**INTERPRETATION & APPLICATION**

**Issues to consider**

Interpretation is all about how you ‘read’ or ‘interpret’ something -be it: a question or an item of data etc

The key challenge for you in your writing is show how well you have interpreted questions, sources and course content. It is about the sensitive reading of a question and deciding how best to answer that question. Application is the way that you ‘use’ your knowledge/understanding to answer the question. This will involve how well you ‘plan’ and ‘structure’ your answer. It includes the way that you link points to a given question, in a selective way, not just writing all that you know on a topic in a disjointed and confused way.

**Strategies for displaying this skill**

1. **Remind yourself of the ‘Interpretation/Application’ ladder**

Here is a basic summary of how I&A look in terms of a mark scheme which is a composite of the A level criteria

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Level | Quality of I&A |
| **Top**  **band** | Interpretation and application is very **focused.**  Answers may show a **clear rationale** in the organisation of material and there is a distinct conclusion.  Material will be **accurately and sensitively** interpreted and applied to the **set question showing relevance** |
| **Middle**  **band** | Material will be accurately interpreted, but its relevance may not always be made explicit.  The answer will begin to deal **explicitly with issues** in the set question.  Answers in this band will show some reasonable interpretation,  Interpretation and application to the demands of the question **may remain implicit.**  In some places application may be **generalised.**  Lower in the band will be a tendency to list material with **limited regard for the specific issues** raised by the question. |
| **Lower**  **band** | Interpretation of material may be **simplistic and partially related** to the question.  Answers will show very limited interpretation and application.  May rely on **undeveloped** examples, reference to recent events or personal experience. There will be very little sociological insight. |

The key things that come out of this for you to think about are:

* How can you make what you write relevant to the set question.
* How organised are the points that you are making.
* How can you be explicit

1. **Heed the advice of examiners**

### **‘Failing to answer the given question’**

Students need to focus on the set question. What you write must be **relevant** and linked to the question set. You should use **‘signposts’** to direct your readers to help them understand where your answer is going. Introductions are vital to show your examiners that you have read a question properly. Answers must also be **structured** to answer questions effectively.

### ‘**Saturation bombing’**

Students cram their answers with all they know on a topic. Usually very descriptive, but not focusing on questions set. Relevancy is unclear. Students need to be more selective and know what to leave out and what to keep in.

### ‘**Ignoring action words’**

Students do not read questions carefully. They ignore the key words in a question which are designed to flavour the nature of an answer. Students can also fail to define and explore key words in essay titles.

### ‘**Lack of illustration’**

Students fail to support points with evidence.

### ‘**Lack of structure’**

Students appear to present points in a jumbled fashion and lack clarity and direction in answers. They do not organise points in a systematic way. Planning is absent and answers are confused as a result.

1. **Apply the Relevancy Test**

When planning an answer, ask yourself ‘how relevant is the point I am making’. This involves considering the way a point relates to a question. If you cannot link it to the set question – don’t use it!

The key to checking relevance is to take a question and turn it around in your head – think about what it means.

**Using material from Item 2B and elsewhere, assess the Marxist view that the main role**

**of the family is to serve the interests of capitalism.**

For a question like this –you would ask the following questions:

* What do Marxists say about the role of the family?
* What criticisms are there of the Marxist views?
* What do other theories say about the role of the family that support/challenge the Marxists?
* What is meant by ‘main’ role and how could this be addressed?

These questions will enable you to consider points that you could use in the answer that are relevant and useful.

**TIP: For each point you offer, ask ‘what has this got to do with this question? Why is it here? If you can’t link it don’t use it.**

1. **Locate the Debate – Planning and structuring an answer**

A good strategy for planning how to present your points in a systematic way and apply them to the set question is to ‘locate the debate’.

Take an assessment question and think about the contrasting sides of the debate.

The good thing here, is that you should be able to fall back on a number of ‘standard debates’ for a lot of answers, such as: Consensus vs Conflict debate and Structure vs Action, Strengths vs Weaknesses.

In the above question, we can find an obvious debate that this question is located within.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Using material from Item 2B and elsewhere, assess the Marxist view that the main role**  **of the family is to serve the interests of capitalism.** | |
| Positive roles of the family (consensus) | Negative roles of the family (conflict) |
| Functionalism  New Right | **Marxism**  Feminism  Anti-Psychiatric theories |

By doing this we can get a sense of the bigger picture and what the question is getting at (along with a sense of structure).

We understand from this locating process that Marxism offers a theory about the role of the role of family. This is a negative view emphasising benefits to capitalism. There are other approaches that see the family negatively, but place less emphasis on the benefits to capitalism (although Marxist Feminists make relevant related points and so does David Cooper on mental health!). But is this the main role of the family – well for Feminism it is the promotion of patriarchy and exploitation of women, and for Anti-Psychiatrists it may not intend to – but the family does a Larkin on us (you should read more!). This locating process also helps us to consider other more positive roles of the family that run against the Marxist argument.

Overall what this does is focus you on the question and provides hooks on which to develop your points.

**5.Rationale**

Make the rationale in your answer clear and explicit. Take time out to communicate this to your marker. Introductions are useful for this. However throughout an answer a great way to show your rationale is to flag it up with signposts. These are a bit like neon road signs which every now and again show the way, or a bit like my satnav friend Sean, who shouts out useful directions like ‘exit ahead’ and ‘you have reached your destination’ to support my journeys.

Use signposts like these to show how you have interpreted a question/idea and highlighting how you will apply it.

**How to connect the evidence together**

You can link material using ‘supportive links’ or ‘critical links’.

***Supportive links***

These are sentences that help bring in evidence to support a view. These will get you marks for interpretation and application as they show that you are developing arguments and applying further evidence to strengthen a case. When a number of points are included in an argument, this is called **‘range’**.

* Further evidence supports the view that…..
* In addition…supports the idea……
* In support of the view that…….(a theorist) also believes……
* Increasing support for the view that….is…..
* Not only does empirical evidence strengthen the…..theory, but case studies have also been used to lend further weight.
* This argument has been developed by……

***Critical links***

These are sentences that help to bring in other ideas in an evaluative capacity. They flag up to your examiner that your are evaluating and show that your answer is **structured** and has **depth**.

* An alternative theory to the …..view was developed by..who argued….
* A major criticism of the …..view is…….
* A major weakness of the …..theory is….
* Whereas the…..view focuses on….the….view explores…..
* Although the …..theory is supported by……, certain evidence contradicts this by highlighting…..
* A different explanation has been offered by….
* However……

The above link phrases are good for evaluation too. Link phrases though should show connections to the question specifically too:

* ‘Capitalism also benefits from the protection of private property. Engels notes how…..’
* ‘Another important role of the family is in how it prevents revolution. Zaretsky explores…’
* ‘Benston, from a Feminist viewpoint, supports the Marxist argument by….’

Note how each of these relates directly to the set question above –a simple turn of phrase that makes a point more relevant and show how you are using a point in your answer.