

GCE AS and A Level Subject Criteria for Sociology

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The criteria

Introduction

AS and A level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.

They provide the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.

Aims and objectives

1. The study of *A Level Sociology* should focus on contemporary society. Studying sociology should foster the development of critical and reflective thinking with a respect for social diversity. It should provide an awareness of the importance of social structure and social action in explaining social issues. Learners should be encouraged to develop their own sociological awareness through active engagement with the contemporary social world.
2. GCE specifications in sociology should encourage learners to:
 - acquire knowledge and a critical understanding of contemporary social processes and social changes;
 - appreciate the significance of theoretical and conceptual issues in sociological debate;
 - understand and evaluate sociological methodology and a range of research methods through active involvement in the research process;
 - develop skills that enable individuals to focus on their personal identity, roles and responsibilities within society;
 - develop a lifelong interest in social issues.

Subject content

3. GCE AS and A level specifications in sociology should provide learners with an awareness of social structure and social action which emphasises different interpretations of social experiences. The specifications should build on skills established at GCSE but should not exclude learners studying sociology for the first time.

Knowledge and understanding

The nature of sociological thought

4. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to study the following concepts and theoretical issues:
 - social order, social control;
 - social change;
 - conflict and consensus;
 - social structure and social action;
 - the role of values;
 - the relationship between sociology and contemporary social policy.

Methods of sociological enquiry

5. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a range of methods and sources of data and to understand the relationship between theory and methods, particularly the way sociologists deal with:
 - the collection of primary and secondary data;
 - the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data using appropriate concepts;
 - factors influencing the design and conduct of sociological research;
 - practical, ethical and theoretical issues arising in sociological research.

Themes

6. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to study two themes:
 - socialisation, culture and identity;
 - social differentiation, power and stratification.
7. The themes should be understood and applied to a range of particular substantive areas of sociology, in a global context where appropriate. However, these themes are to be interpreted broadly as threads running

through many areas of social life and should not therefore necessarily be regarded as discrete topics. For example, the theme of ‘socialisation, culture and identity’ might be addressed through aspects of ‘the family’ but equally through aspects of the ‘the mass media’ or ‘youth culture’. Similarly, the theme of ‘social differentiation, power and stratification’ might be addressed through aspects of ‘social class’ but equally through aspects of ‘gender’.

Skills

8. In order to demonstrate the skills outlined in this section, learners should relate them to their sociological knowledge and understanding, as specified in sections 4, 5 and 6.

Collection and recording of evidence*

9. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate their ability to:
 - analyse and evaluate the design of sociological investigations;
 - analyse and evaluate the method(s) used in these investigations to collect and record evidence.
10. This could be achieved by learners designing and conducting a sociological investigation.

Interpretation and evaluation of evidence*

11. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate their ability to:
 - distinguish between facts, opinions and value judgements;
 - select and apply a range of relevant concepts and theories;
 - interpret qualitative and quantitative data;
 - identify and evaluate significant social trends shown in evidence;
 - evaluate theories, arguments and evidence.

* The term *evidence* should be understood to include both primary and secondary sources, as well as both quantitative and qualitative data.

Presentation of evidence* and argument

12. GCE AS and A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate their ability to:
- organise evidence and communicate arguments in a coherent manner;
 - demonstrate an awareness and understanding of theoretical debates in sociology;
 - use evidence to support and sustain arguments and conclusions.

Additional requirements

13. In addition, GCE A level specifications will require learners to demonstrate:
- a wider range and greater depth of knowledge and understanding than at AS;
 - more highly developed skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation than at AS.

Assessment objectives

14. The assessment objectives and the associated weightings for AS and A level are the same and should be weighted in all specifications as indicated. Specifications should require that all learners demonstrate the following assessment objectives in the context of the content and skills prescribed.

Assessment objectives		Weighting
AO1	Knowledge and understanding of the theories, methods, concepts and various forms of evidence outlined in sections 4, 5 and 6 and of the links between them. Communication of knowledge and understanding in a clear and effective manner.	45–55%
AO2	Demonstration of skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation as indicated in sections 9–13	45–55%

15. Assessment objective 2 should have a higher weighting at A level than at AS level. The assessment objectives apply to the whole specification.

Scheme of assessment

Assessment

16. Assessment must be entirely through external assessment.

Synoptic assessment

17. Synoptic assessment will be included at A2 and draw on both assessment objectives.
18. The definition of synoptic assessment in the context of sociology is as follows:
 - Synoptic assessment in sociology should engage learners in theoretical debate while encouraging an active involvement with the research process. It should foster a critical awareness of contemporary social processes and change. Synoptic assessment should draw together the knowledge, understanding and skills learnt in different aspects of the course and should include the explicit assessment of understanding of the connections between the nature of sociological thought, methods of sociological enquiry and the themes identified using the higher-order skills.
19. Examples of synoptic assessment tasks might include:
 - an examination question that assesses a learner's understanding of the links between sociological theories, methods and substantive topics, and which draws on the learner's own small-scale research experiences;
 - an examination question that presents learners with a research topic that is related to the core themes and requires them to use their theoretical and methodological understanding to create and justify a research proposal;
 - a stimulus question based on at least one prose passage and/or numerical data making connections between different parts of the course. The question would assess learners' understanding of these connections in the context of sociological thought and research methods.

AS performance descriptions for sociology

	Assessment objective 1	Assessment objective 2
Assessment objectives	<p>Knowledge and understanding of the theories, methods, concepts and various forms of evidence outlined in paragraphs 4,5 and 6 and of the links between them.</p> <p>Communication of knowledge and understanding in a clear and effective manner.</p>	Demonstration of skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation as indicated in paragraphs 9 - 13.
A/B boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate accurate knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological theories, methods and concepts, supported by evidence; b) present appropriate material in a logical, accurate and coherent manner, with few errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate an ability to select, apply and interpret, accurately and appropriately, different types of sociological evidence from a range of sources; b) make some analysis and evaluation of evidence and arguments that have relevance to the question paper.

E/U boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate a basic knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, methods and concepts with limited evidence; b) present some sociological material with limited coherence and some errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate a limited ability to select, apply and interpret different types of sociological evidence; b) make a limited analysis and evaluation of evidence and arguments relevant to the question paper.
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A2 performance descriptions for sociology

	Assessment objective 1	Assessment objective 2
Assessment objectives	<p>Knowledge and understanding of the theories, methods, concepts and various forms of evidence outlined in paragraphs 4,5 and 6 of the links between them.</p> <p>Communication of knowledge and understanding in a clear and effective manner.</p>	<p>Demonstration of skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation as indicated in paragraphs 9 -13</p>

A/B boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate full, detailed, accurate and wide ranging knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, methods and concepts and the connections between them, citing wide-ranging evidence; b) present sociological material in a logical and coherent manner, where spelling, grammar and punctuation are largely accurate. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate an ability to select, apply and interpret, accurately and appropriately, different types of sociological evidence from a wide range of diverse sources; b) make detailed and accurate analysis and evaluation of sociological evidence and arguments on a variety of issues that are highly relevant to the question paper.
E/U boundary performance descriptions	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate a basic knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, methods and concepts, with some limited evidence of understanding of the connections between them, supported by some evidence; b) present some sociological material that displays a basic structure with limited coherence and some errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling. 	<p>Learners characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) demonstrate a basic ability to select, apply and interpret different types of sociological evidence from a limited range of sources; b) make basic analysis and evaluation of evidence and arguments that have some relevance to the question paper.

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First published by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation in 2011

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