems of using biographies and autobiographies in sociological research.

## AS Question Type 2: Evaluate the strengths and/or limitations of ..... – 16 marks

### Generic Mark Scheme

| Band    | Descriptor   |
|---------|--|
| 13 - 16 | Sound, conceptually detailed knowledge of a range of relevant material on the topic of the question. Good understanding of the question and of the presented material. Appropriate material applied accurately to the issues raised by the question. There will be some reasonable evaluation or analysis.   |
| 10 - 12 | Broad or deep, accurate but incomplete knowledge of a range of relevant material on the topic of the question. Understands a number of significant aspects of the question; reasonable understanding of the presented material. Application of material is largely explicitly relevant to the question, though some material may be inadequately focused. There will be some limited evaluation or analysis.   |
| 7 - 9   | Largely accurate knowledge but limited range and depth. Understands some aspects of the question; superficial understanding of the presented material. Applying listed material from the general topic area but with limited regard for its relevance to the issues raised by the question, or applying a narrow range of more relevant material. Answers are unlikely to have any evaluation but may have some limited analysis within a largely descriptive account. |
| 4 - 6   | Limited undeveloped knowledge. Understands only very limited aspects of the question; simplistic understanding of the presented material. Limited application of suitable material, and/or material often at a tangent to the demands of the question. Very limited or no evaluation. Attempts at analysis, if any, are thin and disjointed.   |
| 1 - 3   | Very limited knowledge, e.g. one to two very insubstantial points or about methods in general. Very little/no understanding of the question and of the presented material. Significant errors, omissions, and/or incoherence in application of material. No analysis or evaluation.  |

1. Evaluate the problems of using participant observation in sociological research.
2. Evaluate the view that practical factors are the most important influence when selecting research methods.
3. Evaluate the uses and limitations of official statistics in sociological research.
4. Evaluate different approaches to sociological research used by positivists and interpretivists.
5. Evaluate the view that the main influences on researchers choice of research method of practical considerations.

6. Evaluate the view that theoretical issues are the most important influence when choosing a research topic and research methods to investigate it.
7. Evaluate the usefulness and problems of using content analysis in sociological research.
8. Evaluate the advantages of using official statistics in sociological research.
9. Evaluate the problems of using self-completion web-based structured questionnaires in sociological research.
10. Evaluate the advantages of using structured interviews in sociological research.
11. Evaluate the advantages of using participant observation in sociological research.
12. Evaluate the problems of using experiments in sociological research.
13. Evaluate how and why sociological knowledge is different common sense knowledge.
14. Evaluate why sociologists use official statistics in their research.
15. Evaluate how far different factors may affect sociologists choice of research methods
16. Evaluate the practical, ethical and theoretical problems faced by sociologists when using laboratory experiments.
17. Evaluate the strength of using mailed questionnaires.
18. Evaluate the difficulties that sociologists face when using structured interviews.
19. Evaluate the advantages that some sociologists see in participant observation.
20. Evaluate the practical and theoretical issues involved in using statistics in studying Society.
21. Evaluate the reasons why some sociologists use unstructured interviews.
22. Evaluate the reasons why some sociologists choose to use official statistics when conducting their research.
23. Evaluate the problems of using overt observation in sociological research.
24. Evaluate the advantages of using documents in sociological research.
25. Evaluate the practical, ethical and theoretical issues associated with covert observation.

# A Level Question Type 1: Outline and Explain Two... – 10 marks

## One both Paper 1 and Paper 3

### Generic Mark Scheme

| Band   | Descriptor   |
|--------|--|
| 8 – 10 | Answers in this band will show very good knowledge and understanding. There will be two applications of relevant material. There will be appropriate analysis.   |
| 4 - 7  | Answers in this band will show a basic to reasonable knowledge and understanding of one or two points on the topic of the question. There will be some analysis/evaluation   |
| 1 – 3  | Answers in this band will show limited knowledge and understanding of one or two points on the topic of the question. Some material may be at a tangent to the question and there will be limited or no analysis/evaluation. |

**Please note that these questions should not be marked in terms of 5 + 5 but as a response as a whole and only points from the item can be credited.**

1. Outline and explain **two** advantages of using official statistics in sociological research.
2. Outline and explain two arguments against the view that sociology is a science.
3. Outline and explain **two** reasons why sociologists may not influence government policy.
4. Outline and explain two reasons why experiments are often associated with the positivist approach in Sociology.
5. Outline and explain two practical problems with covert observation.
6. Outline and explain two ethical problems with covert research.
7. Outline and explain two ethical problems that sociologists may experience when conducting research.
8. Outline and explain two advantages of using field experiments in sociological research.
9. Outline and explain two arguments against the view that sociology can be value free.
10. Outline and explain two theoretical problems with participant observation
11. Outline and explain two arguments in favour of the view that sociological research should have an influence on social policy.

