



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

SC3W Sociological Methods

Mark Scheme

2006 examination – June 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.

SC3W

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 ‘pilot study’ (Item A , line 6).	<i>(2 marks)</i>
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Two marks for an appropriate explanation or definition, such as testing a research instrument in advance of the main study.

One mark for a partial explanation, eg a small-scale study in advance of the main research.

(b) Suggest two factors that may influence a sociologist’s ‘choice of topic to be investigated’ (Item A , line 2).	<i>(4 marks)</i>
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Two marks for each of two appropriate factors, such as:

- the researcher’s own interests;
- the researcher’s theoretical position;
- societal concerns;
- the funding body;
- availability of data;
- accessibility of subject;
- research opportunity.

(c) Suggest three problems sociologists may encounter when using ‘media reports’ in their research (Item A , line 7).	<i>(6 marks)</i>
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Two marks for each of three appropriate problems, such as:

- bias in media reports;
- unrepresentativeness;
- difficulties in quantification;
- problems in interpreting meanings;
- time-consuming to analyse.

(d) Identify and briefly explain two reasons why some sociologists prefer to collect and use primary data in their research. (Item A)	<i>(8 marks)</i>
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Two marks for each of two appropriate reasons identified, such as:

- primary data is easier to interpret;
- choice of which methods to use;
- ability to use their own definitions eg of social class;
- researcher has control over question design/structure/format;
- researcher has choice of sampling technique;
- researcher can take advantage of research opportunities as they arise;
- researcher can keep a full focus on the research aims;
- data can be created that is specifically relevant to the research aims.

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

- primary data is easier to interpret because the researcher is more closely involved in the creation of the whole research process;
- the researcher can use methods that fit their theoretical preference;
- researchers can operationalise their definitions in the way they feel is most appropriate.

(e) Examine the problems some sociologists may find when using participant observation in their research. (20 marks)

0 No relevant points.

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

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

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

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

Lower in the band, this might be confined to a competent if basic account of some of the characteristics of, and problems with, participant observation. Interpretation may be limited and not explicitly linked to the demands of the question; for instance, answers may be diverted into often lengthy descriptive accounts of particular examples of studies that have used participant observation.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be broader and/or deeper, and will begin to identify a wider range of problems some sociologists find with participant observation, and will differentiate between overt and covert approaches. 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 the problems of participant observation in particular research contexts or a list of some of the advantages of participant observation. However, this is **not** a requirement, even to reach the top of the band.

16 – 20 Answers in this band will display sound, conceptually detailed knowledge and understanding of sociological material relating to the problems of using participant observation in sociological research. Coverage of different forms of participant observation will be more balanced. This will be accurately and sensitively interpreted to meet the demands of the question. The candidate will show the ability to organise material and analyse and/or evaluate so as to produce a coherent and relevant answer. Evaluation will be more closely related to the reasons identified in the answer. References to the strengths of participant observation will be applied in an evaluative way.

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.

Candidates will consider a range of problems some sociologists find with participant observation. Material may be drawn from issues of theoretical preference, validity, reliability, and representativeness; issues of access; the covert-overt dimension; deception/informed consent; lack of utility in some research contexts; lack of quantitative data generated; problems of interpretation of data; cost; time. Examples of studies employing participant observation will be accurate and explicitly applied to the question.

(f) Using material from **Item B** and elsewhere, assess the usefulness of official statistics 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 the usefulness of official statistics, or some material ineffectually recycled from Item B.

Higher in the band, answers will show limited, undeveloped sociological knowledge, for example a few insubstantial points about statistics in general. There may be little or no specific focus on the ‘official’ dimension. Interpretation of material may be simplistic or at a tangent to the question. Analysis/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, some suitable material will be correctly identified and a broadly accurate if basic account offered, for example of some relevant aspects of official statistics. Some unfocused material may also appear, for example, reference to social surveys.

Higher in the band, knowledge and understanding of material will be broader and/or deeper, and the answer will deal explicitly with some characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of official statistics. However, answers may lack a balanced coverage of both advantages and disadvantages of official statistics. Interpretation of material will be largely appropriate to the demands of the question. 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/sources of data.

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 concerning the usefulness of official statistics, drawn from Item B and elsewhere. This will be accurately and sensitively interpreted to meet the demands of the question.

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.

Answers may identify practical, ethical and theoretical advantages and disadvantages of official statistics, and may draw on issues such as availability, time, cost, accessibility, coverage, the nature of quantitative data, the social construction of such data, comparability of data, etc. Clearly, however, not all of these issues need to be addressed, even for full marks.

Analysis and evaluation will be explicit, perhaps being anchored in an application of the concepts of reliability, representativeness and validity, or through linkage to an understanding of relevant theoretical positions and concepts, or through reference to the relative usefulness of official statistics in the study of particular issues. Explicit analysis and evaluation of the usefulness of official statistics may also be displayed through the direct comparison with alternative research methods, or by a comparison of the different advantages and disadvantages of those official statistics generated as a by-product of government activities and those created through ad-hoc or regular surveys.

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

Questions	ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES		
	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