Worksheet 3.1   Types of data (pages 120–122)

Consolidate (work individually)

1   Define the term 'primary data'.

2   Define the term 'secondary data'.

3   Explain the difference between quantitative and qualitative data.

4   Identify one source of quantitative data.

5   Identify three sources of qualitative data.

6   Define the term 'validity'.

7   Define the term 'reliability'

8   Suggest two reasons why quantitative data is likely to be more reliable than qualitative data.

9   Suggest two reasons why qualitative data is likely to have greater validity than quantitative data.

10 Give an example of how data that is reliable may not be valid.

Apply (work in small groups)

1   Explain why qualitative data may have *higher validity* but *lower reliability* than quantitative data.

2   Briefly explain why quantitative data is useful for measuring the strength of the relationship between various factors.

3   Why might qualitative data provide a richer and more in-depth picture of social life than quantitative data?

4   Why, ideally, should research data be both valid and reliable?

5   Identify and briefly explain any situation in which a sociologist might want – or be forced – to use secondary, rather than primary, data in their research.

Evaluate (work as a class)

Imagine you are conducting research on student friendship patterns in your school/college:

1   You have only been given sufficient funding to allow you to collect either quantitative or qualitative data. Which type of data would you choose to collect and why would you choose this type of data?

2   You have been asked to identify and explain possible differences in educational achievement between boys and girls. What primary and secondary data would you want to collect in order to successfully complete this research?

Worksheet 3.2 The research process (pages 122–128)

Consolidate (work individually)

1 Suggest three factors that might affect a sociologist's choice of topic.

2 Identify three practical considerations that might affect a sociologist's choice of research method.

3 Summarise the interpretivist approach to research.

4 Identify one research method associated with the interpretivist approach to research.

5 Summarise the positivist approach to research.

6 Identify one research method associated with the positivist approach to research.

7 Explain what is meant by a 'social fact'.

8 Give three ethical guidelines that sociologists need to be aware of during the course of their research.

10 Suggest one reason why a researcher's ethical values might affect their choice of research topic.

Apply (work in small groups)

1 Why is a positivist approach to research likely to use quantitative research methods?

2 Why is an interpretivist approach to research likely to use qualitative research methods?

3 Other than suicide rates, identify three 'social facts' in our society.

4 Using the ethical guidelines identified in the textbook, briefly explain how each might be relevant/irrelevant to the study of **one** of the following:

   a. a criminal gang

   b. classroom behaviour in a primary school

   c. illegal drug users

   d. a group of unemployed males and/or females

   e. life on the road with a rock group.

5 Suggest three ways that secondary research methods can avoid the ethical problems associated with primary research methods.

Evaluate (work as a class)

1 Examine the arguments for and against an interpretivist approach to sociological research.

2 'If sociologists always followed ethical guidelines they would never produce any worthwhile research.' Examine the arguments for and against this view.

Worksheet 3.3　Experiments (pages 128–131)

Consolidate (work individually)

1　Suggest one reason why the results of laboratory experiments are usually quantified.

2　Why is it necessary to 'control variables' in a laboratory experiment?

3　Why is it important to use 'a standard objective system of measurement' in laboratory experiments?

4　Suggest two criticisms of laboratory experiments.

5　Identify two differences between a laboratory and a field experiment.

6　What is the 'Hawthorne effect'?

7　Why do field experiments not provide the same level of control as laboratory experiments?

8　Identify two forms of experimenter bias in field experiments.

9　Give one practical and one theoretical reason why sociologists rarely use experiments.

10　Suggest two ethical considerations that might prevent sociologists from using laboratory experiments.

Apply (work in small groups)

1　Why is it important to 'control all possible variables' in a laboratory experiment?

2　Why is it is impossible to 'control all possible variables' when carrying out sociological research 'in the field'?

3　Why is the Hawthorne effect an important consideration in both laboratory and field experiments?

4　Suggest two reasons why a laboratory experiment is likely to be highly reliable.

5　Suggest two reasons why experiments may lack validity.

Evaluate (work as a class)

1　'Laboratory experiments have been very successful in the natural sciences such as physics and chemistry. However, many sociologists have serious doubts about their application to human beings.' What does this statement suggest about possible differences between the natural and social worlds?

2　'Laboratory experiments, such as those carried out by Bandura, tell us little or nothing of any value about how people really behave.' Assess the usefulness of laboratory experiments for an understanding of social behaviour in the 'real world'.