12. Outline and explain two practical problems of the use of postal questionnaires in sociological research.
13. Outline and explain two advantages of using qualitative sources of data in sociological research.
14. Outline and explain two ways in which structuralist theories of society differ from social action or interpretivist theories.
15. Outline and explain two arguments that suggest functionalist theories may have little to contribute to an understanding of society today.
16. Outline and explain two ways in which modernist approaches differ from postmodernist approaches to the study of society.
17. Outline and explain two arguments that suggest that Society may have moved beyond modernity to a new stage of postmodernity.
18. Outline and explain two feminist views of the position of women in society.
19. Outline and explain name two arguments for the view that sociology is a science.
20. Outline and explain two advantages of using quantitative data in sociological research.
21. Outline and explain two concepts that symbolic interactionist use to understand social life.
22. Outline and explain two ways in which a sociologists subjective beliefs and values may influence sociological research.
23. Outline and explain two arguments for the view that sociological research should not be value free.
24. Outline and explain two ways in which sociologists may contribute to the understanding of its societal problem.
25. Outline and explain two reasons why some sociologists suggest researches should not involve themselves in applied research to assist governments informing their social policies.
26. Outline and explain two advantages of using questionnaires in sociological research.
27. Outline and explain two reasons why positivists prefer quantitative research methods.
28. Outline and explain two ethical problems often associated with qualitative research.
29. Outline and explain two functionalist concepts.
30. Outline and explain two criticisms of Marxist views of society.
31. Outline and explain two reasons for the growth of globalisation.

## A Level Question Type 2: Using material from the item and your own knowledge, evaluate .... – 20 marks

### Generic Mark Scheme

| Band    | Descriptor   |
|---------|--|
| 17 – 20 | Answers in this band will show sound, conceptually detailed knowledge of a range of relevant material. Sophisticated understanding of the question and of the presented material will be shown. Appropriate material will be applied accurately and with sensitivity to the issues raised by the question. Analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant. Evaluation may be developed, for example through a debate between different perspectives. Analysis will show clear explanation. Appropriate conclusions will be drawn.   |
| 13 – 16 | Answers in this band will show accurate, broad or deep but incomplete knowledge. Understands a number of significant aspects of the question; good understanding of the presented material. Application of material is largely explicitly relevant to the question, though some material may be inadequately focused. Some limited explicit evaluation, and/or some appropriate analysis, e.g. clear explanations of some of the presented material.   |
| 9 - 12  | Answers in this band will show largely accurate knowledge but limited range and depth. Understands some limited but significant aspects of the question; superficial understanding of the presented material. Applying listed material from the general topic area but with limited regard for its relevance to the issues raised by the question, or applying a narrow range of more relevant material. Evaluation will take the form of juxtaposition of competing positions or to one or two isolated stated points. Analysis will be limited, with answers tending towards the descriptive |
| 5 - 8   | Answers in this band will show limited undeveloped knowledge, e.g. two or three insubstantial points. Understands only limited aspects of the question; simplistic understanding of the presented material. Limited application of suitable material, and/or material often at a tangent to the demands of the question. Very limited or no evaluation. Attempts at analysis, if any, are thin and disjointed.   |
| 1 - 4   | Answers in this band will show very limited knowledge, e.g. one or two very insubstantial points about sociological methodology in general. Very little/no understanding of the question and of the presented material. Significant errors and/or omissions in application of material. No analysis or evaluation  |



**Item B1**

*Interpretivists view social reality as made up of meanings and motives. To understand these meanings and motives, sociologists must be able to empathise with the people they study. Furthermore, interpretivists argue that society can only be studied subjectively and therefore they favour qualitative methods of research.*

Applying material from item B1 and your own knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of interpretivist approaches to our understanding of society

**Item B2**

*Marxists see society as based on conflict between social classes. Those who own the means of production are able to exploit those who do not and are also able to impose their views on society. However, different Marxists have different views about the nature of capitalist society and about how social change occurs.*

Applying material from Item B2 and your knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of Marxist approaches in understanding society.

