

AQA A LEVEL
SOCIOLOGY

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TOPIC TEN MARKERS

Theory & Methods



CRIME & DEVIANCE 10 MARKERS

1. Outline and explain two ways in which contemporary society could be described as postmodern. (10 marks)
2. Outline and explain two arguments against the view that sociology is a science. (10 marks)
3. Outline and explain two ways in which values might enter sociological research. (10 marks)
4. Outline and explain two practical issues that might influence a sociologist's choice of research method. (10 marks)
5. Outline and explain two factors that might influence a sociologist's choice of research topic. (10 marks)
6. Outline and explain two advantages of using questionnaires in sociological research. (10 marks)
7. Outline and explain two practical disadvantages of using unstructured interviews. (10 marks)
8. Outline and explain two disadvantages of using covert observations, compared with overt observations. (10 marks)
9. Outline and explain two advantages of using field experiments in sociological research. (10 marks)
10. Outline and explain two advantages of using personal documents in sociological research. (10 marks)
11. Outline and explain two advantages of using official statistics in sociological research. (10 marks)
12. Outline and explain two ways in which sociology might influence government policy. (10 marks)

Outline and explain two ways in which contemporary society could be described as postmodern. (10 marks)

Postmodernists argue that society has moved on from the modern era into the era of postmodernity. One feature of a postmodern society is the huge amount of choice that exists today. It is not just that people can achieve status in society through meritocracy rather than have it ascribed by birth (which was a feature of modern society, according to functionalists) but that people can literally choose their identity and their status. A choice society is not characterised by consensus or by a fundamental conflict, as modernist theories argued, but instead people can choose their culture, their beliefs, their family, their gender, their ethnicity. This huge amount of choice is at once empowering and unsettling. For example, the ability for men and women to choose their gender identity and role is a liberating idea but one that has led, some argue, to a crisis of masculinity. While there is evidence of choice and diversity in aspects of contemporary society (e.g. family diversity, educational diversity, the multitude of television channels), some would question whether postmodernists overstate the extent and significance of this change. Most people live in the families and with the gender and ethnic identities they were born into and, globally, most people in most of the world have very limited choices. Sociologists such as Anthony Giddens prefer to use the term late modernity to suggest there is a continuation from the modern era rather than a wholly new age.

Another way in which some argue that contemporary society is postmodern is its global character: i.e. the effects of the process of globalisation. A feature of postmodern society, for sociologists such as Cohen and Kennedy, is globalisation: the process by which societies are becoming ever more interconnected and interdependent. If the modern era was the era of the nation state as a social unit, the postmodern era is global. A global economy, increasingly supranational political structures and an increasingly global culture exist. While Marxists would argue that this is westernisation and cultural imperialism – a continuation of the imperialism that existed in the modern era – postmodernists suggest it is a more complex, fluid and interdependent process than that. There is an increasing hybridity of culture, which contributes to the choice society previously mentioned, where people can take parts of western and eastern culture and create their own pick-and-mix beliefs and worldview, as suggested by Baudrillard.

There is no requirement for an introduction for 10-mark questions. There's no harm in a short one, here the writer has opted to go straight into the first "way" (after a sentence of background).

The first paragraph is more-or-less a classic PEEL (but with an emphasis on analysis and development rather than evaluation) including plenty of key terminology.

Some of the analysis here is quite evaluative, but there is no need to include counter arguments. The AO3 marks are for analysis rather than evaluation.

Very clear that we have moved onto the second way.

Again, the analysis has a hint of focused evaluation, which is fine, but there is no need to spend time on arguments suggesting that globalisation is not happening.

The focus is kept on postmodernity, rather than broader points about globalisation

[395 words]

Examiner comments: *Mark Band: 8-10*

This is a top band answer. Two “ways” are identified and clearly and distinctly addressed. Keeping the two ways in separate paragraphs and clearly signposting them with phrases like “another way” means that the examiner knows precisely what to mark and credit.

Key terminology is used throughout and plenty of relevant concepts are packed in and used effectively as part of a chain of reasoning and analysis.

Of course the writer could have chosen a number of other possible ways: rapid change, hyper-reality, reflexivity, etc. It is important that, while demonstrating excellent knowledge of the topic, there is no temptation to list all those other ways. They will not be credited and only the best two will be marked. It is, however, possible to bring more concepts in to the development and analysis of one of the points. In this essay, there is some discussion of Baudrillard and pick-and-mix culture within the section of globalisation but it is clearly tied to globalisation (as a contrast to the idea of westernisation or cultural imperialism) so there is no risk that it might be seen as a third “way”.

Outline and explain two ways in which sociology might influence government policy. (10 marks)

One way in which sociology might influence a government's social policy is through the identification of a social problem that requires policies to solve it. Policies are often designed to solve problems in society, for example, differential educational achievement or patterns of crime and deviance. Sociological research brings these problems to the attention of the public, media and government as well as providing evidence to show the extent of the problem. For example, lots of research showed that social class differences in educational achievement are already apparent at pre-school age. This evidence contributed towards the Labour government of 1997-2010 developing Surestart centres, as a form of compensatory education. The same government introduced EMA payments to pupils from low-income households, partly as a result of research by Smith and Noble (1995) that showed lack of money for educational resources and travel was a barrier to continuing in education. These are clear examples of social research identifying social problems, leading to government adopting policies to solve them. The party in power might well respond to different research, however. The coalition government elected in 2010 scrapped EMA and cut many Surestart centres, despite access to the same sociological evidence.

Another way sociology might influence government policy is through developing theories that seek to explain social problems and identify possible solutions and strategies. Max Weber argued that sociology should provide evidence for policy-makers without making judgements or proposing policies. Others have been much keener to influence policy and while Marxists and radical feminists have argued for the fundamental, radical reform unlikely to be embraced by governments, other sociologists have had a lot of influence. For example, New Right sociologists like Murray and Marsland influenced the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher and the Third Way sociologist Anthony Giddens and left realist sociologists like Lea and Young influenced Tony Blair's New Labour government. The right realist sociologist, James Q. Wilson developed his broken windows theory that directly influenced government policy in New York and, to a lesser extent other US cities and the UK, encouraging zero tolerance policing. Murray's work on the underclass influenced welfare policies under Thatcher and Major. Therefore, it is not just evidence that influences social policy, but theory too.

This answer gets straight into the first way. If the question had been worded 'social policy' it might have demanded a brief definition.

Specific examples of policies and some research are given to make this point explicit.

The analysis is evaluative in character but there is no counter-argument to suggest sociology does not influence policy as this would not be creditworthy.

The second way is clearly identified and explained.

Some theoretical background and analysis helps to develop the point.

Specific examples illustrate the argument, making it a detailed and thorough response.

[367 words]

Examiner Comments: *Mark Band: 8-10*

This is a top-band answer. Students are often worried about social policy questions, but this answer shows that (depending on the question) high marks are available without having to consider particularly difficult concepts. This answer identifies the two most likely responses and illustrates them with plenty of examples. The examples here are from Education and Crime and Deviance and so would be available to all students; it is also likely that students might identify examples from optional modules like Families and Households or Global Development.

Plenty of examples are used, but the focus is kept firmly on the question, without extended descriptive passages about the examples.

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