

Exam focus

Top tips for answering questions

- ✓ This is a 2-hour paper and is worth a total of 90 marks.
- ✓ The Education with methods section has 3 questions and you must answer all of them.
- ✓ The exam board give the following advice about managing your time; spend 50 minutes on Question 1, 25 minutes on Question 2 and 40 minutes on Question 3.
- ✓ Use the other few minutes to check your answers.

Short-answer questions

- ✓ Part questions worth 2 marks should be answered in a few words or a sentence at most.
- ✓ Questions that ask you to suggest 2 or 3 things should be answered with brief points only.
- ✓ Question 1c is worth 12 marks and should be written as a mini essay.
- ✓ Try to complete 1c in around 15 minutes.

Essay-answer questions

- ✓ Each of the three essays is worth 20 marks.
- ✓ The essays for both Education and Education with Research methods carry 8 marks for AO1 (Knowledge and Understanding) and 12 marks for AO2 (Application, Analysis, Interpretation and Evaluation).
- ✓ For the Research methods essay, the split is AO1: 10 marks and AO2: 10 marks.

- ✓ Make sure to use the item if asked to.
- ✓ You need to allocate 25 minutes to plan and write each essay.
- ✓ It is vital that you leave enough time to answer the final essay.

Education and methods questions

- ✓ Question 1 is based on Education and you will need to be able to quote studies conducted in this area.
- ✓ Question 3 is based on Research methods.
- ✓ Question 2 is based on Research methods when studying Education.
- ✓ In Question 2, it is vital that any point you make about a research method is linked to the study of Education.
- ✓ However, in Question 3 you can relate research methods to any area of sociological study.

Exam focus

Specimen question: Families and households

Item A

In the 1960s, research was being carried out to try to explain why there were class differences in levels of educational attainment. Initially it was thought that replacing the old tripartite system with a new, comprehensive form of secondary education would ensure that the gap between the classes would narrow.

Not only have class differences remained a feature of education in England and Wales, if anything the gaps in attainment levels has widened. One of the more recent attempts to tackle this issue has been a whole series of policies, some of which have involved a process that has become known as marketisation.

Question 1

- a) Explain what is meant by 'a comprehensive form of secondary education'. (2 marks)
- b) Suggest **three functions** education might be said to perform. (6 marks)
- c) Outline some of the factors outside of schools that can influence students' chances of educational success. (12 marks)
- d) Using material from Item A and elsewhere, outline and assess the impact of policies introduced to improve educational standards in the last 20 years. (20 marks)

It would be a good idea to number your points to make sure that you have 3 distinct ones.

The command word 'outline' means to give brief details of.

The question says 'some' factors. Aim for a minimum of 3, possibly up to 5.

'Assess the impact' is asking you to try to judge the effect of these policies.

Question 2

Item B

What makes a good school? Some people might judge a school just on its position in the league tables. These tables show a range of statistics concerning external examination results, attendance figures and so-called 'contextual value added'.

Other people might be interested in the quality of the teaching, the behaviour of the pupils, the sporting or artistic merits of the school, or even how happy the pupils are. The problem with these factors is that it is harder to collect quantifiable data on them; indeed it may be necessary to turn to qualitative measures.

Using material from the item and elsewhere, assess the strengths and weaknesses of one of the following when studying how good a particular school is:

- (i) quantitative methods (ii) qualitative methods.

This gives you a time frame. You can be flexible but don't go too far back. The 1960s for example would be too long ago.

This is a phrase you may wish to define and explore in your answer.

Whichever you choose, be sure to define what they are.

Make your points specific to sociology, avoid points about laboratory experiments in general.

Question 3

- a) What is meant by the term **random sample**? (2 marks)
- b) Suggest two other types of sample apart from random. (4 marks)
- c) Suggest two reasons why laboratory experiments are rarely used in sociological research. (4 marks)
- d) Examine the reasons why some sociologists prefer to use secondary data in their research. (4 marks)

Command word asking you to look in detail at something.

Define this term and try to give examples of different types.

Examples of the use of secondary data, do not need to be limited to education.

Exam focus

Question 1 Exemplar response: Candidate A

a) Comprehensive system is where all children go to the same secondary school, no 11 plus exam.

