**Godalming College**

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Grade: U/S 1 2 3

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**Sociology Department**

Surveys and Questionnaires



WORKBOOK 4- RESEARCH METHODS

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| Name: | Set: | Group: |

**What the specification says**

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| AQA SpecificationResearch Methods Students must examine the following areas: * sources of data, including **questionnaires**, interviews
* the theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research.
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**SURVEYS**

Surveys are a means of collecting primary data from large numbers of people, and are most commonly carried out using questionnaires or structured interviews. In this booklet, we will be mainly focussing on questionnaires.

Because surveys mainly produce quantitative statistical data, combined with large samples, they are the method most favoured by positivists, such as by the so called ‘founding father’ of Sociology, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917).

However, it is important to note that many people use surveys other than sociologists – for instance, the government when it carries out the ten-yearly census, market researchers who want to test people’s attitudes to products, and election pollsters trying to find out how people vote in elections.

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| **QUESTIONS**1. What types of topics/issues are suitable for surveys?
2. What types of topics/issues are less suitable for surveys? Why?
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# Video: The Sex Survey

**National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Positivist** | **Interpretivist** | **Realist** | **Qualitative data** | **Quantitative data** |
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| **Reasons for the interest of the researchers on this topic (please stick to what is on the video!)** |
| **The methods used in the survey** |
| **The size of the sample (and the size of the original sampling frame)** |
| **The method of sampling used** |
| **Source of funding** |

**QUESTIONNAIRES**

As mentioned at the beginning of the booklet, most surveys involve the use of questionnaires. A questionnaire is a list of pre-set questions to which the respondents are asked to supply answers – either by filling in responses (a self-completion questionnaire) or by giving information to an interview, either face-to-face or over the telephone. When administered by an interviewer, these take the form of interviews.

Those using questionnaires see them as a comparatively cheap, efficient and fast method that allows for obtaining large amounts of quantitative data on relatively large samples of people.

In the next few pages of the booklet, we will examine some of the key issues to consider when designing questionnaires, the two types of questions used in questionnaires as well as the types of questionnaires.

**Questionnaire Design**

Great care is needed in designing a questionnaire. Because the idea is to present all respondents with the same questions and therefore obtain comparable data, questionnaires cannot be changed once a survey has begun. They should be kept as simple and clear as possible, otherwise those being interviewed or filling in the questionnaire will be unlikely to complete it.

A pilot survey is therefore important to clear up problems and avoid wasting time and money on a poorly designed questionnaire. Pilot studies are used to test questions, make sure their meaning is clear, and to ensure layout and sample are suitable for the intended sample.

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| **QUESTIONS** 1. Why is it important to phrase questions in ‘neutral terms?
2. Why should questions be phrased in clear, everyday language?
3. What types of questions should be avoided in questionnaires?
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**Types of Questions**

There are two main types of questions used in questionnaires: pre-coded or closed/structured questions and open-ended or open questions. Both types of question may be combined in the same questionnaire

**Closed Questions**

In closed questions, the range of responses is fixed by the researcher (pre-coded). The respondent usually has to select one answer from two or more given alternatives.

**Open Questions**

Open ended questions used in questionnaires are less structured than pre-coded questionnaires. An open question asks the respondent to answer a question in their own words. Although open-ended questionnaires will usually have a number of pre-set questions, there is no pre-set choice of answers.

**Types of Questionnaires**

**Postal/mail or online self-completion questionnaires**

This kind of questionnaire is either left with the respondent and picked up later, or sent through the post with a pre-paid addressed envelope for the reply, or posted on an internet site for people to reply to, or it may be sent and returned via email. The respondent will complete the questionnaire herself or himself (self-completion).

**Structured Interviews (see Booklet on Interviews)**

Questionnaires may also form the basis of interviews by social researchers, In a structured interview the interviewer reads out the questions either face-to-face or via the telephone. Structured interviews, then, are much like postal or self-completion questionnaires except they are carried out by an interviewer. The interviewer asks closed questions set in the same order each time, and does not probe beyond the basic answers received: a formal question-and-answer session.

**Activity:** Imagine you were doing a survey of parents’ attitude to a local school. If you could not use any other method apart from a postal or other form of self- completion questionnaire, suggest three steps you might take to try to ensure you get a high response rate.

