

Sociology Revision Booklet

Eduqas GCSE Sociology
Paper 1 and Paper 2

Unit 4 - Research Methods

Research Methods Topics

Topic	RAG
Different type of research and data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary vs Secondary • Qualitative vs Quantitative 	
PET Issues in Sociology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time/ cost /access • Ethical factors i.e. informed consent • Reliability/ Representativeness/ Validity • Positivism vs Interpretivists 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors influencing choice of method • Factors influencing choice of topic 	
Questionnaires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postal/ hand delivered/ structured interview/electronic • Pros and cons 	
Interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured/ semi structured/ unstructured/ focus/ group • Interview bias • Pros and cons 	
Observations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant vs non participant • Covert vs overt observations • Hawthorne Effect • Pros and cons 	
Official statistics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark figure • Pros and cons 	
Content Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pros and cons 	
Sampling Methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Random/ stratified/ systematic/ Quota/ volunteer/ snowball • Pros and cons 	
Mixed Methods Approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation • Pros and cons 	

REMINDER: RESEARCH METHODS IS A TOPIC ASSESSED ON BOTH PAPER 1 AND PAPER 2. IT IS IMPORTANT YOU KNOW YOUR METHODS VERY WELL TO ACHIEVE MAXIMUM MARKS.

Component 1: Understanding Social Processes

- ✓ Written examination: 1 hour 45 minutes
- ✓ 50% of the qualification

This component covers the following topic areas:

- Key Concepts in Sociology
- Families and Households
- Education
- **RESEARCH METHODS**

Component 2: Understanding Social Structures

- ✓ Written examination: 1 hour 45 minutes
- ✓ 50% of the qualification

This component covers the following topic areas:

- Social Differentiation and Stratification
- Crime and Deviance
- **APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS**

Below are the assessment objectives for this specification. Learners must:

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.

AO3: Analyse and evaluate sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods to construct arguments, make judgements and draw conclusions.

The table below shows the weighting of each assessment objective for each component and for the qualification.

	AO1	AO2	AO3	Total
Component 1	20%	20%	10%	50%
Component 2	20%	20%	10%	50%
Total	40%	40%	20%	100%

In each examination series, a minimum of 15% of the available marks will be awarded for learners' knowledge and understanding in relation to *Research Methods*.

PET Issues

When conducting research, Sociologists must always consider PET issues. In the exam you could be asked to identify PET issues. You must have a good understanding of each.

<u>PET issues</u>	<u>Summary</u>	<u>Key headlines</u>
<u>Practical issues</u>	The practicalities involved with research. This includes such things as the amount of time the research will take, how much it will cost, whether you can achieve funding, opportunities for research including ease of access to respondents (people to complete it), and the personal skills and characteristics of the researcher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost • Access • Time • Opportunity • Skills
<u>Ethical issues</u>	The researcher has a responsibility to protect participants. The Sociologist must think about how the research impacts on those involved with the research process. Ethical research should gain informed consent, ensure confidentiality, be legal and ensure that respondents and those related to them are not subjected to harm. All this needs to be weighed up with the benefits of the research.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed Consent • Right to withdraw • Confidentiality • Protection from harm • Vulnerable groups
<u>Theoretical issues</u>	Positivists prefer quantitative research methods and are generally more concerned with reliability and representativeness. Interpretivists prefer qualitative research methods and are prepared to sacrifice reliability and representativeness to gain deeper insight, which should provide higher validity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliable • Representative • Valid

<u>Sociologists</u>	<u>Summary</u>	<u>Preferred methods</u>
<u>Positivists</u>	Sociologists who believe sociology is a science and should be studied like the natural sciences. Positivists prefer methods and data that is quantitative, reliable and representative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official statistics • Content Analysis • Questionnaires
<u>Interpretivists</u>	Sociologists who take a micro approach to studying society. They are interested in small-scale interactions between people, and aim to understand society and people on a deeper level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unstructured interviews • Observations • Diaries

The Research Process

This module will introduce you to one of the key areas of study in sociology. Research methods are at the heart of sociology. Sociologists base their ideas about society on research. The aim of sociology is to collect data in a logical and unbiased way. Sociologists use a range of methods during the research process. Sociologists do social research to get a better understanding of society. Their findings can influence how society is organised, enable governments to make decisions and change legislation (laws).

The Research Process - this is the path that research takes in sociology (shown below in a flow diagram)

Research Aims - this is the general area which a sociologist is interested in researching. Aims need to be clear so that the sociologist is aware of what to study and so they can obtain funding from the correct place. E.g. aim to study gender differences in education.

Hypothesis - This is a prediction about what the researcher thinks will happen. E.g. Girls will get better GCSEs than boys.

Research Method - This can be primary or secondary and is the method of investigating the research aims (more detail over the next pages)

Sampling - This is the way the researcher find participants for their study (more detail over the next pages)

Findings - This is what the researcher finds out from the research

Social Policies - This is where the government use research findings to design social policies to help society. E.g. research may find that students miss school because of bullying, a social policy to help this could be to give harsher punishments to bullies. Research may find that families divorce because of stress about money, a social policy to help this could be to give tax breaks to married couples.

Research Choice

Task

Complete the reading and answer the questions that follow.

How do Sociologists make choices about research?

Sociologists have numerous things to consider when choosing a research area. Some of these apply both to famous sociologists who are professors and to year 10 students creating their first project for GCSE Sociology. Others would only affect professional sociologists.

What aspect of society to study?

The first consideration for sociologists is to study an area that they are personally interested in. For you, this might be linked to a hobby that you have. If you play sport, for example, then this could be the topic or research area for you. For a professional sociologist, this personal interest is important too. They might, for example, choose a research area as a way of advancing their career at the university they are based at. A Sociologist's values might also affect their choice of study area. They might, for instance, hope to influence the government to change certain policies.

For example, a government might tell sociologists what it wants to know about. Sociologists should then research the issue as scientifically as possible. The findings can then be used by the government to put the idea into practice. For the year 10 sociologist, this would mean letting the management of a school tell you what you should research. But you might have your own ideas...

The purpose of sociology

Marxist and Feminist Sociologists would believe that sociology should be about improving society. For Marxists, this would mean producing research that particularly helps the working class and, for feminists, improving society for women. For a year 10 student, it might mean conducting research that will make the school better for students.

Sociologists also have to decide which method to use. If the researcher collects primary data, several methods could be used. These include questionnaires, interviews, observation and experiments. Experiments are not common in Sociology, but there are some interesting studies. The choice made might depend upon the researcher's personal skills. Cost and time will also play part in the decision. Cost includes such things as computer hardware and software, interviews and printing, postage and so on for a questionnaire. In addition, sociologists will consider the type of data they want to collect.

Funding

A significant factor affecting the choice of method for professional sociologists is that of funding. Real Sociological research is expensive, and might involve paying many costs, including the wages of researchers. Therefore, sociologists often need to seek funding for their studies, or offer their services to conduct paid studies. The main groups that fund sociological research are universities, charities, private companies and the government.

Example

Charities including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Shelter are interested in funding research into poverty. This fact might influence researchers to choose that area. The Economic and Social Research Council is one of the main government bodies that funds sociological research. The problem in such a case is that the government might not want to pay for research that criticises it. This awareness might also influence the choice of research area for sociologists.

The people or organisations who provide funding can act as gatekeepers for research. They also control the type of research that is done. For instance, research into corporate crime or the MP expenses scandal is unlikely to be funded by the government. Research into the negative social effects of alcohol is unlikely to be funded by a company that produces alcoholic drinks.

Interests and availability

Other factors that influence sociologist’s choice of topic are the trends of the times. Some aspects of society are of great interest at a particular time and are more likely to attract funding. Social networking and cybercrime, for example, are of great interest currently and attract funding for sociological studies. The year 10 sociologist might be interested in topics that are popular among the young people in their school. If you are choosing something to research, it might not be a bad thing to be interested in it yourself.

Another key factor for your research might be the availability of a group of people to study.. If you are a skateboarder, then you might know, or at least know of, other people who also skateboard. This gives you access to a whole subculture. Professional sociologists would also be able to take advantage of groups that are available to them in this way. Some accessibility might also influence the choice of research area.

Questions

1. Research choice can be based on hobbies and interests. What might a Feminist choose to research?

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2. What could influence a researcher’s choice of method?

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3. Why can research be expensive?

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4. Trends and time can influence a choice of topic. What do Sociologists mean by this?

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Key Term	Definition
Primary research	Data the Sociologist has collected themselves , first hand.
Secondary research	Information used in research that was originally used or collected by somebody else for another purpose.
Qualitative methods	Research data that is in words and has lots of detail, helping to give context.
Quantitative methods	Statistical data that is in numbers and can be presented as graphs and percentages.