This is a correct answer and does not need any more detail. A 2-mark question can always be answered with just one sentence. (2 out of 2 marks)

b) Schools are there to teach pupils how to behave properly. They are also there to allow pupils to get qualifications to help them get jobs. Finally schools are a form of secondary socialisation which carries on after the family.

There are 2 acceptable responses here. The first sentence scores, as does the second. However the third is a restatement of the first. Also the candidate might be better to number the points to ensure they do make three distinct responses. A possible third function would be to teach specific job-related skills. (4 out of 6 marks)

c) There are a lot of different factors which can influence students' chances of success. Some of these are inside the school and some of them are outside. I intend to look at these to decide what it is that will influence success. Working-class homes do not have as many books as those of the middle class so the child does not get the chance to read from an early age.

Sometimes working-class parents do not go to parents' evenings or concerts. This might be because they do not have the time. They often have to work shifts and this also means that they do not have as much time to listen to their children reading. Middle-class parents can help with homework because they have been successful at school themselves. They are also able to help their children with coursework when it comes to GCSEs. Working-class parents can't do this as they probably left school at 16 and the maths is very different from when they were at school. Also there is less money in many working-class homes and this can have a huge impact. For example it is easier to do coursework if you have a computer at home. Also middle-class parents can pay for their children to go on school trips.

So these are some of the reasons why things outside of the home can have an influence on how well someone does at school.

This answer discusses a reasonable range of factors concerning class differences and does focus on factors outside of school. It mainly concerns the level of parental involvement and issues relating to material deprivation.

The answer could be improved if it developed these concepts and perhaps also discussed in greater detail cultural issues, which it only touches on. In addition, it has a rather narrow focus in that it relates only to class. The question is broader than this and some recognition of other divisions such as gender or ethnicity would enable the student to score a higher mark. (8 out of 12 marks)

db There have been a lot of policies to improve education. They abolished the old 11 plus exam and set up comprehensive schools so everyone would have an equal chance. This meant if a child wasn't good at exams they would still get to go to a good school when they were 11.

Whilst the abolition of the 11 plus exam could be a relevant starting point, most areas did this more than 20 years ago (with exceptions such as Northern Ireland). Also the candidate would need to link this discussion to improvements in educational standards.

The government also introduced the National Curriculum. This is a list of subjects everyone has to study. Because of this it stopped just boys doing woodwork and girls just doing home economics. Now everyone has to study the same subjects which makes things more equal.

Again discussion of the national curriculum could be made relevant if the candidate considered if this policy had raised standards in schools. As it is, the points made are somewhat inaccurate; options are still allowed and the subjects mentioned are still gender-linked.

Another policy is that of SATs. This is where all children have to sit tests in key subjects at different times. The point of this is everyone knows how well they are doing and parents can see the progress their child is making.

A good idea to discuss SATs and there is some attempt to analyse their impact. However the discussion is not linked to raising standards. The candidate could debate why the government thought publishing SAT scores as league tables would help to drive up standards.

Finally the government brought in GNVQ's for people who didn't want to do A-levels. This means they could do subjects like health and social care or I.T. and get good qualifications to go on to a good job. This gives more people the chance to do well at school.

The candidate could really build upon this last point. There has been considerable debate around the impact of 'new' vocational qualifications. As the candidate says, they could be viewed as giving more choice and opportunities but others have suggested they do not raise standards in the system. There is an absence of evaluation in this answer but the question clearly asked for some.

So there are lots of policies in the last 20 years and there are still more at the minute. All of the policies I have looked at were brought in to make schools better. This is because it is important everyone does well at school so they can get a good job.

This conclusion adds little to the answer. The candidate shows knowledge of a range of policies (3 or 4). However, they do not apply them well to the question. The central issue of 'Have policies raised standards?' is not addressed. There is no real use of the item. In addition to this, with no real evaluation the essay cannot score highly. So improvements could be made by keeping focused on the question, use of the item and some attempt to evaluate how successful policies have been. (9 out of 20 marks)

Exemplar response: Candidate B

a) Only one type of school at 11, not three.

This brief answer scores both marks. (2 out of 2 marks)

b) 1. Secondary socialisation

2. Teaching skills for jobs

3. Providing qualifications for jobs/university

All three of these are acceptable, as is the numbered list the student provides. (6 out of 6 marks)

c) A lot of factors influence success in school. Some are within the school like teachers' labels, some are outside the school like parents' attitudes.

