

# Section B Theory and methods

## Exam context

The content in this topic of the workbook will help you prepare for the second section of Paper 3, which aims to bring together your knowledge from all of the different modules you have studied over the two-year course. There will be two questions in this section that will follow this structure:

- 1 'Outline and briefly explain two...' (10 marks)
- 2 Applying material from the Item and your knowledge, evaluate...' (20 marks)

For the 10-mark question, it is advised that you write two clear and detailed paragraphs that include specific

answers to the question asked. Aim to write at least half a page of A4 for each paragraph to ensure that you include enough content to have the potential to obtain full marks.

For the 20-mark question, read the item carefully and remember to show a range of knowledge in your answer. A key skill being assessed is evaluation, which is indicated by the command word in the question.

For this part of the exam, aim to spend around 45–50 minutes on these two questions.

## Topic 5 Research methods revision

In Book 1 of this workbook series, research methods are covered in great detail. This workbook will mainly be a quick overview of some of the key points. While preparing for Paper 3, ensure that you know the following aspects of the research methods content:

- the meanings of key terms such as *reliability*, *validity*, etc.
- the strengths and weaknesses of the methods (this will be the main focus of this workbook)
- a range of different sampling methods
- the practical, ethical and theoretical factors that affect choice of method
- the different stages of the research process

To prepare for the demands of the exam, it would be wise to ensure that you know at least three different

strengths and weaknesses of each of the following methods:

- questionnaires
- structured interviews
- unstructured interviews
- group interviews
- participant observation (overt and covert)
- experiments — lab, field and the comparative method
- official statistics
- documents — personal and historical

Fill in the table over the next two pages to ensure that you have an effective resource that will help you prepare for the upcoming exam. Use your textbooks, workbook 1 and knowledge from Year 1 of your course to assist you.

<p>Questionnaires: strengths</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>	<p>Questionnaires: weaknesses</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>
<p>Structured interviews: strengths</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>	<p>Structured interviews: weaknesses</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>
<p>Unstructured interviews: strengths</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>	<p>Unstructured interviews: weaknesses</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>
<p>Group interviews: strengths</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>	<p>Group interviews: weaknesses</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>
<p>Participant observations: strengths</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>	<p>Participant observations: weaknesses</p> <p>1 _____</p> <p>2 _____</p> <p>3 _____</p>
<p>Experiments: strengths</p> <p>1 Lab</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>2 Field</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>3 Comparative method</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Experiments: weaknesses</p> <p>1 Lab</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>2 Field</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>3 Comparative method</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

<p>Official statistics: strengths</p> <p>1 .....</p> <p>2 .....</p> <p>3 .....</p>	<p>Official statistics: weaknesses</p> <p>1 .....</p> <p>2 .....</p> <p>3 .....</p>
<p>Qualitative documents: strengths</p> <p>1 .....</p> <p>2 .....</p> <p>3 .....</p>	<p>Qualitative documents: weaknesses</p> <p>1 .....</p> <p>2 .....</p> <p>3 .....</p>

- 1 Outline three practical factors that can affect a sociologist's choice of research method. 6 marks**
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- 2 Outline three ethical factors that can affect a sociologist's choice of research method. 6 marks**
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- 3 Identify three different forms of sampling that could be used by a sociologist to achieve their required sample. 6 marks**
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

### Exam-style questions

*Exam hint:* Look at the table you completed to find your disadvantages of using covert participant observation and pick the two most effective points that you can think of. Once you have selected your points, consider how you could include any key terms such as *validity*, *reliability*, *representativeness*, etc. Once you are ready, attempt to construct two clear and detailed paragraphs on each of the disadvantages you have identified.

- 1 Outline and explain two disadvantages of using covert participant observation in sociological research. 10 marks**
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

#### Item

When selecting a research method, a sociologist needs to consider many factors. It is argued that the practical factors such as time and access to the participants are highly influential on the sociologist. On the other hand, it would be wise to consider other factors such as ethical and theoretical to ensure that the sociologist has made the correct choice.

