



General Certificate of Education

Sociology 5191

SC3WR Sociological Methods

Mark Scheme

2008 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.

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Dr Michael Cresswell, Director General.

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, punctuation and grammar 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 ‘validity’ (Item A , line 5).	<i>(2 marks)</i>
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Two marks for an appropriate explanation or definition of ‘validity’, such as gaining a true/authentic picture or measuring what the research sets out to measure.

One mark for a partially satisfactory answer.

(b) Suggest one advantage and one disadvantage of using life histories in sociological research (Item A , line 8).	<i>(4 marks)</i>
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Two marks for one advantage, such as:

- insight into a person’s life experiences;
- people can present their world-view in their own words;
- can give a historical dimension to our understanding of individual’s views.

Two marks for one disadvantage, such as:

- requires empathetic skills from the researcher;
- time-consuming;
- can be influenced and ‘led’ by the researcher;
- may be unrepresentative.

(c) Suggest three disadvantages of ‘covertly observing members of a social group’ (Item A , line 4).	<i>(6 marks)</i>
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Two marks for each of three appropriate disadvantages, such as:

- lack of informed consent;
- recording behaviour is more difficult;
- difficult to maintain covert role;
- cannot ask direct questions;
- greater physical danger.

(d) Identify and briefly explain two disadvantages of personal documents in sociological research.	<i>(8 marks)</i>
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Two marks for each of two disadvantages of using personal documents, such as:

- their meaning is open to interpretation;
- some groups are less likely than others to create personal documents;
- may be forged;
- lack of representativeness.

Two further marks for an appropriate explanation of each of the disadvantages offered.

For example:

- their meaning is open to interpretation, thus they are difficult to categorise;
- some groups are less likely than others to create personal documents, thus the documents used may be unrepresentative;
- may be forged and thus lack authenticity/validity.

(e) Examine the problems sociologists may face when using 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.

Higher in the band, answers will show limited, undeveloped sociological knowledge, for example, two or three weak descriptive points about 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 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 some of the problems of 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 questionnaires, poorly linked to the question.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be broader and/or deeper, and will begin to identify a wider range of problems sociologists face when using questionnaires. More than one aspect of questionnaires will be considered. 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 comparison of questionnaires with other forms of data gathering. 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 the range of problems sociologists face when using 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 it so as to produce a coherent and relevant answer. Evaluation will be more closely related to the reasons identified in the answer.

Candidates will consider a range of problems when using questionnaires. Material may be drawn from issues of hypothesis creation, generalisation, operationalisation, question design, different modes of delivery (mailed, internet, personal distribution), sampling, pilot studies, cost, time, pre-categorisation, imposition of researcher values, lack of researcher presence, appropriateness for particular research issues/groups, theoretical preference, representativeness, validity, reliability and ethical concerns.

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 claim that a sociologist's choice of research method is primarily influenced by theoretical factors. (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, there may be one or two quasi-commonsensical points about methods in general, or material ineffectually recycled from Item B with little understanding of relevant issues.

Higher in the band, answers will show limited, undeveloped sociological knowledge, for example a few insubstantial points about one or two research methods with little or no specific focus on the factors influencing choice of research methods. 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 influences over choice of research method. Some unfocused material may also appear, for example, unfocused descriptions of specific studies.

Higher in the band, knowledge and understanding of material will be broader and/or deeper, and the answer will deal with theoretical influences on choice of research methods and will give some consideration to practical and/or ethical issues. However, answers may lack a balanced coverage of the range of influences on choice of method. 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 contextualisation in a specific study or a weak comparison of two or more influences on choice of method.

16 – 20 In this band, analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant, and answers will show sound, conceptually detailed knowledge and understanding of relevant sociological material drawn from Item B and elsewhere concerning the factors influencing choice of research method. This will be accurately and sensitively interpreted to meet the demands of the question. Analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant.

Answers will identify practical, ethical and theoretical influences and may draw on issues such as time, cost, accessibility, availability, methodological preference, confidentiality, consent, etc. Not all of these issues need to be addressed, even for full marks. Analysis and evaluation will be explicit, perhaps being anchored in a direct comparison of the influence of theoretical, practical and ethical factors, or through some understanding of the interplay between factors contextualised in a particular study. Explicit analysis and evaluation may also be shown through a recognition that some factors are positive influences, whilst others are constraints, on choice of research method.

Lower in the band, interpretation may be less selective or evaluation less developed and more list-like.

Higher in the band, interpretation will be more focused and evaluation more thorough, and answers may show a clear rationale in the organisation of material leading to a distinct conclusion such as which, if any, factor exerts the greatest influence over choice of method.

ASSESSMENT GRID FOR UNIT 3 (SC3WR)**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