Studies have proved teachers' labels influence how well pupil does. If they get labelled 'bright', they believe in themselves and go on to get good qualifications. If they get the label 'thick', they lose confidence and so end up not doing well. Another label some pupils get is 'troublemaker' and if they get treated like this then that is how they end up acting. I think it is wrong for teachers to do this because some 'thick' students could really be quite bright but never get a chance.

The other side of the coin is to do with parents and their attitudes to school. If a parent gives their child encouragement then they will do better. However, if the parent thinks education is a waste of time, or if they don't really understand the system, then the child may not develop as well as they could. They might be encouraged to leave school at 16 and get a job. This is also unfair because every child deserves to do the best they can in school. This will help them to go on and get a good job which is well paid after they leave school.

In this answer the candidate has talked about factors within schools, which is not what the question asked for. They do make a couple of points about parents' attitudes to or knowledge of education. These can be rewarded but the answer needs a much clearer focus on issues of cultural and material deprivation in order to score more highly. Also, there needs to be some recognition of which group(s) might achieve differently in the education system. (5 out of 12 marks)

d) For all of the last 20 years governments have tried to make sure educational standards are rising. Many of the policies which have tried to achieve this have been based on marketisation. This means schools have to compete with each other to get pupils and in this way standards will get better.

This is a strong introduction. The candidate has taken the key concept from the item, defined it and linked it to the focus of the question.

In 1988 the government introduced the Education Reform Act. This set up the national curriculum. For the first time everyone had the chance to study the same subjects. It has been claimed that this greatly improved the educational performance of girls because it gave them access to subjects which in the past were seen as masculine.

Here an appropriate policy is identified and explored. There is a direct link to the question of improving standards. Perhaps an example of which subjects girls improved in (such as science) would improve the point.

Also in the 1980s there were a whole series of policies which aimed to encourage girls to study traditionally masculine subjects, especially science. One of these was called WISE (Women Into Science Education). Alison Kelly claims this policy helped to boost girls' confidence and helped to raise their performance in science subjects. So these policies were a success, but at the same time boys, especially in the working class, began to see school as too female and many formed anti-school subcultures. So the policies didn't raise standards for everyone.

This is an excellent paragraph. A policy area is correctly identified and explained. The candidate evaluates its success, both with reference to a study and by their own ideas. The final point is a very insightful piece of evaluation.

Soon afterwards the government decided all the tests children were sitting (SATs) should have their results published in league tables. The reason for this was so parents could see which schools were getting the best results. The idea was also that this would put pressure on under performing schools so standards would go up. Not everyone agrees that this has happened because if a school becomes unpopular it is harder to attract good students and the results might go down. These are called 'sink' schools.

This paragraph shows a good range of skills. Knowledge and understanding are good and accurately conveyed. There is analysis of the policy (look at the sentence which starts 'the reason for this was'). Also the candidate is able to evaluate the impact of the policy so is directly addressing the question.

Some people have even been critical of SATs. Teachers say they put too much pressure on children. Also they don't tell us a lot about what a school is really like.

This is a somewhat weaker paragraph. The point about pressure on children could be developed by discussing if they are being drilled to pass tests and if the SATs really do measure educational standards. This would retain the focus on the question.

Part of marketisation is about giving parents more choice of schools. To do this the government has introduced many different types of schools such as specialist schools, more faith schools and academies. With so many different types of schools parents have much greater choice. However sociologists such as Gewirtz are critical of this and claim not all parents have this choice. Those with cultural capital have greater knowledge of the system and how it works so are more likely to get their first choice. However results do show that faith schools improve educational standards.

A very good paragraph. The idea from the item is developed very fully. Good knowledge of different types of schools is shown and a sociologist who is critical is discussed. Note also the introduction of a valuable concept, cultural capital. Finally a counter argument is suggested, even though it could also be questioned, e.g. do faith schools raise standards overall or just 'cream off' better pupils?

The government also introduced the policy of Sure Start, which put a lot of nurseries into deprived areas. The purpose of this was to catch children at a young age and help to 'compensate' for cultural and material deprivation. However, it is difficult to judge if this scheme has been a success as it takes a long time to see the benefits of extra nursery places.

