

# RESEARCH METHODS CHECKLIST

This checklist highlights the key concepts and suggested research studies that students should consider in their revision for both paper 1 and paper 3 of AQA A level Sociology. The concepts identified are based upon those included in a range of publications designed to help A level students achieve in AQA Sociology.

The paper 1 exam has 30 marks worth of questions on theory and methods, with a further 30 marks of questions on paper 3. Paper 1 has a 20 mark methods in context question and a 10 mark theory and methods question. Paper 3 also has a 10 mark question on theory and methods, with a further 20 mark essay of theory and methods as well. The question styles are outlined below.

## PAPER 1 QUESTION 5 : METHODS IN CONTEXT

The Methods in Context question is largely testing your skill of application. It asks you to evaluate the strengths and limitations of using a specific method to investigate an issue in education. In order to get into the higher mark bands on this question, you need to be able to apply the specific characteristics of research participants (the WHO) that a researcher might investigate when researching a specific issue (the WHAT) using the method in the question (the HOW). In order to get into the higher bands you need to demonstrate that you have consistently applied the method to the context, rather than writing solely about the method or education in general.

## PAPER 1 QUESTION 6 AND PAPER 3 QUESTION 5: OUTLINE AND EXPLAIN TWO...(10 MARKS)

Both of these questions can reference any aspect of the theory and methods part of the specification. As such, you should have revised the whole content of this checklist in time for paper 1 as you could be asked a question on methods, theories or key debates in sociology. This question is largely knowledge based, and so you should look to explain in detail any strengths, limitations, features, criticisms or perspectives that are mentioned in the question. Questions on this section can be straightforward such as 'outline and explain two practical limitations of using primary methods of research', or comparing and contrasting different approaches or methods - e.g. 'outline and explain two reasons why researchers may prefer quantitative data to qualitative data'. For each of these types of question, you can draw upon your knowledge from right across the specification - just because the question is on paper 1 does not mean you need to reference studies in education and the same for paper 3 and crime.

## PAPER 3 QUESTION 6: USING MATERIAL FROM ITEM C AND YOUR KNOWLEDGE EVALUATE... (20 MARKS)

As with all essays, this question is testing the full range of your skills. Once again, material can be drawn from right across the theory and methods specification. It may take the form of a straightforward 'Evaluate strengths and limitations' of a specific method. Alternatively it could ask about the contributions of a specific theory, e.g. Marxism, feminism, functionalism. Another alternative could be that the question is presented in the form of a debate - such as 'Evaluate the view society has entered a postmodern age'. Each of these questions will allow you to draw upon information from across the full specification and applying your knowledge of education, crime and/or the different optional topic areas is encouraged, in order to demonstrate the synoptic nature of sociology.

High band responses will show a range of explanations that have been developed in depth and explicitly evaluated. Conclusions can be drawn throughout your essay, but a short concluding paragraph will help you to identify to an examiner that your essay might be a top band one.



### EXAM GOLD

Application of relevant examples of research is a good way to demonstrate sound knowledge of sociological ideas, concepts and theories. Have examples of research that have used different methods ready to use to prove the points you make. Another key feature of top band essays is the ability to apply different concepts across topic areas. For example, Durkheim's concept of social solidarity crops up in both education and crime (as well as other optional topic areas like Beliefs in Society) - using these examples to demonstrate the effectiveness of a theory is a higher order skill and will help you to get into the higher mark bands.



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TOPIC AREA	KEY CONCEPTS	SUGGESTED EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH USING THE METHOD	✓
<b>Research Design</b>	<p>The strengths and limitations of using:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary and secondary data</li> <li>• Quantitative and qualitative data</li> </ul> <p>The use of pilot studies</p> <p>Sampling methods including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Random sampling</li> <li>• Stratified sampling</li> <li>• Snowball sampling</li> <li>• Systematic sampling</li> <li>• Quota sampling</li> </ul> <p>Different stages of research</p> <p>Operationalising concepts</p>		
<b>Practical Issues</b>	<p>Logistical issues surrounding the conduct of different research methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time taken to conduct and analyse findings of different research methods</li> <li>• Researcher's opportunity to conduct research into a specific area of interest</li> <li>• Access to participants or research materials</li> <li>• Money - cost of equipment, training, materials in order to conduct experiments</li> <li>• Personal characteristics of researcher conducting research</li> </ul>		
<b>Ethical Issues</b>	<p>Ethical issues surrounding conduct of different research methods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deception of participants</li> <li>• Right to withdraw from research</li> <li>• Informed consent</li> <li>• Protection from physical and psychological harm</li> <li>• Social sensitivity</li> <li>• Confidentiality and anonymity</li> <li>• Storage of personal data</li> </ul>		