Types of Data

Type of Data	Research Method it Comes From	Strengths	Weaknesses
Primary: Data the sociologist collects themselves	Observation, social surveys, opinion polls, focus groups, case studies	More relevant to the aims of research and up to date.	More expensive, time consuming.
Secondary: Data that someone else collects or has already been collected	Diaries, official statistics, the results of other people's research	Cheap, quick and useful to look at before beginning the main study	May not be relevant to the aims or may be dated.
Quantitative: numerical data %, 1,2,3 Graphs...	Social surveys with closed questions, observations, content analysis, official statistics	Objective (can't be misread) and easy to turn into graphs and charts for analysis	Don't get the reasons behind the data.
Qualitative: nonnumerical data Words, Diary's Journals, Newspapers...	Social surveys with open questions, case studies, diaries, photographs	Lots of rich data with the reasons for the behaviour	Time consuming to analyse and may be subjective

Task

Look at the list of research methods below. Place each method in the correct boxes.

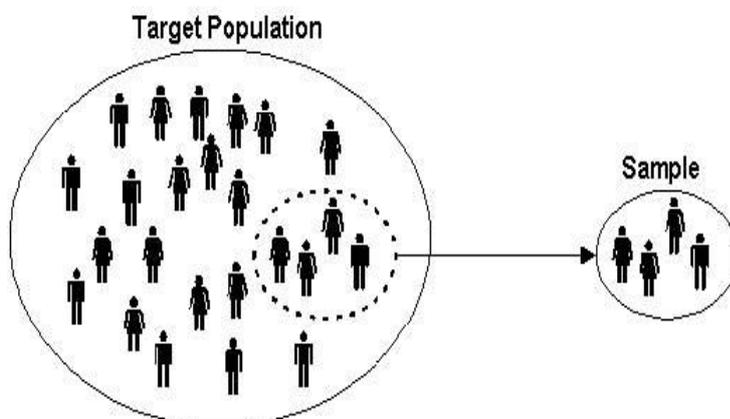
	Quantitative Data	Qualitative Data
Primary Methods	<i>Questionnaires</i>	<i>Participant Observation</i>
Secondary Methods		

- a) Diaries
- b) Websites
- c) Opinion Polls
- d) Photographs
- e) Experiments
- f) Historical Documents
- g) Structured interviews
- h) Unstructured interviews
- i) Official stats
- j) Letters
- k) Newspaper article

Sampling

What is sampling?

This is where we take a group from the target population (the people the researcher aims to study e.g. students, Year 7, people of a particular age or gender) and do a piece of research using them. We do this when we can't use the whole population because that could be really expensive and time consuming.



How do I get a sample?

You get a sampling frame (a list of all the people in the population who are available for research e.g. the electoral roll or a class register) and choose people using the techniques in the table below.

Does it matter which sampling technique I use?

Yes! You want to get a **representative sample** (a group of people whose thoughts and opinions truly reflect those of the population) if you end up with a biased sample e.g. all boys or all one subculture, then your research isn't **valid** (it isn't truly what you tried to find out.)

What is the best sampling technique? – See the table on the next page.

That depends on your study. A stratified sample is the most representative but you may not have much time or money, in this case a volunteer sample may be better because they will come to you (they will also want to be part of the study so they are less likely to drop out!) If you don't have a sampling frame (e.g. if you wanted to study students who do drugs at school- there is no list for this) then a snowball sample may be best as you can get the 'hard to reach' participants to recruit each other, on the other hand you may only get a small sample as they may worry they are going to get in trouble.

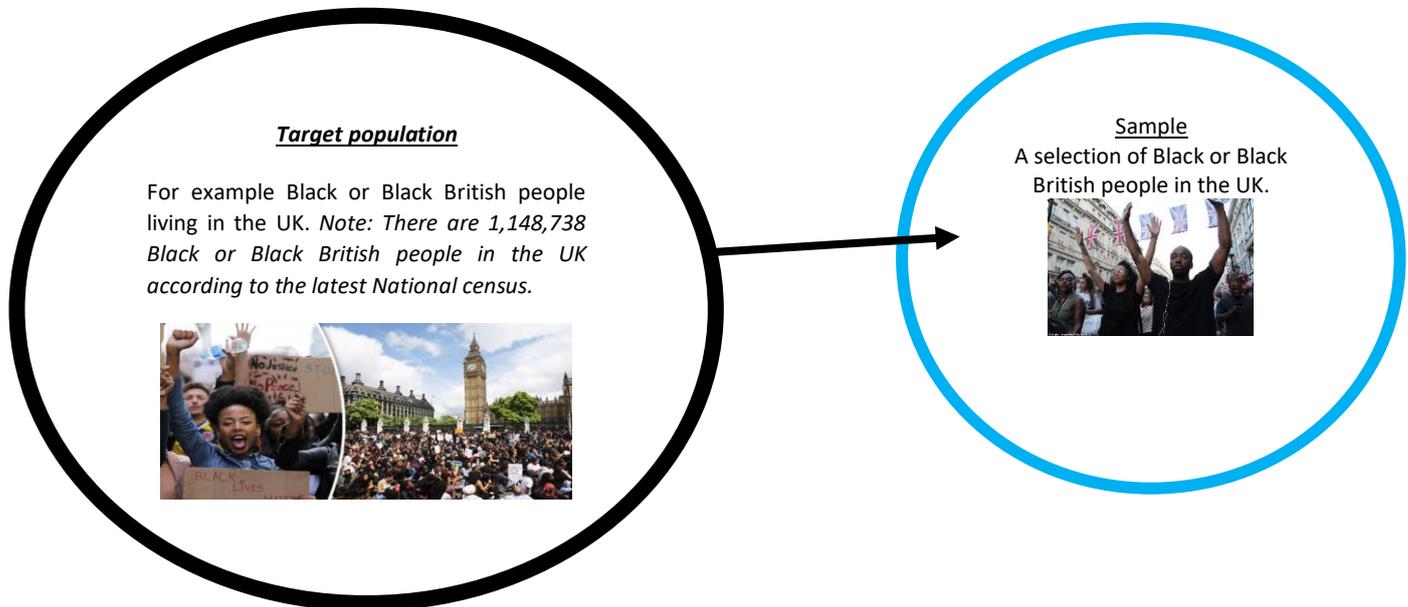
Sampling Strategy	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses
Random Sample <i>E.g pulling names out of a hat</i>	Everyone in the population has an equal chance of being chosen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highly representative ✓ For very large samples it provides the best chance of an unbiased representative sample - The researcher can't just pick the people they like. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Time consuming to create lists.
Stratified Sample <i>E.g. if there are 60% males in your population, you make sure there are 60% males in your sample.</i>	Attempts to reflect characteristics of the population. You work out the proportions which are important and are in your population and make sure that these are in your sample.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highly representative. A deliberate effort is made to make the sample representative of the target population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Time consuming and expensive to do.
Volunteer Sample	You put an advert out for volunteers and people turn up for the study, they are self selected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Cheap, quick and easy. ✓ People in the study want to be there so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Unrepresentative as it leads to bias on the part of the participant. E.g. a daytime TV

		may not drop out.	advert would not attract full-time workers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Likely to be biased you may only get men or only get students. ✗ There is a certain personality type who volunteers for a study.
Quota Sample	You decide on characteristics which are important (e.g. female, wearing trainers, has an iPhone) and keep recruiting people until you have enough	✓ Representative as you know that everyone in the study is relevant to the population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Time consuming and people could drop out while they wait for you to recruit enough people. ✗ Sampling bias as it is not random.
Systematic Sample <i>E.g Every 10th person.</i>	You look at the sampling frame and use a system such as every 5th/10th/15th person to pick your sample.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Quick, cheap and easy. ✓ The researcher can't be biased, they cannot just picking people they like. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Could accidentally pick a biased sample. ✗ Only works if you have a sampling frame to work from. ✗ Not entirely random.
Snowball Sample	You find one person who fits your criteria and ask them if they know anyone else who also fits the criteria. E.g. ask a teenage mum if they know any other teenage mums.	✓ Good for people who don't appear on a sampling frame (e.g. people who have had an informal police caution) or people who are unlikely to volunteer for a study (e.g. rule breakers at school)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Could end up with a very small sample. ✗ Can be very biased, people with more friends are more likely to be selected as participants

For example....

Hypothesis: Black British citizens suffer racial abuse in Britain today.

To prove or disprove this hypothesis you could interview Black British people living in England, Wales or Scotland. Your target population would be 'Black British Citizens'.



Samples need to be representative. Representativeness means that a sample should include all parts of the population being studied, for example the right amount of males to females. A representative sample enables justifiable statements about the whole population to be made. Access to a sample might require permission, and some groups are hard to reach.

It is important that quantifiable sociological research is representative and generalizable. This is because quantifiable research tend to be concerned with discovering patterns and trends.

- **Representativeness** refers to how well the sample reflects the characteristics of the target population.
- **Generalisability** refers to how well the findings from a sample can be applied to other people in the population.