Despite this being a somewhat partial account of Sure Start, it is a very relevant area to discuss. The purpose of the policy is explained and an evaluative comment is added.

There is still a question about if these policies have improved standards. The number of pupils getting 5 or more GCSE's has increased but the government itself keeps saying that a lot of schools are failing. Also we should note that the gap between different classes and ethnic groups still remains even if the gender gap has closed.

Here the candidate comes to a reasoned conclusion that is directly related to the question. They point to contradictory evidence and make a very useful point about educational standards of different social groups.

Overall the question has a good range of policies (5 or more) and each one is dealt with in terms of the question. Use is made of the item and the focus on the question is retained throughout the answer. Evaluation is explicit and appropriate.

This may not be a perfect answer but it is as good as one could reasonably expect given exam conditions and the amount of time provided.

(20 out of 20 marks)

Question 2 Exemplar response: Candidate A

League tables can tell us a lot about a school. They give you a lot of statistics to look at. These include the results of SATs and GCSEs as well as attendance figures for the school. These can then be used by a sociologist who wants to research how good a particular school is.

If you look carefully, almost all of this material is in the item. As the candidate does not use this but just reproduces it, they get no reward. The only thing new here is which exams the league tables cover. A better way to start would be to clearly identify which option the candidate is answering and to define the type of approach they will be considering.

By looking at exam results, we can see right away how many pupils are getting 5 A to Cs at GCSE. Also, we can see if this figure is getting better over the years. If the teaching has got better and the school's results are improving, we can clearly see this from the league tables. Also a sociologist could see if a school was not getting as good results as it used to.

If the candidate had started as suggested they could then identify league tables as quantitative, perhaps defining what exactly this means. Instead, this second paragraph really only makes one point that gains any marks – the idea that league tables can compare present with past performance.

The same is true about figures for attendance. If a school is a good one it will have almost 100% attendance. If you get two schools close to each other and one has better attendance it might show one is doing a better job at teaching the pupils.

This short paragraph does make a couple of valid points. It would help if the candidate could introduce a little bit of analysis here by questioning whether high attendance does necessarily mean a school is good or even by discussing whether the comparison they suggest is a valid one.

Not everyone agrees with school league tables. Some schools have got much better students from better off homes. This means they will always be near the top of the table. A school could still be a good school but with weak pupils and it won't be high up the tables and so will look bad.

This paragraph explores a very important point. The candidate is able to criticise the use of some types of quantitative data. However, they do miss a great opportunity to use the part of the item that refers to contextual value added. This would allow them to discuss if this type of data gives a truer picture of how good a school is.

Also the figures on attendance might not be reliable. It is schools themselves that record these figures. Some schools only take a register once a day whilst others have one every lesson. Also some use computers to take registers which makes the details more accurate. Finally a school might try to hide the number of absences so they appear to be better than they are.

There is a better focus in this paragraph. The candidate is exploring why we might not be able to trust some statistical data. They could build on this by linking in their discussion to more general points about the limits of quantitative data in sociological research.

League tables and attendance figures are useful because they are cheap, quick and easy to get hold of. However they do not tell us everything about how good a school is. If we want to know that we would need to also use qualitative measures and look at things like pupil behaviour or sports or arts.

There are a couple of general points here but then the candidate repeats the first paragraph and simply restates the item. This will not gain any marks unless they state how a sociologist might study these things.

Overall this is not a strong answer. It could be improved by providing a clear definition of quantitative methods in an introduction that also sets out where the essay is going.

Also the discussion could be extended to cover other forms of data apart from league tables and attendance figures.

Finally a wider range of possible strengths and weaknesses are needed so that the question is addressed more directly. For example, the candidate makes some points about the validity of statistics, which could be developed as a criticism of statistical data. Also they could discuss how quantitative data can be used to assess the impact of different policies or initiatives a school might introduce. (9 out of 20 marks)

Exemplar response: Candidate B

As the item suggests, quantitative data such as statistics do not always give a full picture. If a sociologist wanted to study a school they might need to turn to qualitative methods to see behind the figures such as league tables.