Worksheet 3.4   Social surveys (pages 131–134)

Consolidate (work individually)

1 Define the term 'social survey'.

2 Explain the idea of 'a sample'.

3 What is a 'sampling unit'?

4 Name four common types of sample.

5 What is the main difference between a *stratified random* sample and a *quota* sample?

6 Suggest four factors that can be used to stratify a sample.

7 Identify two differences between a snowball sample and a systematic sample.

8 Define the term 'response rate'.

9 Suggest three reasons for people failing to respond to research questions.

10 Identify two potential problems of non-response.

Apply (work in small groups)

1 Suggest possible sampling frames for the following:

- voting behaviour in the UK

- a school

- a large private business

- doctors in England and Wales

- plumbers in your local area.

2 Imagine you are considering the following areas of research:

- voting behaviour in the UK

- the factors influencing A-level subject choice

- religious beliefs in Britain

- problems of disabled access to a shopping mall

- attitudes to homosexuality among heterosexual women.

Suggest appropriate ways that you could stratify each sample to make it as representative as possible.

3 Identify and explain three situations in which a researcher might be forced – rather than choose – to use a snowball/volunteer sample.

4 How might the response rate in a piece of research affect its representativeness?

5 Why is it important to construct a representative sample?

Evaluate (work as a class)

1 Examine the arguments for and against the idea that samples should always be representative.

2 Imagine you were going to do some research on your school/college that involved drawing a representative sample. Keeping practical considerations (such as limited time and money) in mind, which sampling technique would you use, and why would you use it?

Worksheet 3.5   Questionnaires (pages 134–138)

Consolidate (work individually)

1   Explain the difference between a self-completion questionnaire and a structured interview.

2   Explain the term 'interviewer bias'.

3   What are closed questions most suitable for?

4   Suggest one advantage and one disadvantage of open questions.

5   What are the advantages of self-completion questionnaires?

6   What are the disadvantages of self-completion questionnaires?

7   Provide an example of a 'leading question'.

8   Why should questions mean the same thing to all respondents?

9   Why do sociologists sometimes use pilot studies?

10 Identify three problems of questionnaire questions.

Apply (work in small groups).

1   Sociologists frequently operationalise concepts by using indicators – things they can define and measure. For example, to operationalise the concept of 'crime' indicators might include the number of people who are arrested for breaking the law. Suggest indicators sociologists could use to operationalise the following concepts:

   • divorce

   • educational achievement

   • religious belief

   • domestic labour

   • truancy from school.

2   For **each** of the indicators you've identified, suggest **one** criticism of the validity of the data it might produce. For example, the 'number of people arrested for breaking the law' is not a particularly valid indicator of 'crime' because an unknown number of people commit crimes for which they are never arrested.

3   Why might a self-completion questionnaire, rather than a structured interview, be more likely to produce valid data about the following?

   • personal sexual behaviour

   • criminal behaviour

4   Make a case from a positivist perspective for the use of questionnaires in sociological research.

5   Argue the case from an interpretivist perspective against the use of questionnaires in sociological research.

Evaluate (work as a class)

1   'The advantages of questionnaires outweigh their disadvantages.' Discuss this view in relation to postal questionnaires and structured interviews.

2   Imagine you have been commissioned to do research in your school/college that involves getting the views of teachers and students about homework. Make a case – for or against – using questionnaires as your method of research.

Worksheet 3.6   Interviews (pages 139–142)

Consolidate (work individually)

1   Give two differences between a semi-structured and an unstructured interview.

2   Identify two advantages and two disadvantages of structured interviews.

3   Identify two advantages and two disadvantages of semi-structured interviews.

4   Suggest three advantages of unstructured interviews.

5   Why are 'social desirability' effects a problem particularly associated with unstructured interviews?

6   Why do unstructured interviews make 'comparisons between data from different interviews difficult'?

7   What is 'non-directive interviewing'?

8   Identify two problems with non-directive interviewing.

9   What are 'active approaches' to interviewing?

10 Identify one strength of active approaches to interviewing.

Apply (work in small groups)

1   Suggest reasons why focus groups might provide a rich source of qualitative data.

2   Suggest reasons why interpretivists are more likely to use unstructured rather than structured interviews.

3   'Interviewer bias is unavoidable.' What implications does this statement have for the reliability *and* validity of unstructured interviews?

4   Identify and explain two ways that 'probing the interviewee' might produce biased or misleading data.

5   How might the disadvantages of semi-structured interviews impact on their reliability and validity?

Evaluate (work as a class)

1   Imagine you have been asked to interview a group of young males (aged 10–14) about their alcohol drinking habits. Which type of interview is likely to produce the most valid data and why?

