A-Level Theory and Methods

| **Specification and content** | **Covered ✓** | **RAG** | **RAG** |
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| * **1. Quantitative and qualitative methods of research; research design** * **Sources of data, including questionnaires, interviews, participant and non-participant observation, experiments, documents and official statistics** * **The distinction between primary and secondary data, and between quantitative and qualitative data** * **The relationship between positivism, interpretivism and sociological methods; the nature of ‘social facts’**   **The theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research (AS and A Level)** | | | |
| * **Types of research method and data sources:** * the differences between quantitative and qualitative data, * strengths and limitations of quantitative and qualitative data * the differences between primary and secondary sources of data; * strengths and limitations of primary and secondary sources of data; |  |  |  |
| * **Primary methods of data collection and the main variants of each :** * Questionnaires   + Interviews (structured and unstructured)   + observation (participant and non-participant observation)   + experiments (laboratory and field experiments).   + The main stages of the research process for these methods.   + Practical, Ethical and theoretical strengths and weaknesses for each method |  |  |  |
| * **Secondary sources of data:** * Documents (personal, public and historical; different sources of official statistics.) * official statistics (including different sources) |  |  |  |
| **Research design, in relation to**   * pilot studies and * sampling techniques; * main stages of the research process in relation to the methods. |  |  |  |
| * **Practical issues affecting choice of methods and sources,** * time, * cost, * access and * researcher’s characteristics; * strengths and limitations of different methods and sources in relation to these issues. |  |  |  |
| * **Ethical issues affecting choice of methods and sources,** * informed consent, * deceit and * vulnerable groups; * strengths and limitations of different methods and sources in relation to these issues. |  |  |  |
| * **Theoretical issues affecting choice of methods and sources,** * reliability, * validity, * representativeness, * positivism, * interpretivism; * strengths and limitations of different methods and sources in relation to these issues. |  |  |  |
| * **Practical, ethical and theoretical factors influencing choice of research topic,** * personal experience and * policy concerns. |  |  |  |
| * + 1. **Consensus, conflict, structural and social action theories (A level)** | | | |
| **The difference between consensus and conflict theories of society, including**   * consensus theories such as functionalism, the New Right, * conflict theories, ie Marxism and feminism;   **The major variants of such theories,**   * scientific and humanistic Marxism; * liberal, radical, Marxist etc feminism. * Marx, * Gramsci, * Althusser, * Durkheim, * Parsons, * Merton |  |  |  |
| **The difference between structural theories such as functionalism and Marxism, and action theories**;   * the main types of action theory, such as * social action theory, * symbolic interactionism and * ethnomethodology. * Weber, * Mead, * Blumer, * Becker, * Goffman, * Garfinkel |  |  |  |
| * + 1. **The concepts of modernity and post-modernity in relation to sociological theory (A level)** | | | |
| **The concepts of modernity and postmodernity, including variants such as late modernity.**   * Baudrillard, * Giddens, * Beck, * Harvey |  |  |  |
| **Modernist and postmodernist theories of contemporary society.**   * Baudrillard, * Giddens, * Beck, * Harvey |  |  |  |
| * 1. **The nature of science and the extent to which Sociology can be regarded as scientific (A Level)** | | | |
| **Debates about the scientific status of sociology:**   * positivist and interpretivist views. * Durkheim, * Weber, * Glaser & Strauss, * Atkinson |  |  |  |
| **Different views of the natural sciences and implications for sociology’s scientific status.**   * Popper, * Kuhn, * realism, * Keat & Urry |  |  |  |
| **The relationship between theory and methods** | | | |
| **The relationship between theoretical perspective and preference for particular research methods and sources of data,**   * positivism and quantitative data, * interpretivism and qualitative data. * Durkheim, * Atkinson, * Jack Douglas |  |  |  |
| * 1. **Debates about subjectivity, objectivity and value freedom (A Level)** | | | |
| **Concepts of**   * objectivity, * subjectivity, * value freedom and * ideology. * Comte, * Durkheim, * Marx, * Weber, * Becker, * Gouldner |  |  |  |
| **Different views of whether sociology can and should be objective or value free,**   * classical sociology, * value neutrality and * committed sociology; * relativism. * Comte, * Durkheim, * Marx, * Weber, * Becker, * Gouldner |  |  |  |
| * 1. **The relationship between Sociology and social policy (A Level)** | | | |
| **The difference between social problems and sociological problems;**   * perspectives on social policy * perspectives on the role of sociology in relation to policy. * Worsley, * Comte, * Durkheim, * Marx, * Murray |  |  |  |