A good introduction that has its focus on the question. The point about seeing behind statistics is very good and could be developed later on. As an introduction, this is quite short and could be improved by explaining what exactly qualitative methods are, perhaps with some examples, such as participant observation in a classroom or in a staffroom, or diaries students keep.

For example if they wanted to study things like teaching and pupils' behaviour, some form of observation might be best. This is because quantitative measures such as statistics or even questionnaires might not find out what really happens in lessons. A sociologist asked teachers if they treated boys and girls differently in class. They said they got equal treatment but when lessons were observed, the researcher found they spent much more time with boys and gave them more praise as well as telling them off more. This shows observation can tell us a lot more about what really happens.

This is an excellent paragraph. The candidate takes some issues from the item and then shows how qualitative methods can study these better than statistics. The candidate uses a very good illustration and note that it does not matter too much that they can't name the sociologist; they have identified and applied the study well.

Many other studies have used observation methods. Cecile Wright looked at the treatment of ethnic minorities in a primary school. She found teachers had different expectations of different children, especially boys who they expected to behave badly. So the boys got a negative label and it turned into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Another very appropriate study is used here. However the candidate tells us more about the findings of the research than the method. Because this is an education and methods question, this needs to be the focus here.

A study which was directed more at pupils than teachers was Paul Willis in his book *Learning to Labour*. He followed a group of lads in their last year at school and observed their behaviour and chatted with them. He wanted to find out how they saw school and their future. It is unlikely he would have got such a detailed picture if he had given them a questionnaire.

Again there is good use of a study to illustrate a point. Also the candidate is evaluative in suggesting observation was a better method than questionnaires. They could develop this by suggesting why questionnaires would not give Willis the sort of detail observation did. Also the candidate could introduce the concept of empathy in discussing what Willis hoped to achieve.

So we can see that how good a school is cannot just be judged by looking at the league tables. Researchers using qualitative methods such as observation have told us a lot

more about what goes on in schools. Qualitative methods give us more depth and insight than statistics ever can.

This is quite a good summing up but it remains rather general. Some short comment on what kind of things observation allows us to study, such as teachers' attitudes or the perspective of pupils would add to this conclusion.

(14 out of 20 marks)

Question 3 Exemplar response: Candidate A

a) A random sample is where every person has an equal chance of being picked to be part of the study.

This is a good answer, especially as it does not use either of the words of the term in the definition. You should avoid an answer that states 'where people are picked randomly' because this does not explain the term. (2 out of 2 marks)

b) A quota sample and a snowball sample.

Two acceptable sample types are given, and note neither needs explaining or expanding upon. (4 out of 4 marks)

c) There is the Hawthorne Effect where if people know they are being studied they change their behaviour. A second reason is you can run in to ethical issues.

The first reason scores the full 2 marks but the second is incomplete. It is not clear what the ethical issue might be so this part only gains one mark. By giving an example of an ethical issue, such as causing distress, the extra mark could be gained. (3 out of 4 marks)

d) The advantages of secondary data are

1. It is quick and cheap.
2. There is a lot of it and it's easy to get hold of.
3. You can base your studies on it.
4. You don't have to find things out for yourself.

The candidate may have run out of time but writing lists or notes is not a good idea in the essay questions. It states on the front of the exam question paper that these must be written in full sentences and paragraphs. There is some reward for a couple of knowledge points on the advantages but points 3 and 4 don't really tell us anything.

However the disadvantages are

1. It is often out of date so not much use to the sociologist.
2. It might be biased by the government.
3. It might not tell you all the things you want to know.

So secondary data has good and bad points. This is why sociologists often use more than one method in their study to get the best of both worlds.

The same points apply to this. A few disadvantages are stated but none are explained or developed so very few marks can be awarded. The candidate could gain extra marks by stating why statistics get out of date so quickly, giving some examples of possible government bias, and perhaps illustrating a case where the information did not match all the sociologist wanted to know.

(6 out of 20 marks)

Clearly what is needed to improve this is much more time and thought spent on the question. A good place to start would be a definition of what secondary data means with some examples. The candidate then needs to identify and explain reasons why such data is useful to sociologists, perhaps by quoting a study that used such a method successfully. They then need to consider possible problems with this method and come to some sort of reasoned conclusion about its usefulness.

Exemplar response: Candidate B

a) It is where people are picked at random, like drawing names out of a hat.

