

THEORY AND DEBATES 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 on 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 & methods alone 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 part 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 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 has 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.



THEORETICAL APPROACHES

TOPIC AREA	KEY CONCEPTS	SUGGESTED SOCIOLOGISTS	
Structural theories: functionalism	<p>Key concepts and ideas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consensus theory • Functional pre-requisites • Collective conscience • Social solidarity • Socialisation • Systems theory • Adaptation • Goal attainment • Integration • Latent functions • Manifest functions • Merton's internal critique 	<p>Durkheim Parsons Merton</p>	
Structural theories: Marxism	<p>Key concepts and ideas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict theory • Class conflict • Bourgeoisie and Proletariat • Economic infrastructure • Cultural superstructure • Exploitation • Alienation • Humanistic Marxism • Hegemony • Counter-hegemony • Dual consciousness • Structural Marxism • Ideological state apparatus • Repressive state apparatus 	<p>Marx Gramsci Althusser</p>	



EXAM GOLD

A key feature of structural theories is that they often agree that things happen in society, but differ on who it benefits or why this happens. For example, whilst functionalists suggest that the process of socialisation teaches individuals the value consensus of society that benefits society as whole, Marxists suggest that individuals are socialised into the dominant ideology of the ruling class to control them. Similarly, feminists suggest socialisation is important, but that it socialises individuals into patriarchal norms and values. Structural theories are often different sides of the same coin and this provides some useful material for evaluation.

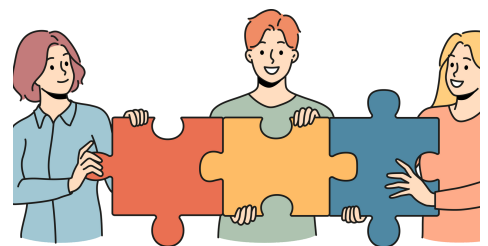


TOPIC AREA	KEY CONCEPTS	SUGGESTED SOCIOLOGISTS	
Structural theories: feminism	<p>Key concepts and ideas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal feminism • Radical feminism • Marxist feminism • Intersectional feminism • Patriarchy • Dual Burden • Gender domains • Genderquake • Dual systems theory • Intersectionality • Malestream sociology • Feminist methodologies 	<p>Oakley Walby Firestone Crenshaw Ansley</p>	
Social action theories	<p>Key concepts and ideas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict • Rationalisation • Verstehen • Symbolic interactionism • Labelling theory • Dramaturgical model • Impression management • Ethnomethodology • Reflexivity • Phenomenology • Typologies • Structuration • Duality of structure 	<p>Weber Becker Goffman Cooley Shutz Garfinkel Cooley</p>	



EXAM GOLD

Theory-based questions can be asked in a variety of different ways on the AQA specification. You could be asked to provide an evaluation of why one type of theory is better than another (e.g. conflict over consensus or structural versus social action). You could also be asked for contributions of a specific theory - e.g. evaluate the contribution of functionalism. you may even be asked about a specific feature of society and asked to what extent this is the defining feature - e.g. evaluate the view social class is the most important feature. For any theoretical question, you can show synoptic knowledge by applying material from right across the course - education, crime, methods or your optional topic areas. Doing so, show that you understand the big picture in sociology and how concepts, ideas and theories are connected.



KEY DEBATES IN SOCIOLOGY

TOPIC AREA	KEY CONCEPTS	SUGGESTED SOCIOLOGISTS	
Modernity, postmodernity and late modernity	<p>Key concepts and ideas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationality • Science • Capitalism • Rejection of metanarratives • Simulacra/simulacrum • Hyperreality • Globalisation • Reflexivity • Risk society • Consumerism • Choice • Diversity • Media saturation 	<p>Weber Durkheim Marx Baudrillard Lyotard Beck Giddens</p>	
Sociology and science	<p>Key ideas/concepts and theoretical debates around the claim that sociology is a science including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positivism • Interpretivism • Realism • Verificationism • Falsification • Paradigm shifts • Scientific revolutions • Science as an open and closed system 	<p>Comte Durkheim Weber Atkinson Douglas Popper Kuhn Keat and Urry Garfinkel</p>	



One of the key skills to master when dealing with debates questions in sociology is to come to a conclusion on which side of the debate offers the best explanation. This is the skill of evaluation - the ability to make a judgement on arguments presented. However, in many debates, there are natural mid-points presented through the specification. These points offer a compromise between two opposing arguments. For example, in the debate over whether sociology is a science, whilst one side will argue sociology can be a science (e.g. positivism), another will suggest that sociology cannot and should not be a science (e.g. interpretivism). There is a third option - that sociology can use scientific methods to discover what has happened, but cannot make predictions about what will happen as natural sciences do (e.g. realism). These mid-points occur more frequently than you think, so watch out for them. They make great conclusions.

TOPIC AREA	KEY CONCEPTS	SUGGESTED SOCIOLOGISTS	
<p>Subjectivity, objectivity and value freedom</p>	<p>Key ideas/concepts and theoretical debates around the claim the sociology can be value-free including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher values • Theoretical position • Value freedom • Value-laden • Positivism • Interpretivism • Committed sociology • Role of funding agencies • Use of scientific methods • Relativism 	<p>Comte Durkheim Gouldner Becker Marx Weber Myrdal</p>	
<p>Sociology and social policy</p>	<p>The extent to which sociology should inform social policy and reasons why it may not inform social policy including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and sociological issues • Influence of electorate on politicians • Think tanks and pressure groups • Role of international governmental organisations (IGOs) • Theoretical perspectives • New right • Social democracy • Cost implications • Political ideologies 	<p>Worsley Durkheim Marx Murray</p>	

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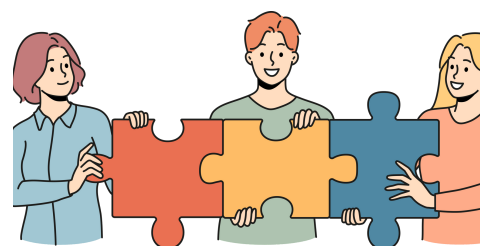


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