Our research is only valid if our sample is representative of the population.

Key terms

- **Target Population:** The total group of people a sample could be taken from.
- **Sample:** A selection of people from the target population.
- **Sampling Frame:** A list of people from the target population from which the researcher would gain the sample i.e. telephone directory or electoral (voting) register

SCENARIO

You are asked to carry out sociological research into the attitude of teenage boys to crime.

A) Systematic sampling is one type of sampling method that can be used in sociological research. Identify a different sampling method you would choose to carry out research into the attitude of teenage boys to crime. [1 mark]

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<p>What is the examiner looking for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO2 = 1 mark • You will be awarded one mark for one appropriate sampling method. • NOTE: This is an exam question taken from paper 	<p>Sentence starters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need to write a one-word answer. Think about the sampling methods we have discussed today. • As this is a small-scale study, you may wish to identify a non- probability sample.
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B) Explain two reasons why you have chosen this sampling method for your research. [4]

<p>What is the examiner looking for?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will be awarded one mark for a simple reason (you need 2). • You will be awarded another two marks for a more developed answer that links back to the item and your sociological study. • NOTE: This is an exam question taken from paper 	<p>Sentence starters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sentence starters • One reason could be.. • Another reason could be... • This means... • I have selected this method because.. • With reference to the study... • The boys in my study...
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Research Methods

Are there different types of research methods?

Yes. There are **primary research methods**: These are methods which the sociologist collects the data themselves (e.g. through experiments, observations, social surveys, case studies and focus groups.) There are also **secondary research methods**: These are methods where the sociologist uses data which they have not collected themselves (e.g. official statistics or by asking participants to submit a diary, photo or other personal document.)

Does it matter which research methods I use?

Yes. The method may not be appropriate for the researcher's aims, e.g. if a researcher is aiming to study people who take drugs in school then it may not be a good idea to do an observation as students who take drugs at school are not likely to do it when people are watching.

Primary Research Methods

Observation:

When a researcher watches for a behaviour this can be a covert observation (where the participant doesn't know they're there) or overt (where the participant is aware they are being watched.) It can also be participant observation (where the researcher takes part in the activity the participant is doing) or non-participant observation (where the researcher just watches.)

Type of Observation	Strength	Weaknesses
Covert (Undercover) <i>The researcher joins the group without informing its members of his or her research activities.</i>	If the participant doesn't know they are being watched they won't change their behaviour and it makes the study more valid.	It is unethical to deceive participants as they have not given informed consent for this to happen (see ethics for further details)
Overt (Open) <i>The researcher 'comes clean' and the group are aware of the research activities.</i>	This is more ethical and allows us to get informed consent (see ethics for further details)	The participant may not act in a way they normally would if someone is watching.
Participant (Take part) <i>The researcher <u>joins</u> the group & takes part in their activities</i>	The researcher will more fully understand the reasons why a participant behaves the way they do if they take part in the activity. It may help the researcher gain the trust of the group.	Some researchers who go undercover can 'go native' this means that they begin to identify more with the observed group than their usual social group.
Non-Participant (Do not take part) <i>Groups observed without the researcher taking part</i>	The researcher is protected from dangerous activities and cannot go native. Also, the	The group may not trust that the researcher will not get them in trouble unless they take part in an activity with

	researcher doesn't lose focus from watching the behaviour.	them- plus it is harder to be covert if you do not take part in the activity.
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Task

Look at the three examples of observational studies below and decide which one is most likely to be conducted using;

- (a) Covert participant observation
- (b) Overt non-participant observation
- (c) Covert non-participant observation.

Explain why in the final column.

Example	Type of observation	Explanation
Observing the interactions of mothers and children using a hidden camera.
Joining a criminal gang.
Sitting in to observe a school lesson.

Task

Watch the clip from *'Secret Life of Five Year Olds'* and answer the following questions in the space provided. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJCRzgAPwE4>

1. What kind of observation is this?

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2. Why is this type of observation important to the Psychologist's research?

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3. What would happen of the Psychologist was in the room with the children?

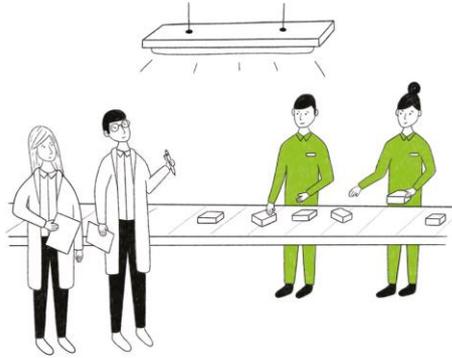
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The Hawthorne Effect

Elton Mayo conducted an experiment at the Western Electric company in Hawthorne near Chicago in the 1930s. Mayo was interested in the effect of changing working conditions. He made changes to the factory such as heating and lighting. Whatever change he made, the workers worked harder.



The Workers were aware they were being watched. With this, they changed their everyday behaviour, and worked extra hard. When participants change their behaviour due to an awareness of the researchers presence, this is known as the *Hawthorne Effect*.

Task

Did you see evidence of the Hawthorne Effect in the Secret Life of Five Year Olds? Explain.

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Is the Hawthorne Effect a good or bad thing?

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The Problems with both overt and covert observation

It is important to explore some of the various issues that the researcher is faced with when choosing to use participant observations.

Issues	Summary	Examples
Getting In	Gaining entry into the group/ Making Contact: This highly depends on the researchers personal characteristics & connections.	Patrick (1973) 'A Glasgow Gang Observed.' Patrick gained access to the a Glasgow gang as he had taught one of the gang members.
Acceptance of the Group	The Researcher might find it difficult to gain trust & build rapport with the group. This could be influenced by age, class, gender, ethnicity (Researcher Effects).	Griffin (1962) 'Black Like Me'. To gain acceptance into 'the Black culture' in apartheid America, Griffin (a white man) used sun lamps & medication to turn his skin black. Thornton (1995) 'Rave Culture'.

		Thornton's age meant that she was slightly older than the group she was studying making it more difficult to be accepted by the group.
Staying In 'Going Native'	This means that the researcher loses their objectivity as a researcher and begins to identify with the group to the point that they become one of them – the researcher thus becomes bias (Value-Free vs. Value Laden)	Punch (1979) 'Policing the Inner City' In order to be accepted by the police that he was studying, Punch over-identified with them. He found himself aiding arrests, holding suspects, searching houses & shouting at people who abused 'his colleagues'.
Getting out	Although this is arguably the easiest part of the P.O study, it too poses many problems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loyalty to the Group • Publishing the Research (& details of the group) • Re-entering 'Reality'. 	Patrick (1973) 'A Glasgow Gang Observed'. Patrick ended his research early as he could not face the violence that the group carried out any longer.

Advantages to Covert Observation

Being 'Under Cover' (Covert) is advantageous to the researcher for one main reason...

- Reduces the risk of the Hawthorne Effect.
- Makes it easier to gain access in to certain groups.

Example: Humphries (1970) 'Tearoom Trade.'

Acting as 'Gate Keeper' (Look out), Humphries was able to gain access to the world of homosexuality in public places. 'There is only one way to watch highly discreditable behaviour & that is to pretend to be in the same boat with those engaging in it'

Problems with Covert Observations

- The researcher must 'keep up the act' & not get their 'cover blown.
- Cannot ask certain questions in case they arouse suspicion.
- Hawthorne Effect is still a problem (even if lessened).
- Cannot take notes freely & openly.
- Ethical problems include:
 - *Deceit & Consent*
 - *Lying, Dishonesty*
 - *Participation in Immoral or Illegal activity*
 - *Morally, Duty-Bound to report illegal behaviour*

Examples

Patrick (1973) 'A Glasgow Gang Observed'. Patrick nearly blew his cover by paying for his suit with cash rather than credit & fastening his buttons in the 'wrong' way. Patrick struggled with this when handed an axe to use in a fight.

Festinger (1956) 'When Prophecy Fails'

Festinger was forced to write notes in toilets, and rely on his memory to avoid being found out.

Advantages to Overt Observations

Being 'Open' (Overt) is advantageous to the researcher for many reasons...

- Avoids Ethical problems of being deceitful, lying & gaining information without consent.
- The researcher can ask more questions without fear of being 'sussed out'.

- Notes can be taken openly & freely.
- The researcher can check their interpretations with individuals in the group to check if they are accurate.

Problems with Overt Observations

- Refusal/ Rejection by the group.
- Hawthorne Effect (Invalidity) e.g. Punch (1979) 'Policing the Inner City'.



Exam practice (Paper 1)

Discuss the usefulness of covert observations in research. [12 marks]
You should explore at least two strengths and two weaknesses in your response.

What is the examiner looking for?

AO1 marks = 4 marks

The examiner is testing your ***knowledge and understanding*** of sociological theories, terms, names, concepts, evidence and methods

AO2 marks = 4 marks

The examiner is interested in your ability to ***apply*** theories and ideas to this question. And your ability to apply examples.