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**PET: FACE TO FACE STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS / QUESTIONNAIRES**

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| **Define the** **method** |  |
| **Example(s)** |  |
| **Circle correct** | **Quantitative** | **Qualitative** | **Positivist** | **Realist** | **Interpretivist** |
|  | **Strengths**  | **Weaknesses**  |
| **Practical** |  |  |
| **Ethical** |  |  |
| **Theoretical** |  |  |

**PET:SELF-COMPLETION / « POSTAL » QUESTIONNAIRES (NB may be web-based etc)**

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| --- | --- |
| **Define the** **method** |  |
| **Example(s)** |  |
| **Circle correct** | **Quantitative** | **Qualitative** | **Positivist** | **Realist** | **Interpretivist** |
|  | **Strengths**  | **Weaknesses**  |
| **Practical** |  |  |
| **Ethical** |  |  |
| **Theoretical** |  |  |

**A LEVEL Exam Practice:**

**10 marks**

Outline and explain two reasons why a sociologist would choose to use a questionnaire in sociological research [10 marks]

Outline and explain two problems with the use of self-completion questionnaires in sociological research [10 marks]

Outline and explain two advantages for positivist researchers of using structured interviews in sociological research [10 marks]

Outline and explain two reasons that interpretivist sociologists might give for not using survey methods in sociological research. [10 marks]

**20 marks (these would include an Item)**

*Using the material in Item C and your own knowledge …*

…evaluate the problems of using self-completion web-based structured questionnaires in sociological research [20 marks]

…evaluate the practical and theoretical problems of using questionnaires as a type of sociological research [20 marks]

…evaluate the problems of survey methods in sociological research [20 marks]

**AS EXAM PRACTICE**

4 marks

Outline two reasons why a sociologist would choose to use a questionnaire in sociological research [4]

Outline two problems with using a self-completion questionnaire [4]

Outline two advantages of doing a structured interview [4]

Outline two problems with closed questions [4]

Outline two problems with open questions [4]

16 marks

Evaluate the problems of using self-completion web-based structured questionnaires in sociological research [16]

Evaluate the practical and theoretical problems of using questionnaires as a type of sociological research [16]

Evaluate the problems of using questionnaires in sociological research [16]

**Method in Context - Investigating unauthorised absences from school**

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| **Item C****Investigating unauthorised absences from school**There is a close correlation between frequent unauthorised absence from school and educational underachievement. Those pupils who are not doing well at school are more likely to truant. Similarly, those who truant regularly are likely to finish their school career with poor qualifications. Pupils may be absent without authorisation for many reasons, from caring responsibilities at home or dislike of school, to parents arranging family holidays in term time. Sociologists may use self-completion written questionnaires to study unauthorised absences. These can be distributed easily to large numbers of pupils, parents or teachers. The findings of the questionnaires can also be used to establish patterns and trends in relation to unauthorised absences. However, self-completion questionnaires often have very low response rates, especially when they ask about sensitive issues.  |

Applying material from **Item C** and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using self-completion written questionnaires to investigate unauthorised absences from school. **[20 marks]**

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| **Introduction** • Apply **WWWE*** **W**hat? – What is the method in the question? Define and apply detail about the method.
* **W**ho? – Who would use it? (Positivist, Interpretivist, Realist)
* **W**hy? – Why would they use it? – Relating to the context in the question – in this case unauthorised absences from school.
* **E**valuate – Who wouldn’t use it? Why?
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| **Paragraph 1 – Strength** • Level 1 – identify strength • Level 2 – link to general topic area • Level 3 – expand and link to the topic (investigating unauthorised absences in school (be specific)  |

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| **Paragraph 2 – Weakness** • Level 1 – identify weakness • Level 2 – link to general topic area • Level 3 – expand and link to the topic (be specific)  |

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| **Paragraph 3 – Strength** |

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| **Paragraph 4 – Weakness** |

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| **Paragraph 5 – Strength** |

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| **Paragraph 6 – Weakness** |

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| **Conclusion** * Summarise strengths and weaknesses (in relation to the topic)
* Would an alternative method be more suitable (do not dwell on this – maintain focus on the method you have been asked about)?
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