



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

SC3W Sociological Methods

Mark Scheme

2008 examination - January series

Mark schemes are prepared by the Principal Examiner and considered, together with the relevant questions, by a panel of subject teachers. This mark scheme includes any amendments made at the standardisation meeting attended by all examiners and is the scheme which was used by them in this examination. The standardisation meeting ensures that the mark scheme covers the candidates' responses to questions and that every examiner understands and applies it in the same correct way. As preparation for the standardisation meeting each examiner analyses a number of candidates' scripts: alternative answers not already covered by the mark scheme are discussed at the meeting and legislated for. If, after this meeting, examiners encounter unusual answers which have not been discussed at the meeting they are required to refer these to the Principal Examiner.

It must be stressed that a mark scheme is a working document, in many cases further developed and expanded on the basis of candidates' reactions to a particular paper. Assumptions about future mark schemes on the basis of one year's document should be avoided; whilst the guiding principles of assessment remain constant, details will change, depending on the content of a particular examination paper.

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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Dr Michael Cresswell, Director General.

QUALITY OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Where candidates are required to produce extended written material in English, the scheme of assessment must make specific reference to the assessment of the quality of written communication. Candidates must be required to:

- select and use a form and style of writing appropriate to purpose and complex subject matter;
- organise relevant information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary when appropriate;
- ensure text is legible, and spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate, so that meaning is clear.

The assessment criteria for quality of written communication apply only to the assessment of parts (e) and (f) of the questions. The following criteria should be applied in conjunction with the mark scheme.

The quality of written communication bands must be regarded as integral to the appropriate mark scheme band even though they are listed separately in the mark scheme. Examiners should note that, in the assessment of candidates' sociological knowledge and skills, the assessment of the Quality of Written Communication will be judged through the assessment of the clarity and appropriateness of the sociological material presented.

In the 1 – 7 band, candidates' answers are likely to be characterised by the poor logical expression of ideas and the use of a limited range of conceptual terms, perhaps often used imprecisely and/or inaccurately. Spelling, punctuation and grammar may show serious deficiencies and frequent errors, perhaps impairing the intelligibility of significant parts of the answer.

In the 8 – 15 band, candidates' answers are likely to be characterised by the fair to good logical expression of ideas and the competent use of a reasonable range of conceptual terms. Spelling, punctuation and grammar will be of a reasonable standard. Commonly used words and sociological terms will generally be spelt correctly. There may be minor errors of punctuation and grammar, but these will not seriously impair the intelligibility of the answer.

In the 16 – 20 band, candidates' answers are likely to be characterised by the very good to excellent logical expression of ideas and the precise use of a broad range of conceptual terms. Spelling, punctuation and grammar will be of a very good to excellent standard. Commonly and less commonly used words and sociological terms will almost always be spelt correctly. Punctuation and grammar will be used correctly throughout to facilitate the intelligibility of the answer.

SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS

Answer **all** parts of the question.

Total for this question: 60 marks

1

(a) Explain what is meant by ‘primary’ data (Item A , line 6).	<i>(2 marks)</i>
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Two marks for an appropriate explanation, such as data created by the sociologists themselves for their own research purposes.

One mark for a partial explanation, such as ‘new’ data, or for an example of a source of primary data, eg questionnaires.

(b) Suggest two ‘ethical issues’ that sociologists might take into account when choosing a research method (Item A , line 2).	<i>(4 marks)</i>
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Two marks for each of two issues, such as:

- negative effect of the research on participants
- danger to other members of the research team or respondents
- confidentiality
- anonymity
- right of privacy
- impact of their actions on the status of sociology
- informed consent.

(c) Suggest three advantages of using personal and historical documents in sociological research (Item A , lines 7 – 8).	<i>(6 marks)</i>
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Two marks for each of three appropriate advantages. These could include:

- low cost
- high validity
- sometimes the only source of information
- often contemporary to events described
- as a source of sociological hypotheses
- can provide a comparative historical dimension
- quick to access.

(d) Identify and briefly explain **two** disadvantages of using 'official statistics created by government agencies' in sociological research (**Item A**, line 10). *(8 marks)*

Two marks for each of two disadvantages of official statistics identified, such as:

- no control over how the data was collected
- socially constructed
- ideological bias
- does not cover all forms of social behaviour.

Two further marks for each of these satisfactorily explained, such as:

- No control over how the data was collected: the way concepts are operationalised by government departments may be different from that of the sociologist.
- Socially constructed: the result may be a distorted view of social reality eg the 'dark figure' of crime.
- Ideological bias: political intervention in definitions used may result in invalid data, for example, the 'true' level of unemployment.

(e) Examine the reasons why some sociologists use participant observation in their research.

(20 marks)

0 No relevant points.

1 – 7 Answers in this band will show only limited knowledge and understanding.

Lower in the band, this may be one or two quasi-commonsensical points about participant observation.