AO3 marks = 4 marks

The examiner wants you to ***analyse*** (look for similarities and differences), ***evaluate*** (look for strengths and weaknesses to ideas discussed) make an argument and an overall conclusion.

Task

Read the band descriptors provided by the Eduqas exam board.

	AO1 – 4 marks		AO2 - 4 marks		AO3 - 4 marks	
BAND 4	A coherent answer demonstrating detailed, relevant knowledge and understanding of at least two strengths and at least two weaknesses relating to the usefulness of observations in research. There will be evidence of appropriate and sustained sociological language, and	4	Knowledge and understanding of relevant theories/ concepts/evidence/ methods is applied and used to explain accurately and in detail their impact on the usefulness of observations in research. The explanation will be fully developed.	4	A developed analysis and evaluation of the impact of the strength and weaknesses on the usefulness of observations in research. There is a sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant, substantiated and logically structured to support a judgement and a conclusion linked to the specifics of the question.	4

	concepts are described in detail.				
BAND 3	A coherent answer demonstrating mostly detailed, relevant knowledge and understanding of strengths and weaknesses relating to the usefulness of observations in research, though some will be described in less detail than others. There will be evidence of mostly appropriate sociological language and concepts, but these are not sustained throughout.	3	Knowledge and understanding of relevant theories/ concepts/evidence/ methods is applied and used to explain accurately their impact on the usefulness of observations in research. The explanation will be partially developed and some of these will be explained in less detail than others.	3	Good analysis and evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of observations in research. Lines of reasoning may not be sustained throughout but are coherent and relevant to support a judgement and a conclusion linked to the specifics of the question.

After reading the band descriptors answer the following question:

What must you do to achieve a mark in band 4?

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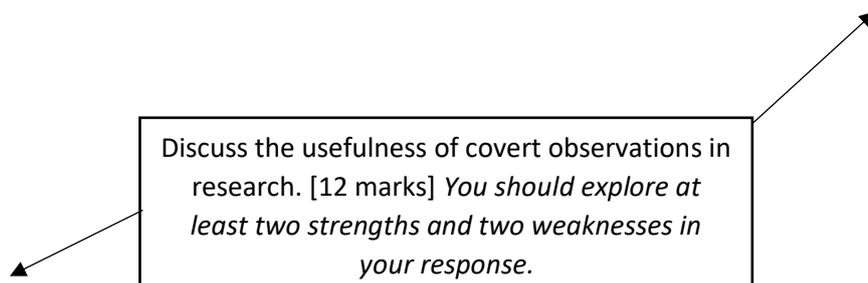
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Task

Mind map your points. Create a colour key to show the strengths and weaknesses.

Strengths	Weaknesses
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Essay structure

In Sociology, we tend to use the PEEL or PEEEL model to answer essay based questions that require evidence of AO1, AO2 and AO3 skills. Today we will use the PEEL method. When structuring a 12-mark essay question, you should write two PEEL paragraphs to represent weaknesses, and two to represent strengths.

POINT	This should be one sentence. This should be a clear statement.
EXPLAIN	Here you must explain in a little more detail what you mean by your point. You may be required to explain a key term.
EVIDENCE/ EXAMPLE	Here you should provide some sort of example to back up your point. This example could be a case study, statistics, something from the news.
LINK	Refer back to the main question. Does your paragraph relate and to the question.

Model PEEEL paragraphs

<i>Argument for...(Strength)</i>	
POINT	Covert observations are useful because they reduces the risk of the Hawthorne Effect.
EXPLAIN	This refers to the way a persons behaviour may change if they know they are being watched or observed. Covert observations can eliminate this problem, as participants are unaware they are part of a study.
EVIDENCE/ EXAMPLE	For example, Laud Humphreys went undercover and found homosexuality was practised by 'straight' and 'married men'. He would not have found this information if he conducted an overt observation.
LINK	Therefore, covert observations are useful for achieving a more valid or accurate picture of a society, due to no Hawthorne Effect.

<i>Argument Against (Weakness)</i>	
POINT	<i>However</i> , covert observations are difficult for sociologists to stay in character or role.
EXPLAIN	When a researcher joins a group, they go undercover to fit into the group they are studying. To achieve trust and valid data, the sociologist must keep the act up.
EVIDENCE/ EXAMPLE	For example James Patrick, when studying Glasgow Gangs, almost blew his cover by buttoning his shirt the 'wrong way', and paying for a suit with cash, rather than on credit. The gang became suspicious of him.
LINK	With this, covert observations can be dangerous and unethical for sociologists who take on a fake identity.

Case Studies

When one person or a small group are intensively studied through lots of methods to get lots of data.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Useful for special cases such as abused children. Generate lots of data for analysis.	Time consuming. Can be unethical if the participant gets stressed about how much focus is on them. Small sample.

Social surveys

This is when you ask participants for their opinions (this can be through an interview or a questionnaire. They involve open and closed questions.

Type of Question	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses
Open	When a question allows participants to give their opinion e.g. 'what do you think of...'	Allow participants to clarify their answers and give more detailed information.	Time consuming to analyse. Answers may not be relevant and people may not want to answer if it takes too long so drop out.
Closed	When a question has a restricted range of responses e.g. age, gender	Quick to analyse. Ensures that the response is relevant to the question.	Participants can't explain their answers or add extra details e.g. why they did something.

Social Surveys: Interviews

Interviews tends to be associated with **Interpretivists**. Depending on the research topic, Sociologists have different interview types to choose. These can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. It depends on the study as to which one the researcher would use.

Type of Interview	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses
Structured (Prepared list of questions)	An interview where the interviewer has a set list of questions and doesn't say anything else.	Quick, easy to train someone to be an interviewer.	The participant may not understand the question and cannot give extra detail.
Semi-Structured (Some questions prepared)	The interviewer has some formal questions but there is chance for the participant to talk if they wish.	There is a good mixture of closed and open questions.	You need to train someone to be an interviewer, more expensive.
Unstructured (More like conversation)	There are general points to discuss but the participant can talk as much as they	The participant may feel more comfortable if they can ask questions or go off topic.	Takes a long time to do and to analyse the results.

No prepared questions, just the theme is prepared.	like and change topic if they want.		
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Problems with interviews in general

- Interviewer effects: When a participant changes their responses due to the characteristics of the interviewer e.g. they won't admit to being racist if the interviewer is an ethnic minority.
- Interviewer bias: When the interviewer biases the results because they are racist, sexist or just don't like the answers they hear.
- Demand characteristics: when a participant changes their answers e.g. they lie

Interview bias is a problem with **ALL** interviews. Interview bias refers to the answers given in an interview being influenced or distorted in some way by the presence or behaviour of the researcher.

Task

Read the item below and answer the questions that follow in the space provided.

Item A: The Researchers				
				
<u>Brad</u>	<u>Eliza Do-Little</u>	<u>Maggie T</u>	<u>Mary Beard</u>	<u>Marlon</u>
Item B: Three Interviews				
<p>Interview one: An eight year old Black boy from Harlem in New York is interviewed by a friendly White interviewer who presents him with a toy jet plane and asks him to describe it. The setting is formal. There are long silences followed by short two three word answers, which hardly provide an adequate description of a plane.</p>				
<p>Interview two: Another Black boy from Harlem is interviewed. Again the setting is formal but this time the interviewer is Black and raised in Harlem. The boy responds in much the same way as the boy in the first interview.</p>		<p>Interview three: The boy and the interviewer are the same as in the second interview. This time the interviewer sits on the floor, the boy is provided with a supply of crisps and his best friend is invited along. The change is dramatic. The boy is enthusiastic, talkative, and gives a detailed description of the toy plane.</p>		

Questions: You are being interviewed on 1. Your sexual behaviour 2. Your views on race and racism 3. Your views on animal rights. Look at the Researchers in Item A.

Do you think any of the above researchers may influence your answers? Why?

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Whom could you speak honestly to? Why?

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With reference to Item B, explain your understanding of the term interview bias.

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Focus Groups

When a small group are asked for their opinions on a topic- the group can discuss ideas and share stories.

Strengths	Weaknesses
The participants can talk to each other- making them more relaxed. They can prompt each other to help out with answering questions.	Participants may feel self-conscious and change their answers. One participant may speak more than the others.

Task: PET issues

Read the advantages and disadvantages to each interview. Create a colour key to represent PET issues. Highlight each pro and con accordingly.

