



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

SC3W Sociological Methods

Mark Scheme

2006 examination – January series

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

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

QUALITY OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS

Answer **all** parts of the question.

1

Total for this question: 60 marks

(a) Explain what is meant by a ‘snowball’ sample (**Item A**, line 11). *(2 marks)*

Two marks for an appropriate explanation or definition of a ‘snowball’ sample, such as a sample identified via the personal networks of initial respondents.

(b) Suggest **two** problems that the researchers may have faced in using the ‘doorstep survey’ (**Item A**, line 8). *(4 marks)*

Two marks for each of two problems, such as:

- locating a suitable sample could take a long time;
- cost implications of doorstepping a large number of potential respondents;
- those replying may be suspicious of the researchers’ question and be unco-operative;
- the person answering the door may not know if anyone in the household has done paid work from home in the last twelve months.

(c) Suggest **three** reasons, **apart from** those in **Item A**, ‘why some sociologists find official statistics useful’ in their research (**Item A**, line 6). *(6 marks)*

Two marks for each of three appropriate reasons, such as:

- relatively quick to use;
- readily available;
- few if any ethical constraints;
- as the starting point of research/hypothesis generation;
- as background information to a study;
- use large samples or total populations;
- enable comparisons over time.

Note: No marks for using official statistics to identify a research population or for low cost.

(d) Identify and briefly explain **two** disadvantages of using interviews that are 'informal and in-depth' in sociological research (**Item A**, line 12). (8 marks)

Two marks for each of two disadvantages usually associated with in-depth interviews, such as:

- respondents may stray from the focus of the research;
- non-standardised questions produce data which is difficult to quantify;
- they take longer to carry out than structured interviews or mailed questionnaires;
- they require well-trained interviewers to deliver them;
- interviewer bias.

Two further marks in each case for an appropriate explanation of the disadvantage offered, such as:

- if respondents stray from the focus of the research, some of the data generated will be irrelevant to the researcher;
- if the data produced is difficult to quantify, the researcher will be unable to identify trends, patterns or correlations between social factors;
- because in-depth interviews take longer to carry out, this is likely to limit the size of the research sample, reducing the possibility of creating a representative sample.

(e) Examine the problems that sociologists may encounter when using postal questionnaires in their research. (20 marks)

0 No relevant points.

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

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

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

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

Lower in the band, this might be confined to a competent if basic account of postal questionnaires. Interpretation may be limited and not explicitly linked to the demands of the question; for instance, answers may be diverted into often lengthy, descriptive accounts of the characteristics of postal questionnaires, poorly linked to the question or a separate list of strengths of postal questionnaires not directly related to the problems identified in the answers.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be broader and/or deeper, and will begin to identify a wider range of problems with postal questionnaires. Material will be accurate, though at times its relevance may not be made explicit. There may be some limited explicit analysis or evaluation, for instance, through some weakly developed awareness of ways problems might be dealt with by researchers. However, this is *not* a requirement, even to reach the top of the band. Evaluation will begin to be closely related to the problems identified in the answer.

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

Candidates will consider a range of problems with postal questionnaires. Material may be drawn from issues of theoretical preference, question design, utility of resultant data, lack of researcher presence, response rate, representativeness, appropriateness for particular research issues/groups, validity, reliability and ethics.

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

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

(f) Using material from **Item B** and elsewhere, assess the strengths and limitations of different forms of observation in sociological research. (20 marks)

0 No relevant points.

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

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

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

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

Lower in the band, answers will tend to be more limited in range, offering a broadly accurate if basic account of one or more forms of observation. Some less focused material may also appear, for example, lengthy, descriptive accounts of specific and often minor issues with one or more forms of observation.

Higher in the band, knowledge and understanding will be largely appropriate to the demands of the question, identifying a range of strengths and limitations of more than one form of observation. Accounts of studies using observation will be more closely linked to these issues. There will be some limited explicit analysis and/or evaluation, for example through some brief reference to methodological issues or weak comparison with other methods or between different forms of observation.

16 – 20 In this band, analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant, and answers will show a sound, conceptually detailed knowledge and understanding of sociological material drawn from Item B and elsewhere concerning the usefulness of more than one form of observation. This will be accurately and sensitively interpreted to meet the demands of the question. Analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant. The strengths and limitations of different forms of observation will be accurately identified in some detail. These may include issues such as time, cost, access, exit strategies, Hawthorne Effect, informed consent, observer bias, degree of structure in observation, quantitative/qualitative data, etc.

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

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

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

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

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