Higher in the band, answers will show a limited, undeveloped sociological knowledge, for example, two or three weak descriptive points about participant observation. Interpretation of material may be simplistic or at a tangent to the question, for example a weak account of a research study that used participant observation. Analysis will be very limited or non-existent.

8 – 15 Answers in this band will show reasonable knowledge and understanding.

Lower in the band, this might be confined to a competent if basic account of some of the uses of participant observation. Interpretation may be limited and not explicitly linked to the demands of the question; for instance, answers may be diverted into often lengthy, descriptive accounts of the characteristics of participant observation or basic lists of strengths and limitations, poorly linked to the question.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be broader and/or deeper, and will begin to identify a wider range of reasons why some sociologists use participant observation. More than one form of participant observation will be considered and there will be a focus on the overt-covert dimension. Material will be accurate, though at times its relevance may not be made explicit. There may be some limited explicit analysis or evaluation, for instance, through some weakly developed comparison of overt and covert participant observation, a list of problems weakly related to the strengths of participant observation or a weak comparison with other methods. However, this is **not** a requirement, even to reach the top of the band.

16 – 20 Answers in this band will display sound, conceptually detailed knowledge and understanding of a range of reasons why some sociologists use participant observation. This will be accurately and sensitively interpreted to meet the demands of the question. The candidate will show the ability to organise material and analyse and/or evaluate so as to produce a coherent and relevant answer. Evaluation will be more closely related to the reasons identified in the answer.

Candidates will consider a range of reasons for using different forms of participant observation. Reasons considered may include access to particular groups, insight, verstehen, immersion in a full range of group experiences, seeing how social actors behave in their usual social habitats, validity and theoretical preference. Other issues (differentiated between covert and overt) may include consent, recording behaviour, cost, time, Hawthorne Effect and researcher presence.

Lower in the band, answers may examine a more limited range of material.

Higher in the band, answers may be more detailed and complete, and/or may show a clear rationale in the organisation of material leading to a distinct conclusion.

(f) Using material from Item B and elsewhere, assess the usefulness of postal questionnaires in sociological research. <i>(20 marks)</i>
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0 No relevant points.

1 – 7 In this band, analysis/evaluation will be very limited or non-existent, and answers will show only limited knowledge and understanding.

Lower in the band, this may be one or two quasi-commonsensical points about questionnaires in general or some material ineffectually recycled from Item B.

Higher in the band, answers will show limited, undeveloped sociological knowledge, for example, in the form of a few descriptive and undeveloped sociological points in relation to questionnaires. Analysis and evaluation will be very limited or non-existent.

8 – 15 In this band, there will be some limited analysis and/or evaluation (though lower in the band this will be implicit), and answers will show reasonable knowledge and understanding of some potentially relevant material.

Lower in the band, answers will tend to be more limited in range, offering a broadly accurate if basic account of postal questionnaires. Some less focused material may also appear, for example, reference to other methods or lengthy descriptions of the characteristics of questionnaires in general.

Higher in the band, knowledge and understanding will be largely appropriate to the demands of the question, identifying a range of advantages and disadvantages of postal questionnaires. There will be a focus on the postal dimension. Accounts of studies using postal questionnaires will be more closely linked to the issue of usefulness. There will be some limited explicit analysis and/or evaluation, for example through some brief reference to methodological issues or weak comparison with other methods or other forms of questionnaire delivery.

16 – 20 In this band, analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant, and answers will show a sound, conceptually detailed knowledge and understanding of sociological material drawn from Item B and elsewhere concerning the usefulness of postal questionnaires. This will be accurately and sensitively interpreted to meet the demands of the question. Analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant. The strengths and weaknesses of postal questionnaires will be accurately identified in some detail and there will be an explicit focus on the postal dimension. These may include issues such as time, cost, scale, access, Hawthorne Effect, informed consent, response rate, degree of structure, quantitative versus qualitative data, issues relating to question design etc.

Material drawn from Item B and reference to examples of research studies employing postal questionnaires will be relevant, accurate and sensitively interpreted. Analysis and evaluation may be anchored in relation to the concepts of reliability, representativeness and validity, or through linkage to methodological preference. Analysis and evaluation may also be shown through direct comparison with alternative research methods or some recognition that postal questionnaires may be more or less appropriate for particular research purposes.

Lower in the band, answers may consider a more limited range of material or occasionally lack focus or structure.

Higher in the band, interpretation will be more fully focused and evaluation more thorough, and answers may show a clear rationale in the organisation of material leading to a distinct conclusion.

ASSESSMENT GRID FOR AS SOCIOLOGY (5191) UNIT 3 (SC3W)**Sociological Methods**

	ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES		
Questions	AO1	AO2	Total
1 a	2	0	2
1 b	2	2	4
1 c	2	4	6
1 d	4	4	8
1 e	14	6	20
1 f	6	14	20
Total	30	30	60