PRACTICAL	ETHICAL	THEORETICAL
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SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW	
ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Interviewer reads & writes ✓ Increases both reliability & validity. ✓ Helps find balance between objectivity & subjectivity. ✓ Can build a rapport with the respondent more easily than structured interview. ✓ Flexible but still structured to some extent (Keeps Focus). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Chance of interviewer bias. ✗ Never fully reliable or valid. ✗ Time consuming compared to structured interviews. ✗ Not always representativeness ✗ Still restricts responses. ✗ Difficult to compare & quantify 2 types of Data (non-compatible)

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW	
ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ High response rate ✓ Interviewer reads & writes ✓ High in validity (open-ended Qs) ✓ Useful in finding meanings & motivations ✓ Can build a rapport with the respondent ✓ Can probe for detail ✓ Free-flowing & more relaxed ✓ Can explore new ideas (less restricted) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ No structure (go off the point) ✗ Small-scale (unrepresentative) ✗ Highly subjective (value-laden) ✗ Time consuming ✗ Could get too personal ✗ Difficult to quantify qualitative responses ✗ Interviewer bias – Leading Qs ✗ Permission to film or record.
<p><i>These are sometimes referred to as 'Discovery Interviews' & are more like a 'Guided Conversation' than a strict structured interview. An Interview Schedule might not be used, and even if one is used, they will contain Open-Ended questions that can be asked in any order. (Some questions might be added / missed as the interview progresses. Unstructured interviews are often used when conducting research on sensitive issues.</i></p>	
FOCUS GROUP/ GROUP INTERVIEW	
ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lots of information quickly ✓ Can observe group interactions ✓ Respondents can help each other develop their answers & introduce each other to new ideas & views. ✓ More natural behaviour rather than a private interview (Validity) ✓ Group dynamics helps respondents relax. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Difficult to build individual Rapport ✗ Group dynamics mean that respondents might exaggerate/ lie. ✗ Chance of interview bias ✗ Could be difficult to control the interview ✗ Could cause conflict between respondents ✗ Conformity to the group (Invalidity) ✗ Permission to film or record. ✗ Can't guarantee anonymity.



Exam Practice

Item

A recent sociological study looked at opportunities for Gifted and Talented children at school. One of the methods used to collect primary data was semi structured interviews. The male interviewers asked students about their experiences, trips and family background.

Describe what is meant by a semi-structured interview. (2 marks)

What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1= 2 marks • You will be awarded one mark for a basic description relating to bridging the gap between a structured and unstructured interview. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A semi structured interview refers to... • Sociologists describe semi structured interviews as... • A semi structured is...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You will be awarded a further mark for your ability to develop the description in relation to sociological terms and understanding. 	
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<p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

Explain two problems the research could face while using semi-structured interview. (4 marks)

What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>AO2= 4 marks</u> You will be awarded one mark for each problem identified. You will be awarded a further two marks for your ability to develop your answer and by referring to the item. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One problem could be... Another problem could be... This means... With reference to the item... The male interviewers in the study...

<p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>

Item

A recent sociological study looked at boys’ attitudes to school. The boys were aged 5-6. One of the methods used to collect primary data was unstructured interviews. The boys were interviewed about how they felt about school and education.

Describe what is meant by an unstructured interview. (2 marks)

What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>AQ1= 2 marks</u> • You will be awarded one mark for a basic description relating to the term such as 'no clear structure', 'No set questions'. • You will be awarded a further mark for your ability to develop the description in relation to sociological terms and understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An unstructured interview refers to... • Sociologists describe unstructured interviews as... • An unstructured interview is...

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Explain two strengths to the research while using unstructured interview. (4 marks)

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What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>AQ2= 4 marks</u> • You will be awarded one mark for each strength identified. • You will be awarded a further two marks for your ability to develop your answer and by referring to the item. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One strength could be... • Another strength could be... • This means... • With reference to the item... • The boys in the study....

Social Surveys: Questionnaires

A common primary and quantifiable research method used by many sociologists is a questionnaire. A questionnaire refers to a set of structured and standardised questions delivered to respondents. This can be achieved several ways. The four main types of questionnaires you need to be aware of are stated below. *In questionnaires participants are known as respondents.*

Type of Questionnaire	Definition	Strengths	Weaknesses
Face-to-face questionnaire	When a questionnaire is filled out in front of the researcher.	Lower drop-out rate, quick and cheap to produce. People may not lie if it is anonymous.	You may not get a large sample as you have to do it face to face. People may rush through the questions or lie.
Postal questionnaire	When a questionnaire is posted out to a respondent and they post it back.	People can fill it in, in their own time. You can send them out to a large sample. People may not lie if it is anonymous.	People may not bother to send it back or someone else may fill the questionnaire in instead.

How useful are questionnaires?

Questionnaires are mainly used to collect **quantitative data** and have the advantage of being a useful way of collecting large amounts of data. Questionnaires are a popular research method as they are usually a quick and cheap way of collecting data, compared with other methods. The respondent to a questionnaire of collecting data, compared with other methods. The respondents to a questionnaire usually complete the questionnaire themselves, which means there is no need for a team of interviews, saving money and time. Interviewers require training, which costs money, in addition to their wages, and takes more time. Many people can complete the same questionnaire at the same time, meanwhile, making research quicker. There can be a problem, however, if questionnaires have a very low response rate.

Postal questionnaires are one way of handing out questionnaires. This method might gain a particularly low **response rate** as people might not bother to complete and return the questionnaire. Including a pre-paid addressed envelope might improve the response rate, but might have significant cost implications for a large sample. An alternative is to attempt door-to-door questionnaires or to ask people to complete them at work or school. Modern technology has provided even cheaper, quicker and easier ways of using questionnaires with readily available survey software.

Nonetheless, all these methods of distributing questionnaires will meet the same problem. Only a certain type of person is likely to fill out questionnaires. Many people do not feel they have the time nor the implication to complete questionnaires. It is likely that those who do will have strong views on a topic. This would make the sample under representative, meaning that those who reply to the questionnaire are not typical of the people that received the questionnaire.

Task

Summarise the advantages and disadvantages to questionnaires.

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Questionnaire Questions

Closed ended questions refer to a fixed-choice question that requires the respondents to choose between a number of given answers. This is often achieved by a tick box method.

<p>Examples</p> <p>a) Did you vote in the 2015 General Election? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>b) What is your favourite pizza topping? <input type="checkbox"/> Cheese <input type="checkbox"/> Peperoni <input type="checkbox"/> Anchovies <input type="checkbox"/> Mushrooms <input type="checkbox"/> Other</p> <p>c) Have you completed your homework?</p>	<p><u>Task 1</u></p> <p>In the space below, write your own closed ended question. You may wish to include fixed responses.</p>
<p><u>Task 2</u></p> <p>What are the advantages to closed ended questions? List below.</p> <p>➤ ➤ ➤</p>	<p><u>Task 3</u></p> <p>What are the disadvantages to closed ended questions? List below.</p> <p>➤ ➤ ➤</p>

Open-ended question

Open-ended questions refer to a question that allows respondents to put forward their own answers rather than choose a response from several pre-set answers. It requires more than a one-word answer.

<p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did the fight start• What is it like to live in Italy?• Why can't I come with you?• How did you and your best friend meet?	<p><u>Task 4</u></p> <p>In the space below, write your own open-ended question.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;">Task 5</p> <p>What are the advantages to open ended questions? List below.</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Task 6</p> <p>What are the disadvantages to open ended questions? List below.</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p> <p>➤</p>
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Task

Read the information below, and identify the boxes referring to closed ended questions, and those referring to open ended questions. Create a colour key.

Closed	Open
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Can make numerical data.	Can't explain why.	Unlimited answers	Can't create graphs	Preferred by Interpretivists
People may not read the question properly and tick any box.	Creates more valid data.	Too many choices can make it confusing.	Easy to make comparisons	Create data that are more reliable.
Quick to answer	Can expand on answers.	Longer to analyse.	If a respondent does not understand the question, this goes unnoticed.	Preferred by Positivists

SUPER IMPORTANT INFORMATION TO REMEMBER FOR THE EXAM:

- QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USUALLY **RELIABLE** AND **REPRESENTATIVE!**
- QUESTIONNAIRES DO NOT PROVIDE **VALID** DATA!

Item

A recent sociological study looked at subject choices at school. One of the methods used to collect primary data was a **questionnaire**. The questionnaire asked male students from year 10 to identify their GCSE choices and working at grades.

Describe what is meant by a questionnaire. (2 marks)

What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO1= 2 marks • You will be awarded one mark for a basic description relating to a structured set of questions. • You will be awarded a further mark for your ability to develop the description in relation to sociological terms and understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A questionnaire refers to... • Sociologists describes questionnaires as... • A questionnaire is...

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Explain two problems the research could face while using a questionnaire. (4 marks)

What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AO2= 4 marks • You will be awarded one mark for each problem identified. • You will be awarded a further two marks for your ability to develop your answer and by referring to the item. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One problem could be... • Another problem could be... • This means... • With reference to the item... • The boys in the study....

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Secondary Research Methods

Official Statistics

Official Statistics refer to **quantitative data** collected by government agencies and organisations funded by the government. Official Statistics are numerical data used by Sociologists to investigate specific topics such as crime, Education and Domestic Violence. Official Statistics in general have flaws and are not always favoured by interpretivist sociologists who prefer data that are more valid. However Official statistics are beneficial to Sociology and Government agencies. E.g. Official crime statistics, league tables and OFSTED results.