As we noted with Exemplar response A, this first sentence cannot score as it just repeats the term. The second sentence gives an example of how a random sample might be selected so gains 1 mark. (1 out of 2 marks)

b) Stratified sample and opportunity sample.

Both are acceptable. (4 out of 4 marks)

c) 1. The lab is an artificial situation so people will not act normally.

2. Some things have to be studied over a long time, e.g. progress in education.

Again both of these are perfectly acceptable reasons. (4 out of 4 marks)

Secondary data is any information that already exists that a sociologist can make use of. The most common form it takes is official statistics. The government publishes data on a wide range of things such as unemployment, crime, education and health. There are other forms of secondary data such as media reports, personal letters and diaries and even other sociological studies.

This is a good introduction. The method in question is defined and then illustrated with a series of examples. It is especially good that different forms of secondary data are mentioned.

Those who use secondary data are often positivists. They like it because it is information you can trust and it comes in numerical form. It reduces the chance of researcher bias as the data has already been collected by someone else so the researcher can remain objective.

A good link with theory here, but it would be even better if the term 'positivist' was briefly explained, e.g. those who try to make their studies scientific. Three possible advantages of such data are identified but only the last one is even partially explained. The candidate has missed an opportunity to expand on their answer.

One famous study using secondary data was Durkheim's study of suicide. He looked at suicide rates from a range of different countries to see which had high levels. He also did statistical analysis to see if certain groups had high or low rates. He found Catholics and Catholic countries had much lower rates of suicide. He used these findings as the basis to go on to study if suicide was linked to social integration.

A very appropriate study is introduced and the candidate does describe the method, not just the findings. The candidate has discussed inter and intra country comparisons and how analysis of secondary data can lead to the establishment of a hypothesis.

Durkheim's study was criticised by others including Douglas and Atkinson. They argued suicide statistics were not social facts but social constructions. Sometimes suicides are covered up to save the family so Durkheim was working with inaccurate figures in

his research. The same happens when studying crime. Not all crimes are reported or recorded so the crime figures do not fully represent the level of crime.

The criticism of Durkheim is a good idea and starts well with the concepts of 'social facts' and 'social construction' introduced. The latter of these two in particular needs to be defined. Also the point about cover ups could be expanded to discuss how coroners arrive at decisions. Also, both Douglas and Atkinson used forms of secondary data in their research (suicide notes and coroners' records). This could be introduced to show the wider range of secondary data sociologists deal with.

There is always the possibility of bias in government statistics. The way unemployment is measured was changed 17 times by one government so that it appeared fewer people were jobless. Going back to crime figures, Cicourel showed that police have stereotypes of 'typical criminals' and only arrest people who fit them. This is another way statistics are biased.

A number of good points here but it would be better if the candidate did not jump from crime to unemployment and back to crime. If they had planned their answer, they could continue the discussion of crime statistics with the excellent point taken from Cicourel's study and then move on to unemployment figures. This would produce a better 'flow' to the answer.

Overall, some sociologists will prefer secondary data because it is readily available and allows them to make comparisons as Durkheim did. The major problem is that we cannot be certain the statistics are accurate, especially if the government or police are involved.

This is a brief but effective conclusion. It identifies a couple of advantages of secondary data and refers back to a study quoted in the answer. A key criticism is identified, again with reference back to points discussed earlier. (14 out of 20 marks)

This essay could be improved by discussing other types of secondary data, not just official statistics. Some of these are mentioned in the introduction so it is a pity the candidate did not broaden the debate to include them. Another area that could be developed more is the point raised about positivism. Different views held by sociologists on how best to conduct research could be introduced, perhaps by also discussing qualitative methods as used by sociologists they refer to in their essay (Douglas, Atkinson and Cicourel).

Overall mark totals

Exemplar response: Candidate A

Question 1 $2+4+8+9 = 23/40$

Question 2 $9/20$

Question 3 $2+4+3+6 = 15/30$

Total: 47 out of 90 marks

Grade: This is likely to be close to the grade boundary between C and D

Exemplar response: Candidate B

Question 1 $2+6+5+20 = 33/40$

Question 2 $14/20$

Question 3 $1+4+4+14 = 23/30$

Total: 70 out of 90 marks

Grade: This should be well inside the A grade boundary