TOPIC AREA	KEY CONCEPTS	SUGGESTED EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH USING THE METHOD	✓
<b>Theoretical Issues</b>	Theoretical issues surrounding conduct of research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validity</li> <li>• Reliability</li> <li>• Theoretical preference</li> <li>• Methodological preference</li> <li>• Choice of quantitative or qualitative data</li> <li>• Choice of primary or secondary data</li> <li>• Application of research findings</li> </ul>		
<b>Quantitative and Qualitative methods: Experiments</b>	Practical, ethical and theoretical issues involved in conduct of different types of experiment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lab or controlled experiments</li> <li>• Field experiments</li> </ul> Key terms include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecological validity</li> <li>• Operationalising concepts</li> <li>• Independent, dependent and extraneous variables</li> <li>• Hypothesis</li> <li>• Hawthorne effect</li> </ul>	Bandura (controlled experiment) Rosenthal and Jacobsen (field experiment)	



## EXAM GOLD

Using examples of issues that have been faced when conducting research using a specific method is a useful way of showing a deeper understanding of sociological research methods. For example, knowing that Rosenthal and Jacobsen deliberately deceived the teachers in their experiment by telling them that certain students would develop faster during the year is an example of an ethical issue faced by many researchers conducting field experiments. This can also be evaluated through discussing why a breach of ethical codes was important and how results would not be valid if they had not deceived the teachers involved.



TOPIC AREA	KEY CONCEPTS	SUGGESTED EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH USING THE METHOD	✓
<p><b>Quantitative and Qualitative methods: Questionnaires</b></p>	<p>Practical, ethical and theoretical issues involved in conduct of different types of questionnaire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written questionnaires</li> <li>• Self-completion questionnaires</li> <li>• Mailed or online questionnaires</li> <li>• Interviewer present questionnaires</li> </ul> <p>Key terms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open and closed questions</li> <li>• Pre-coded questions</li> <li>• Leading questions</li> <li>• Standardisation</li> <li>• Imposition problem</li> <li>• Response rate</li> <li>• Social desirability</li> <li>• Incentives</li> <li>• Pilot survey</li> </ul>	<p>UK Census Great British Class Survey Sullivan</p>	
<p><b>Quantitative and Qualitative methods: Interviews</b></p>	<p>Practical, ethical and theoretical issues involved in conduct of different types of interview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured interview</li> <li>• Unstructured interview</li> <li>• Semi-structured interview</li> <li>• Group interview (focus group)</li> </ul> <p>Key terms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviewer effect</li> <li>• Interviewer bias</li> <li>• Social desirability</li> <li>• Verstehen</li> <li>• Rapport</li> <li>• Interview schedule</li> <li>• Status differences</li> <li>• Feminist methodologies</li> <li>• Conformity to group</li> </ul>	<p>Wilmott and Young Crime Survey of England and Wales Becker Archer Willis Oakley Carlen</p>	

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<p><b>Quantitative and Qualitative methods: Observations</b></p>	<p>Practical, ethical and theoretical issues involved in conduct of different types of observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant</li> <li>• Non-participant</li> <li>• Overt</li> <li>• Covert</li> </ul> <p>Key terms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objectivity</li> <li>• Subjectivity</li> <li>• Getting in, staying in, getting out</li> <li>• Verstehen</li> <li>• Hawthorne effect</li> <li>• Guilty knowledge</li> </ul>	<p>Venkatesh Patrick Whyte Humphries Willis Barker</p>	
<p><b>Quantitative and Qualitative methods: Secondary sources of data</b></p>	<p>Practical, ethical and theoretical issues involved in conduct of different types of secondary sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official statistics</li> <li>• Personal documents</li> <li>• Public documents</li> <li>• Historical documents</li> <li>• Content analysis</li> </ul> <p>Key terms include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Authenticity</li> <li>• Credibility</li> <li>• Representativeness</li> <li>• Triangulation</li> <li>• Manipulation</li> <li>• Verification</li> <li>• Replication</li> <li>• Objectivity</li> <li>• Subjectivity</li> </ul>	<p>Educational achievement data Census data Thomas and Znaniecki Aries Gewitz et al Glasgow University Media Group Scott</p>	

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<p><b>Practical, Ethical and Theoretical issues affecting choice of topic</b></p>	<p>Practical, ethical and theoretical issues involved in choosing topics to research including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of funding bodies</li> <li>• Purpose of research</li> <li>• Theoretical perspective</li> <li>• Methodological perspective</li> </ul> <p>Key terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher values</li> <li>• Social issues</li> <li>• Value freedom</li> <li>• Value-laden</li> <li>• Structural theories</li> <li>• Social action theories</li> <li>• Conflict</li> <li>• Consensus</li> </ul>	<p>Weber Gouldner Durkheim Comte Marx Worsley</p>	

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