Strengths	Weaknesses
Already gathered so quick, easy and cheap to use if they are gathered by the government then someone will have been well trained to collect it and won't make mistakes. Useful starting point for research.	We don't know the reasons why the statistics show what they do. They are not always valid e.g. league tables could tell us that a school is no good, however, this could be due to a high number of special needs students not poor teaching.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS	
ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Quick to access ✓ Reliable ✓ Representative ✓ Cheap ✓ Can make correlations and comparisons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Lacks Validity ✗ Some data goes unreported or recorded i.e. crime stats. ✗ Definitions change over time, making comparisons difficult.



Exam Practice

Item

Official Statistics are numerical data used by Sociologists to investigate specific topics such as crime, Education and Domestic Violence. Official Statistics in general have flaws and are not always favoured by interpretivist sociologists who prefer data that are more valid. However Official statistics are beneficial to Sociology and Government agencies.

Explain two strengths to Official Statistics. (4 marks)

What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>AO2= 4 marks</u> • You will be awarded one mark for each strength identified. • You will be awarded a further two marks for your ability to develop your answer and by referring to the item. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One strength could be... • Another strength could be... • This means... • With reference to the item... • The Government use Official Statistics...

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Diaries

A sociologist may ask participants to keep a diary of their thoughts, feelings or actions.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Participants may be more honest because the diary is anonymous. Can be filled in, in their own time and can contain lots of rich data.	Takes a long time to analyse. They may lie, not fill it in or write about irrelevant things.

Another sociologist’s research

This is when a sociologist uses the results of someone else’s research.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Easy, quick and cheap to use. Sociologists are well trained to do research so it is probably reliable.	Some results could be irrelevant. The research could be out of date.

Other Types of Research

Longitudinal Research

These are studies which are done over a long piece of time. In designing and carrying out research based on interviews or questionnaires, researchers may either use 'one shot' surveys or longitudinal studies.

- One shot study: To research a sample of the population on the relevant issues *only once*. This gives a snap shot view.
- Longitudinal studies are studies of the same group of people (often a cohort, such as people of the same age) conducted over a period. This can take years of research. After the initial survey or interview has taken place, follow up surveys or interviews are carried out at intervals over a number of years.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lots of data ✓ Get to see changes over time ✓ Reliable data ✓ Same sample used ✓ Creates comparable data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ People could drop out ✗ Time consuming ✗ Expensive ✗ Not always representative



Exam Practice (Paper 1)

Item

In 1964, Michael Apted began his research series entitled '7 years Up'. Every 7 years, Apted would visit his research participants and interview them with regards to their physical, emotional and social development. This research is known as a longitudinal study.

Explain two problems the researcher could face while using longitudinal studies. (4 marks)

What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>AO2= 4 marks</u> • You will be awarded one mark for each problem identified. • You will be awarded a further two marks for your ability to develop your answer and by referring to the item. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One problem could be... • Another problem could be... • This means... • With reference to the item... • Michael Apted....

Model Answer

One problem could be cost. Longitudinal studies can cost a sociologist thousands of pounds. Researchers such as Michael Apted must consider equipment, travel, training and incentive costs to

conduct the research. Many Sociologists may need a grant or government backing to develop their research.

Another problem could be sample attrition. This means members from the sample population may drop out, move away or die during the study. For example Some of Apted’s participants moved abroad. This can impact the whole research project in relation to cost, reliability and validity.

Pilot Study

A small study done before the main study.

Strengths	Weaknesses
A chance to pick up an errors with the research method Can test out research aims to see if it’s worth investigating further	More expensive as it is an extra study with extra analysis

Triangulation

When researchers use more than one different research methods to investigate their aims. (Interview, Questionnaire, Observation)

Mixed Methods

Why do sociologists sometimes used mixed methods?

Quantitative and qualitative methods

For a long time, sociology was divided into two different ways of conducting research. Some sociologists preferred to collect numbers and use these for graphs and statistics. They wanted to collect quantitative data to show patterns and work out the causes of things in society. Other researchers wanted to collect qualitative data. They wanted to capture a more detailed, rounded and accurate view of social life. This would give data that was highly valid. The debate between these two groups was quite furious at times.

Since then, sociologists have begun to realise the advantages to both types of data. They have begun to use missed methods to gain the best of other worlds. In fact, many sociologists were already using both types of methods, and there are many successful studies that combine both methods.

Studies using mixed methods

Mac and Ghail studied African-Caribbean boys in schools and youth organisations. He used interviews and observations to collect qualitative data. However, he backed this up with statistical data he collected from the organisations. He could check that the boys stories matched the data from the institutions. The two methods supported each other.

Another famous study was Eileen Barker’s examination of a religious groups called the Moonies. Her study lasted for six years. Her unstructured interviews of the groups followers lasted for up to

eight hours each. After two years of observing the group first hand, Barker felt that she knew enough about them to design a questionnaire and be confident that she was asking the right questions. Her study is a clear examples of how methods can be combined successfully.

Reasons for using mixed methods

There are a number of reasons for using mixed methods. One of these is to gain the different insights of quantitative and qualitative data. This will increase the reliability and validity of the research. The ability to see patterns in the quantitative data is backed up by the detail and understanding of qualitative data. It is also useful as a form of cross checking. If both methods find the same things, the results of the study are strengthened.

Finally, as in Eileen Barker’s study, using one method can help to use another. Her qualitative data from observations helped her design a questionnaire to collect quantitative data.

Some sociologists use the word triangulation to describe using more than one method. Triangulation includes using mixed methods to crosscheck the findings, and usually helps to add validity and reliability to a study.

Evaluation

There are many benefits to using mixed methods in research. These include being able to gain a true picture of society and being able to see patterns and connections between different areas of society. However, using two or more methods can be time consuming and costly. Sometimes the data from one method, for instance the statistics, might dominate the research. Nonetheless, many sociologists would agree that using more than one method often complements the other. Like a chef and ingredients, sociologists might combine different research methods to create the best research.

Questions

1. What do sociologists mean by a mixed methods approach?

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2. What has used a mixed methods approach? Why did they do this?

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3. What are some of the advantages to using a mixed methods approach?

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4. What do sociologists mean by the term triangulation?

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Ethical Issues

What are ethical issues?

These are issues of whether a piece of researcher is morally right to do. The BPS (British Psychological Society) has created a list of ethical issues which they are concerned with (see the table below.)

Why should I care about ethical issues?

Because researchers have a responsibility to their participants and also so that you don't get sued.

Ethical Issue	Description	Why is it an issue?	How can you deal with it?
Informed consent	Participants can only give informed consent if they are aware of everything that will happen to them in a study and are happy with it.	Some people cannot give consent (e.g. children or the mentally ill.) These people need a gatekeeper to give permission for them. If you do not get consent then you cannot do the study- but if people know what will happen they may lie.	Deceive people first and then ask people later if its ok to use their information. Be completely truthful when you ask for consent. Tell people you are going to lie to them but that you won't tell them what about.
Anonymity	When a participant's identity is kept secret.	Participants may not want to be involved in a study if people will know who they are. Some studies are about sensitive information and people's identity should be protected.	Give participants a fake name or a number.
Confidentiality	When the study is only discussed with people who are involved in the study.	Participant's data should be kept private and only told to those who need to know- especially if it is sensitive research.	Keep details private and ensure no-one outside of the study knows who gave which answer.
Protection from harm (physical and psychological)	The study shouldn't make participants stressed, embarrassed or upset in any way.	Some studies ask questions which cause participants to be upset or argue with others around them. Some studies may put participants on the spot which could embarrass them.	Offer counselling after the study if participants have been negatively affected. Let participants answer in private and anonymously.

You must know all of the below for your exam.

Confidentiality and privacy: Researchers should keep the identity of participants hidden in order to prevent possible negative effects on them.

Vulnerable groups: Special care should be taken when studying particular groups based on age, disability or mental illness.

Right to withdraw: The participant has the right to leave or experiment/ research if they choose to.

Informed consent: Participants should be given the right to refuse. Researchers should also tell participants fully about the research.

Protection from harm: Includes police intervention, harm to employment prospects, social exclusion and psychological damage.



Exam Practice

Item

A recent sociological study looked at boys' attitudes to school. The boys were aged 5-6. One of the methods used to collect primary data was unstructured interviews. The boys were interviewed about how they felt about school and education.

Explain two ethical issues that the interviewers may have faced in carrying out their research. (4 marks)

What is the examiner looking for?	Sentence starters
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>AO2= 4 marks</u> • You will be awarded one mark for each ethical issue identified • You will be awarded a further two marks for your ability to develop your answer and by referring to the item. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One ethical issue could be... • Another issue could be... • This means... • With reference to the item... • The boys in the study...