**Item B3**

*Feminist see Society as based upon conflict between men and women. In patriarchal societies, men are able to dominate and exploit women and ensure that Society is run in the interests of men. However, different feminists have different views about the causes of male dominance and what should be done about it.*

Applying material from item B3 and your own knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of feminist approaches in understanding Society.

**Item B4**

*Sociologists do not always collect their own data as part of their research but instead sometimes use existing secondary data such as official statistics. However, some critics argue that there are so many problems associated with secondary data that it only has only a limited role to play in sociological research. Official statistics in particular have been criticised by interpretivists as lacking validity. For example, 'soft' official statistics such as those relating to crime and unemployment are open to manipulation. However, it has been argued that secondary data is often reliable and representative and in many cases relatively cheap.*

Applying material from item B4 and your own knowledge, evaluate the claim that secondary data has only a limited role to play in sociological research.

**Item B5**

Some sociologists may be using quantitative research methods such as structured interviews and questionnaires. These two methods are similar in many ways. Both use a fixed list of questions, often with pre-set, pre-coded answer categories, and both are relatively quick to complete. Their differences come mainly from how they deliver the questions - by the face to face or in written form. However, interpretivist argue that quantitative research methods impose the research his view on the respondents and do not allow them to express themselves in the way they would like to.

Applying material from item B5 and your own knowledge, evaluate the claim that quantitative research methods may have many advantages, but they tell us a little about what people really think and do.

**Item B6**

*Interpretivists argue that sociology is about investigating the meanings and motives of social actors, and so the aim of researches should be to obtain an empathetic, and subjective understanding of people's meanings. In the view of interpretivists, this can only be achieved by employing open ended qualitative research methods such as participant observation and unstructured interviews. These methods allow people to act naturally or respond fully and freely to the sociologists question, producing data that is high in validity. However, other sociologists argue that these methods produce biased data which is that the results of the research is subjective interpretation of events and responses.*

Applying material from item B6 and your own knowledge, Evaluate the interpretivist claim that qualitative research methods are the most appropriate ones for studying Society.

**Item B7**

Positivists believe that sociology can be a science by following the logic and methods of the natural sciences. In the view of positivism, this involves Gathering objective quantitative data to verify or prove hypothesis and Discover causal laws. While accepting the positivist view of science, interactionists reject the claim that we can study human beings in this way. However, positivism is just one view of what constitutes science. For example, Popper argues that science involves seeking to falsify hypothesis, while Kuhn argues that a scientific subject is one that has a unified paradigm.

Applying material from Item B7 and your own knowledge, Evaluate The claim that whether sociology can be a science depends on what we mean by science in the first place.

**Item B8**

Positivists argue that by replicating the logic and methods of the natural sciences, sociology can uncover laws of human behaviour. They believe that, like natural scientists, sociologists should you use quantitative data to deduce objectively whether a hypothesis is true or false. However, sociologists from other perspectives have different views, not only on whether this is possible but on the very nature of science itself.

Applying material from Item B8 and your own knowledge, Evaluate the claim that sociology can and should be a science.

**Item B9**

*Marxists see class as a fundamental division in society, in which the proletariat are exploited by the capitalist owners of the means of production. The capitalist class maintain their dominance partly by force and partly by ideological control through the media, the education system and so on. However, Marxists predict that ultimately, the proletariat will overthrow capitalism by means of a revolution. For Marxists, social change is not the gradual evolutionary process seen by consensus theories. However, other sociologists argue that class is not the only basis for inequality and that revolutions have failed to occur in advanced capitalist societies.*

Applying material from item B9 and your own knowledge evaluate The contribution of different Marxist theorists to understanding Society.

**Item B10**

*Some sociologists argue that their research should take the side of the underdog. For example, Becker points out that traditionally, sociology has tended to take the side of the powerful groups in society, often accepting their view of the World. As a result, the standpoint of less powerful groups have been largely hidden. Becker therefore argues that sociology should identify with the underdog, empathize with them and uncover their world view. However, others have argued that there is no place with values in Sociology and that sociologists should take an objective 'value neutral' approach to research.*

Applying material from item B10 and your own knowledge, Evaluate the view that sociologists should take the side of the underdog and be committed to social change.

**Item B11**

*Functionalism is a consensus theory. It sees society is based on a set of shared values and this value consensus is the basis for social order. It is also a systems theory. It emphasizes the way the social system shapes social institutions and behaviour patterns of individuals. Society is seen as a system with its own separate existence and needs. However, some critics claim that functionalism understates the extent of conflict in society. Others argue that functionalism is too deterministic, portraying individuals as simply the puppets of the social system.*

Applying material from item B11 and your own knowledge, Evaluate the claim that functionalism understates both the extent of conflict in society and the ability of social actors to create Society through into action.

