

Question guide for Sociology (AQA) essays

i.e. 20mark and 30mark questions

What should I think about when answering/planning essay questions?

There are three main types of essay question so you need to think/plan them slightly differently. They are described below. It is important you stop and plan the question so you start it correctly.

1) Evaluate sociological explanations for the changes in childhood

These questions are asking why is something happening and/or how do sociologists explain what is happening. For this type of question you can usually pick a range of explanations and judge which one is best.

There are usually a few overall explanations/categories with multiple reasons associated with them

Questions to ask yourself

1. What are the main categories/groups of explanations
2. What are reasons/explanations within each category

Example Question: Evaluate the sociological explanations for the changes in the position of childhood since the 1900's (20marks)

March of progress > child centeredness, child protection laws, families are wealthier etc etc

Conflict view of childhood > differences between adults and children e.g. age patriarchy, differences between children e.g. girls have less freedom (feminism), difference between social classes (Marxism)

Postmodernism > Disappearance of childhood, Jenk's view of childhood

2) Evaluate feminist explanations of the role of the family in society today

This type of question gives you a specific theory or topic evaluate. The focus of the essay needs to remain on theory/ideas in the question. Other theories or ideas can only be used in relation to the question

The focus of the question above needs to be on feminism and evaluations of feminism i.e. feminists ignore the march of progress.

You can use other theories to criticise feminism BUT this isn't asking you to list every theories view of the family. Stay focussed on Feminism throughout.

3) Evaluate the view that couples are equal today

This is a for and against question.

There will be theories and evidence for both sides of the view.

You need to think 'what are the two sides to the debate?'

What are the examiners looking for in an essay?

Most marks in the essay questions are for

- **Assessment Objective 2;** Application to the question
- **Assessment objective 3;** Evaluation (making judgements) and Analysis (linking concepts and evidence together).

Feedback from the exam board (this tells what examiners are looking for)

Many scripts had one substantial well developed answer to a 20 mark question and one significantly briefer one, suggesting problems with timing.

It is often the case that a wide range of material can be relevant to these questions, and students need to carefully choose the content they wish to use by planning their answers. For example, it may be more effective to cover a limited number of views or theories in some depth rather than to include every possible theory.

There was a tendency for answers to progressively lose sight of the question and to become a list of different views. The best answers will address all aspects of the question and will draw on theories, concepts and empirical examples or evidence.

Evaluation which meets the demands of the questions is better than points of criticism which have been learned and included, regardless of the question. Students should also be aware that evaluation includes awareness of the strengths as well as the weaknesses of an argument, theory or piece of evidence.

Paragraph structure and A* Examples

Paragraph structure with sentence starter for essay questions

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| Point (A02) Repeat the terms of the question | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One theory that supports the view....• One theory that criticise the view...• One reason for the...• One piece of evidence to support the view...• One theory that explains....• One sociological explanation for• One sociologists that explains.... <p>Then repeat the terms in the question. It maybe you cannot start a point using the sentence starters above. <u>The KEY thing is you repeat the terms of the question.</u></p> |
| Explain (A01) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Link key terms in your answer• Evidence• Examples | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One piece of evidence to support the view...• This is happening because...• This refers to...• This links to...• This process began in/with• One study that proves <p>Explain your point by linking key terms, examples, case studies, theories and/or evidence.</p> |

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| <p>Criticise (A03)</p> <p>Avoid simply listing another theory</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However,has been criticised because.... • However, a piece of evidence which challenges this view... • However, the evidence doesn't support this theory because... • However, this theory/view/explanation has been criticised because... |
| <p>Link to question by writing a judgement or mini conclusion about paragraph (A02)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This shows that (insert the point) is accurate/helpful/unhelpful/isn't support by the evidence because.... • This shows that (insert the statement from the question) is correct/accurate/inaccurate because.... |

A* Example paragraph

Question: Assess the functionalist view of the family (20m)

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| <p>Point (A02)</p> <p>Repeat the terms of the question</p> | <p>Talcott Parsons, a functionalist sociologist, view of the family is that it performs two crucial roles, primary socialisation and stabilisation of adult personalities, which help stabilise society and reduce conflict.</p> |
| <p>Explain (A01)</p> <p>Include evidence from sociological studies AND examples</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Key terms</p> | <p>Primary socialisation refers to families teaching children the norms and values of a given society. This allows children to easily fit into society, reduces conflict and maintains the value consensus. This helps society functions effectively (item) because there is less conflict about values.</p> <p>Parson's argued only the family could perform primary socialisation because parents are the only people who offer enough love, support and patience.</p> <p>Some sociologists e.g. the New Right, support this view; they believe the evidence shows children from nuclear families have less emotional problems and do better in school.</p> |
| <p>Criticise (A03)</p> | <p>However, functionalists have been criticised by feminists and others for ignoring the dark side of family, which includes, abuse and more day-to-day controlling behaviour e.g. parent excessively controlling children, which is known as the age patriarchy.</p> <p>The evidence support this view: 25% of women experience domestic violence, which shows it is widespread. In addition, many families will have different values to the value consensus e.g. hippies may teach values that undermine the value consensus.</p> |
| <p>Link back to the question/mini conclusion (A02)</p> | <p>Functionalism makes a useful contribution to our understanding of the family by highlighting the importance of primary socialisation but, like most structural theories, it assumes all families are the same and teach the same values, which is clearly inaccurate and therefore quite unhelpful.</p> |

Example conclusion

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| <p><i>Give your overall answer to the question.</i></p> | <p>Overall a functionalist view of the family is not helpful because it is a structural theory which is solely based on the nuclear family and ignores family diversity and changing gender roles.</p> |
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| <i>Explain the small counter arguments against your conclusion</i> | Functionalism does make a few helpful contributions e.g. when by highlighting the importance of primary socialisation and how important successful socialisation of individuals is for society to function. |
| <i>Repeat your overall argument – don't leave the examiner in any doubt</i> | Despite functionalism having some strengths, the theory as whole is not useful because it cannot be applied to modern society and fails to recognise the negative roles families perform. |

Example introduction

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| <i>Define the key terms (remember to add key terms here; don't waffle)</i> | Functionalism is a structural consensus theory. Functionalists believe society's main need is stability and every institution performs a positive function to help achieve this e.g. by teaching the value consensus. The family performs the vital function of primary socialisation i.e. teaching children society's norms and values. |
| <i>Give your answer to the question</i> | This essay will show a functionalist view of the family is no longer applicable to today's postmodern society and it fails to acknowledge the dark sides of families. |

Note about intros; they are generally done quite badly in the exams because students tend to waffle and write a list of what they will say. Remember to add key terms throughout and focus on answering the question.

If you can't write more than 2 pages for an essay question and your hand writing isn't particularly small, I suggest you skip the intro. There are more marks to be gained elsewhere.