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Exam Practice – Sample answers (Paper 1)

Student A

A recent sociological study looked at teenagers' attitudes to marriage. The primary method used was questionnaires. Over a thousand teenagers answered questions on the subjects of marriage and their futures.

(a) Describe what is meant by a *primary method*.

[2]

A primary method is a research method where the researcher conducts the research or study first hand and doesn't use somebody else's data. For example, a researcher conducting an interview is a primary method.

2

(b) Explain **two** advantages of using questionnaires for this research.

[4]

A strength of using questionnaires is that they ~~are~~ are a quick method of collecting data. They can be given to large numbers of people relatively quickly, so the researcher will end up with a large sample and more results on teenagers' attitudes to marriage.

Another strength of using questionnaires is that if closed questions are used, the researcher can collect quantitative data. This can be useful for identifying trends and patterns in teenagers' attitudes to marriage.

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(c) Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of observation as a method of research. [12]

You should explore at least two strengths and two weaknesses in your response.

A strength of observations is that they produce qualitative data. This data usually includes in-depth analysis and ~~records~~ ~~of~~ ~~behaviour~~ and detailed notes. This means that the results can usually provide us with a greater understanding of why people behave a certain way. However, a weakness is that qualitative is very time consuming and difficult to analyse. It doesn't usually include numbers and the data is difficult to quantify so it's harder to identify trends and patterns from the results.

Another strength is that if the observation is covert, the results of the observation are likely to be high in validity. This is because people don't know that they're being observed so their behaviour is likely to be natural as they don't know they're part of a study. This means that we can be more trusting of the results of an observation if it is covert. However, there may be ethical issues with covert observations. This is because there is a lack of informed consent from the participants so as they don't know they're being studied. This may be an issue because it's wrong to observe and collect data about them without their permission.

Another strength of this method is that if the observation is studying covert non-participant, that data is likely to be very subjective because the observer has developed no personal connection to the participants, the data they collect is unlikely to be influenced by their own thoughts and feelings. This means that the results are less likely to be biased than other methods of research. A weakness, however, would be that observations tend to have low reliability. This is because the studies tend to be very difficult to reproduce, as if the researcher changed, it's very likely that different results would be collected, so the data collected really depends on how the researcher interprets what's happening.

Therefore observations may not be very reliable or trust worthy. To conclude, I believe observation studies are useful because the data they deal with is usually in-depth and detailed, but the main issue with them is that they have a lack of reliability.

Student B

Examiner
only

6. Read the following passage and answer the questions.

A recent sociological study looked at teenagers' attitudes to marriage. The primary method used was questionnaires. Over a thousand teenagers answered questions on the subjects of marriage and their futures.

(a) Describe what is meant by a primary method.

[2]

A primary method refers to research conducted by one sociologist rather than a secondary method which refers to research conducted by many separate

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(b) Explain two advantages of using questionnaires for this research.

[4]

One advantage is that it has high validity. The teenagers probably answered the questions truthfully as questionnaires are often anonymous.

One more advantage is its reliability. Questionnaires ^{collect} research that can be quickly sorted and repeated to obtain reliable answers.

3

Student C

7. You are asked to carry out sociological research into the use of social media by young people. Exam
only

(a) Identify a method that you would use to carry out research into this. [1]

questionnaire

(b) Explain **one** strength of using this method for your research. [2]

Using this method would give me a large sample because I can send out the questions to lots of ^{young} people relatively quickly and at a low cost. This means my results will be more representative of the entire target population (young people) ^{about social media} ~~what~~ ^{how} use social media

(c) Explain **one** weakness of using this method for your research. [2]

People may not ~~use~~ bother to answer the questions. This means I ~~may~~ get a low response rate, so my results may not be reflective of how all young people use social media

- (d) Discuss the benefits of using more than one method of research (mixed methods approach) for your research. [6]

A strength of using more than one method is that I will gain qualitative data. This gives me an insight into why people use social media so I can really gain a deeper understanding of young people's thoughts and feelings.

Another benefit of using mixed methods is that I will also gain quantitative data. This means that it will be easier for me to identify trends and patterns in my research about young people and their use of social media.

~~Another~~ Yet another strength of using mixed methods is that it may be more suited to the aim of my research. For example, some aspects of my research may involve finding out how much time people spend on social media, which would be better investigated through questionnaires, and another aspects may be how young people feel about social media which would be

END OF PAPER

better investigated through unstructured interviews.

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7. You are asked to carry out sociological research into the use of social media by young people.

Examiner
only

(a) Identify a method that you would use to carry out research into this.

[1]

Unstructured interviews

(b) Explain one strength of using this method for your research.

[2]

One strength of ~~a~~ unstructured interviews is that allows the researcher to build rapport with the ~~student~~ ~~so that~~ young person being interviewed so that they feel more comfortable and give their true opinions about social media which ~~gives~~ increases the validity.

(c) Explain one weakness of using this method for your research.

[2]

One weakness of using unstructured interviews is that ~~it allows~~ the chance of interviewer bias happening is likely as ~~the~~ the young person might feel pressured ~~to~~ from the interviewer to give socially desirable answers about social media, even if they don't apply to the young person. This leads to low validity in the research.

- (d) Discuss the benefits of using more than one method of research (mixed methods approach) for your research. [6]

One benefit of using mixed methods research is that it allows the researcher to see which methods are more useful and reliable and which methods are less reliable or ~~not~~ valid. For example, if questionnaires are given to young people about social media, then they may lie or exaggerate. If afterwards, a structured interview is held with the young people to discuss their ~~own~~ thoughts on social media ~~then~~ they might not understand the question properly, and this method is very time consuming. As a result, the benefits of using mixed methods research is that ~~people~~ the researcher can identify strengths and weaknesses in the research.

A02-2

A03-2

4

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Student E

7. You are asked to carry out sociological research into the use of social media by young people.

only

(a) Identify a method that you would use to carry out research into this. [1]

~~the~~ ^{semi-}structured interviews

(b) Explain **one** strength of using this method for your research. [2]

Questions can be explained to participants, avoiding ~~misrepresentation~~ ~~the~~ ~~are~~ ~~misunderstanding~~ of questions, which leads to more reliable ~~the~~ data and conclusions. For example, a question about engagement on social media may not be understood by teenagers and ^{can be explained by the interviewer.}

(c) Explain **one** weakness of using this method for your research. [2]

Data ^{collected would be} qualitative, meaning trends ~~for~~ and calculations can't be made. For example, the ~~amount of~~ percentage of time in a day spent on social media on average may be harder ^{or} impossible to calculate.

(d) Discuss the benefits of using more than one method of research (mixed methods approach) for your research. [6]

only

Mixed methods means that interviewer bias can be avoided.

If only ~~AA~~^{semi-}structured interviews were used, the presence of an older person may prompt lies from the teenagers, who ~~could~~ could say they use social media less than they truly do. However, using questionnaires through manipulation would overcome this obstacle. In addition, trends can be calculated. In semi-structured interviews, data is qualitative and so can be made into trends and so can be compared less easily. However, with questionnaires on the teenagers are often for the collection of quantitative data, meaning comparisons of, for example hours spent on social media, can be made more easily.

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PAPER 1 - Exam Questions

2 MARKS EXAM QUESTIONS

1. Describe what is meant by a primary method.
2. Describe what is meant by ethics.
3. Describe what is meant by official statistics.
4. Describe what is meant by a longitudinal study.
5. Describe what is meant by a target population.
6. Describe what is meant by reliability.
7. Describe what is meant by representativeness.
8. Describe what is meant by generalisability.
9. Describe what is meant by valid data.
10. Describe what is meant by quantitative data.
11. Describe what is meant by qualitative data.
12. Describe what is meant by secondary research.
13. Describe what is meant by a postal questionnaire.
14. Describe what is meant by mixed methods.
15. Describe what is meant by triangulation.
16. Describe what is meant by covert observation.
17. Describe what is meant by stratified sampling.
18. Describe what is meant by volunteer sampling.
19. Describe what is meant by snowball sampling.
20. Describe what is meant by positivism.
21. Describe what is meant by ethnography.
22. Describe what is meant by content analysis.
23. Describe what is meant by unstructured interviews.
24. Describe what is meant by interview bias.
25. Describe what is meant by focus group.
26. Describe what is meant by response rate.

4 MARKS EXAM QUESTIONS

1. Explain two advantages of using questionnaires for this research.
2. Explain two problems with postal questionnaires.
3. Explain two practical factors associated with unstructured interviews.
4. Explain two strengths to official statistics.
5. Explain two ethical issues associated with the research in the item.
6. Explain two problems with the research mentioned in the item.
7. Explain two weaknesses to structured interviews.
8. Explain two disadvantages to group interviews.
9. Explain two strengths to telephone interviews.
10. Explain two theoretical problems associated with the research stated in the item.
11. Explain two practical problems associated with this research.
12. Explain two strengths to content analysis.
13. Explain two strengths to using longitudinal studies.
14. Explain two ethical issues the researcher must consider.
15. Explain two advantages of using semi structured interviews in research.
16. Explain two problems of using covert observations in research.
17. Explain two ethical problems of using observations in research.
18. Explain two strengths to using a random sample in research.