2   Imagine you are in charge of a team of researchers looking at the relationship between teachers and their pupils in a primary school. Examine the arguments for and against the use of non-directive and active approaches when interviewing different types of respondent.

Worksheet 3.7   Observation (pages 142–147)

Consolidate (work individually)

1 Define the term 'ethnography'.

2 Identify three ways that sociologists have attempted to solve the problem of 'gaining entry' to a group in order to study them.

3 Suggest three skills the researcher needs when conducting participant observation research.

4 When using participant observation, why is 'blending into the background' not always possible?

5 Suggest two advantages and two disadvantages of participant observation.

6 Briefly explain the difference between overt and covert forms of participant observation research.

7 Give two reasons why interpretivists are more likely than positivists to use participant observation in their research.

8 Give two differences between participant and non-participant observation.

9 Identify two disadvantages of participant observation compared to non-participant observation.

10 Suggest two advantages of participant observation compared to non-participant observation.

Apply (work in small groups)

1 Why is participant observation an effective method for discovering meanings?

2 Some sociologists argue that it is important to 'let the people know who you are' when doing participant observation. What are the arguments for and against of this approach?

3 Some sociologists argue we should pretend to be in the same boat with the people being researched when doing participant observation. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

4 Suggest two situations where covert participant observation would be desirable/ necessary and two situations where overt participant observation would be desirable/ necessary.

5 Imagine you have been hired to do some research on student subcultures of your school/college. Which form of participant observation (overt or covert) would you choose for this research? Explain the reasons for your choice.

Evaluate (work as a class)

1 Examine the ethical problems that might be encountered when doing covert participant observation.

2 Imagine that as part of your preparation for research into pupil-teacher relationships in a school/college an initial discussion must take place with your research team to decide whether you are going to use participant or non-participant research. Make the case for using one or the other research methods.

Worksheet 3.8   Secondary sources (pages 147–154)

Consolidate (work individually)

1   What is 'secondary data'?

2   Identify two sources of official statistics.

3   Give two possible problems with the use of official statistics.

4   State four advantages of official statistics to the sociologist.

5   Give three examples of different types of document.

6   Suggest two differences between formal and thematic content analysis.

7   Identify two advantages of content analysis as a research method.

8   Give two disadvantages of content analysis as a research method?

9   Suggest two reasons for using historical documents.

10 Suggest two possible problems with using historical documents.

Apply (work in small groups)

1   One argument against the use of historical documents is that they are often 'biased, prejudiced, one-sided and concerned with putting over a particular point of view'. What arguments can you suggest, in favour of using historical documents, which might counter these problems?

2   Explain what is meant by 'the social construction of crime statistics' (Item B, page 150)?

3   Why are positivist sociologists more likely to use official statistics in their research?

4   Why might interpretivist sociologists reject the use of official statistics in their research?

5   Using Scott's (1990) four 'quality control criteria' for assessing documents, assess the following:

   a. *The Sun* newspaper

   b. The BBC web site (www.bbc.co.uk)

   c. *Heat* magazine

   d. ITV news.

Evaluate (work as a class)

1   Discuss the advantages and disadvantages to sociologists of using secondary sources of data in their research.

2   Examine the positivist argument that official statistics (such as suicide or crime rates) represent social facts that can be used to understand and explain human behaviour.

Worksheet 3.9   Types of research (pages 155–159)

Consolidate (work individually)

1   What are 'life histories'?

2   Identify two criticisms of 'life histories'.

3   Suggest three advantages of case studies.

4   Identify two criticisms of case studies.

5   What is a longitudinal study?

6   Identify one strength of longitudinal studies.

7   Suggest two strengths of the comparative method.

8   Identify two weaknesses of the comparative method.

9   What is triangulation?

10 What is methodological pluralism?

Apply (work in small groups)

1   Suggest two examples of 'the valuable information that a good life history can provide'.

2   Identify and explain two ways that official statistics could be used as the basis for a longitudinal study for each of the following:

   • marriage

   • educational achievement

   • crime.

3   Identify some historical comparative differences between the following in our society over the past century:

   • men and women

   • children.

4   How might the use of secondary sources help to overcome the problem of time and expense with longitudinal studies?

5   Suggest how the use of triangulation might allow a researcher to check the validity and reliability of their findings.

Evaluate (work as a class)

1   How could we use the comparative method to test the idea that human behaviour is based on cultural learning rather than instinct?

2   Why might you use methodological pluralism in a research project?