**Item B12**

*All feminists argue that women occupy and subordinate position in society and all feminists wish to end the state of affairs. However, they differ about both the causes of the problem and it's solution. For example, liberal feminist argue that traditional attitudes and cultural stereotypes about women's abilities have kept them subordinated, but that changes in laws, policies and socialization patterns will gradually bring about gender equality. However, boats radical and Marxist feminist argue that women's oppression has deeper roots and requires more fundamental, revolutionary changes in order to end it.*

Applying material from item B12 and your own knowledge Evaluate the contribution of feminists to our understanding of society.

**Item B13**

*Action approaches reject the idea that we are simply puppets whose behaviour is determined by tightly scripted roles imposed on us by Society. Instead, they start from the assumption that we create and shape Society through our choices and actions. For example, interactionists argue that we create the social world through our interaction with one another, based on the meanings we give to the situations. Similarly, ethnomethodologists argue that we use common sense knowledge to construct a set of shared meanings. However, critics argue that action approaches ignore the influence of wider social structures.*

Applying material from item B13 and your own knowledge, Evaluate the contribution of action approach theories to our understanding of social behaviour.

**Item B14**

*According to some sociologists, recent changes such as those associated with globalisation have resulted in a major change in the nature of today's Society. For example, postmodernists argue that we no longer live in modern society but are now living in a media saturated postmodern society in which it is impossible to distinguish image from reality or to change society for the better. As a result, postmodernists argue, we need new theories to explain this new kind of society. However, some critics argue that although there have been major changes in society, these are a continuation of modernity rather than a completely new type of society.*

Applying material from item B14 and your own knowledge, evaluate the claim that we are now living in a postmodern age.

**Item B15**

*Early positivist sociologists believe that sociology was a 'science of society' that would enable us to discover the causes of social problems and offer solutions to them. Sociologist research findings would then enable the state to implement appropriate social policies to deal with the problems. In the same way as medical research can discover cures for diseases, so sociological research would help solve society's problems. However, Marxists claim that the main function of social policy is to maintain capitalism and that the role of sociologists should therefore be to criticise policy, not to serve the capitalist state.*

Applying material from item B15 and your own knowledge, Evaluate different sociological perspectives on the relationship between sociology and social policy.

**Item B16**

*Questionnaires are favoured by positivists as a method of research. By asking the same questions and with the same response categories, questionnaires are seen as producing reliable data because they can be repeated again and again. Questionnaires can be distributed often on a large scale, by hand, via the Internet or through the mail. This can increase the representativeness of the results and data. Whichever way the questionnaire is distributed, the resulting data is easily quantifiable. This has limitations as well as benefits to the sociologist.*

Applying material from item B16 and your own knowledge, Evaluate the usefulness of questionnaires in sociological research.

**Item B17**

*Functionalism is a structural theory that sees Society as being based on value consensus. Through institutions such as the family and the education system, individuals are socialised into the Shared norms and values. However, some functionalists acknowledge that conflict in society can occur and that's something such as poverty may be dysfunctional for some groups in society. Also, not everyone may share the same norms and values.*

Applying material from item B17 and your own knowledge, evaluate the usefulness of functionalist approaches in understanding Society.

**Item B18**

*Postmodernists argue that due to the significant changes that have taken place in society, the modern world is dissolving. This, it is claimed, is due to factors such as increased fragmentation and living in a media saturated Society. However, other sociologists acknowledge that while rapid changes have occurred since the 1970s, factors such as social class inequalities are still significant in today's Society.*

Applying material from item B18 and your own knowledge, Evaluate the claim that we are now living in a postmodern Society.

**Item B19**

*Feminism is a conflict theory that sees Society as being divided by gender. Feminists argue but as a result of patriarchy, women are subordinated and oppressed by men. However, different feminist theories have different views on how gender inequality is caused and how women can be liberated from this oppression.*

Applying material from item B19 and your own knowledge, Evaluate the usefulness of feminist approaches to our understanding of the role of women in society today.

**Item B20**

*The theoretical and methodological perspectives held by sociologist, such as whether they are functionalist, Marxist or feminist, or positivists or interpretivists, will have important influences on the choice of topics for research and the research methods be used to investigate them. However, the research is also influenced by a series of important practical and ethical considerations.*

Applying material from item B20 and your own knowledge evaluate the view that sociologists choice of research topic and the methods they use to investigate them are primarily based on practical considerations.