19. Explain two weaknesses to using a volunteer sample in research.
20. Explain two disadvantages to using open-ended questions in research.
21. Explain two strengths to using closed ended questions in research.
22. Explain two weaknesses to using qualitative methods of research.
23. Explain two problems associated with ethnographic research.
24. Explain two weaknesses associated with quantitative data.
25. Explain two practical issues associated with observations.
26. Explain two ethical issues associated with covert observation.

12 MARKS EXAM QUESTIONS

(You should explore at least two strengths and two weaknesses of research)

1. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of observations as a method of research.
2. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of unstructured interviews as a method of research.
3. Discuss the usefulness of group interviews in research.
4. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of official statistics as a method of research.
5. Discuss the usefulness of semi-structured interviews as a method of research.
6. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative methods in research.
7. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative methods in research.
8. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of primary methods in research.
9. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of secondary methods in research.
10. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of postal questionnaires as a method of research.
11. Discuss the usefulness of content analysis.
12. Discuss the usefulness of covert observations.
13. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of questionnaires as a method of research.
14. Discuss the practical, ethical and theoretical issues when choosing a research topic.
15. Discuss the practical, ethical and theoretical issues when choosing a research method.
16. Discuss the problems with sampling methods.

PAPER 2 - Exam Questions

In this section, you will be given a scenario.

YOU MUST REFER TO THIS SCENARIO WHEN WRITING YOUR ANSWERS!

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

- *You are asked to carry out sociological research into the attitude of teenage boys to crime.*
- *You are asked to carry out sociological research into the attitudes of teenagers on arranged marriage.*
- *You are asked to investigate the division of housework and childcare amongst married and cohabitating couples today.*
- *You have been asked to investigate truancy amongst secondary school pupils.*
- *You have been asked to research into the attitudes of teenagers to disability access in school.*
- *You have been asked to research the education gap between boys and girls.*

SECTION 7 QUESTION A

Scenario

You are asked to carry out sociological research into the attitude of teenage boys to crime.

YOU ARE THE SOCIOLOGIST AND RESEARCHER! If you were given the above task to complete, realistically, how could you conduct the study as a GCSE Sociology student?

You must then answer the questions that follow.

- a) *Observations is one method that can be used in sociological research. Identify a different method that you would choose to carry out research into the attitude of teenage boys in crime. [1]*

Here you must state one relevant method you would use. This question is worth 1 AO1 mark. The examiner is interested in your knowledge of methods. If your answer is irrelevant and unrealistic you will be awarded 0 marks.

Possible answers:

- ✓ Unstructured interview
- ✓ Structured interview
- ✓ Questionnaire

Irrelevant answers

- ✗ Any secondary based methods such as documents or official statistics.
- ✗ Content analysis
- ✗ Observation

SECTION 7 QUESTION B AND C

(b) Explain two reasons why you have chosen this method for your research. [4]

This question is worth 4 A02 marks. Here you must state one strength to your chosen method, and then explain why this is relevant to working with young boys and or studying attitudes towards crime. You must miss a line and repeat the process.

Sentence starters

- *One reason could be...*
- *Another reason could be...*
- *Teenage boys are more likely to...*
- *One practical reason could be...*
- *Due to ethical factors....*
- *When studying crime...*

SECTION 7 QUESTION B AND C

Content from the exam board

Structured interviews

- *Produce quantitative data that can be used to discover patterns/ trends in teenage boys' views.*
- *Can create statistics and graphs about the boys' views so patterns/ trends are easily identifiable*
- *Can be repeated so good reliability*

Unstructured interviews	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages validity due to some of the following: • The boys would be at ease which would give them the confidence to discuss their views. • Allows a relaxed atmosphere so boys will not feel threatened. • Gives the boys freedom to give their real views rather than answer pre-planned questions. • The researcher can probe for more information. 	
Questionnaires	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce quantitative data that can be used to discover patterns/ trends about the boys' views • They can be done online which is more appealing to the boys • Can easily create statistics and graphs. Trend can be easily identifiable. • Representative- they can be given to many boys via post and or internet. • Fairly cheap because there are no interviewers to pay. • The boys will complete the paper anonymously, so this may encourage truthfulness. • Reliable. The same questionnaire is distributed, and the questionnaire can be repeated. 	
POSSIBLE 4 MARK EXAM QUESTIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain one weakness of using this method for your research. • Explain one ethical issue you may face. • Explain one practical factor associated with your choice of method. • Explain one theoretical issue associated with your choice of method. 	

SECTION 7 QUESTION D

(c) Explain and evaluate the weaknesses that you may find using this method for your research. [6]

For this question, you will be assessed on AO2 and AO3 skills. Use the table as a guide. Aim to explore two to three weaknesses.

PEEEL IT!		
POINT 1	Focus on the weaknesses associated with your questionnaire.	One weakness to questionnaires could be they are expensive to post.
EXPLAIN with reference to your study. AO2		As a GCSE Sociology student, it is not practical and cost effective for me to spend money on postage stamps.
EXAMPLE AO2		For example, postage stamps cost roughly 70 p each. This will impact my sample size and representativeness of my data.
EVALUATION AO3	How will you overcome this	To overcome this, I could create an electronic questionnaire using Google Docs. This will reach the boys quickly, they are more likely to complete an electronic questionnaire, and the response rate should be high.
LINK AO2		Therefore, questionnaires are not always useful in research.

	AO2 1b 3 marks	AO3 1a & 1b 3 marks	
BAND 3	Knowledge and understanding of relevant theories/ concepts/ evidence/ methods is applied and used to explain accurately and in detail the strengths of the method for the given research. The explanation will be fully developed.	3	A developed analysis and evaluation of how the strengths of the research method will impact on the research. There is a sustained line of reasoning which is coherent, relevant, substantiated and logically structured to support a judgement and a conclusion linked to the specifics of the question. 3
BAND 2	Knowledge and understanding of relevant theories/ concepts/ evidence/ methods is applied and used to explain the strengths of the method for the given research. There will be some development in the explanation but with some inaccuracies	2	A partial analysis and evaluation of how the strengths of the research method will impact on the research. Lines of reasoning may not be sustained throughout but are coherent and relevant to support a judgement and a conclusion linked to the specifics of the question. 2
BAND 1	Application of knowledge and understanding to explain the strengths of the method for the given research will be limited. Any explanation will be undeveloped and contain inaccuracies.	1	Limited analysis or evaluation only, with no judgement or conclusion in relation to the specifics of the question. 1
Award 0 marks for incorrect or irrelevant answers			

SECTION 7 QUESTION D 6 MARK EXAM QUESTION
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Explain and evaluate the weaknesses that you may find using this method for your research.</i> 2. <i>Explain and evaluate two strengths that you may find using this method for your research.</i> 3. <i>Explain one sampling method that you would use and explain and evaluate why it is better than another possible sampling technique for obtaining a representative sample.</i> 4. <i>Explain one ethical issue that you may encounter and explain and evaluate how you will overcome this.</i> 5. <i>Explain one practical factor that you may encounter and explain and evaluate how you will overcome this.</i>

Research Methods Glossary

Key Term	Definition
Closed Questions	Question that only allow fixed responses such as yes and no.
Ethics	Moral principals- beliefs about what is right and wrong,
Ethnographic	An interpretive research process based on living within a culture to understand it in depth.
Gatekeeper	People that allow researchers access to a sample of people who would otherwise be difficult to study.
Interpretivism	An approach which focuses on the meanings and definitions which guide and direct behaviour. A branch of sociologists who seek validity and prefer qualitative methods.
Interview bias	The effect that the interviewer has on the respondent's answers.
Open Questions	Questions that allow the respondent to answer in detail and as fully as they wish.
Pilot study	A trial run before full research is carried out.
Positivists	Sociologists who follow the scientific approach to studying society. Prefer quantifiable data.
Qualitative data	Research data that is in words and has lots of detail, helping to give context.
Quantitative data	Statistical data that is in numbers and can be presented as graphs and percentages.
Reliable data	Research results that can be repeated and compared in other contexts.
Respondent	A person who completes a questionnaire.
Response rate	The percentage of the sample that participates in the research.
Representative sample	A sample that aims to have the same mix of people as the target population.
Sample attrition	The reduction in size of a sample during a longitudinal study.
Sampling frame	The list where a sample is selected.
Secondary data	Information used in research that was originally used or collected by somebody else for another purpose.
Stratified random sample	A sample chosen by chance, but making sure that important groups are included.
Triangulation	Taking two different measurements of the same thing to make sure that the results are accurate i.e. a questionnaire and interview.
Valid data	Research results that get close to the truth of what is happening, and are useful and trustworthy.