- 2 Applying material from the Item above and your knowledge, evaluate the view that practical factors are the most influential when selecting a research method. 20 marks**

*Exam hint:* As the item suggests, practical factors are not the only factors that may influence a sociologist's choice of method. To ensure you have the chance to obtain full marks, include the influence of ethical and theoretical considerations in your answer. Start by discussing the role of the practical factors in clear paragraphs; use some of the examples from the item, but then add some more from your own knowledge. To make these paragraphs effective, explain directly how the factor you have discussed can influence your choice of a specific method. Try to include at least one method in each paragraph and try to show variety in your answer, i.e. avoid using the same method in every paragraph. Once you have written around three or four practical paragraphs, construct a couple of ethical and theoretical paragraphs to illustrate your evaluation skills before rounding off with an effective conclusion.

Write your answer on a separate sheet and keep it with this workbook for reference.

# Topic 6 The theories

To prepare well for the theory and methods section of your Paper 3 exam, it would be wise to have a solid understanding of the theories, as you could be asked either a 10- or 20-mark question that specifically focuses on one or more of the different perspectives that you have covered over the two-year course. This workbook includes sections on the following theories:

- functionalism
- Marxism
- neo-Marxism
- feminism
- the New Right
- action theories
- postmodernism and late-modernism

As a starting point, ensure that you know the basics of each type of theory. Is it structural (society shapes the individual) or action (individual shapes society) based? What era was it written in? Is it a conflict or consensus theory? Who founded or is influential in the theory? These are useful introduction comments to make in an effective 20-mark essay on a particular theory. You would then need to know some core content about each of the theories so that you can

then apply that information to the knowledge you have gained throughout the other modules you have covered.

Use the space over the next two pages to write down the titles of the modules you have covered in class and then jot down the basics of how the theories comment on those topics; for example, what do Marxists think of crime and deviance? At this stage do not include much detail, as this space could be used as a point of reference when attempting to approach theory-based questions that will assist your evaluation.

The idea behind this section of the paper is that it aims to test your synoptic skills. This refers to your ability to bring together your knowledge of the whole course rather than just a particular module. Therefore, you would really impress an examiner if you are able to have elements of different modules in a 20-mark essay.

Key theorists that are in this topic are: Durkheim, Parsons, Merton, Marx, Engels, Althusser, Gramsci, Sharpe, Benston, Oakley, Firestone, Mead, Goffman, Garfinkel, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Foucault, Beck, etc.

## Module 1: Education

### Functionalism

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Marxism

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Feminism

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### The New Right

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Action theories

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Postmodernism

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Module 2: Crime and deviance

### Functionalism

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Marxism

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### Neo-Marxism

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

### The New Right (right realism)

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....



**Feminism**

**Action theories**

**Postmodernism**

**Late-modernism**

**Module 3: First choice from 'Topics in sociology'**

Write title here:

**Functionalism**

**Marxism**

**Feminism**

**Action theories**

**Postmodernism**

**Module 4: Second choice from 'Topics in sociology'**

Write title here:

**Functionalism**

**Marxism**

**Feminism**

**Action theories**

**Postmodernism**

# Functionalism

The core ideas of functionalism were first created by Auguste Comte and Durkheim, which was then continued by Parsons in the mid-1900s. Comte believed that the study of sociology was scientific (he is also associated with the birth of positivism) and tried to observe society like a natural, living organism. He also spoke of the societal need for 'altruism', which means that there should be a moral obligation for the individual to put society's needs before their own personal needs. Comte's ideas were taken on board by Durkheim and Parsons who developed his thoughts into what we know as functionalism today.

Functionalists believe that society is far more important than the individual and therefore societal interests should be the priority of the population. Each individual performs a certain role that benefits society and

when they die, someone else is trained to replace them. In this instance, functionalists see society as a continual conveyor belt in which the individual is moulded into a useful product; it then performs its function until it becomes useless. Once the individual loses its functionality, they are discarded and replaced by another new product to fulfil the role in a more effective way.

The ultimate goal for functionalists is to ensure that social order is maintained under any circumstances. Social order is the idea that society is very predictable, everyone plays their role and that things do not change significantly as this causes confusion (anomie). To maintain social order, society needs to make sure it is built upon a value consensus and operates an effective specialised division of labour.

**1 Identify three ways in which society is deemed to be like a biological organism according to functionalists.**

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**2 Outline and briefly explain the four 'functional prerequisites'.**

8 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**3 Explain how change occurs from a functionalist perspective.**

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**4 Briefly outline the functionalist view of the education system.**

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**5 Criticise functionalism using two different theoretical perspectives, linking to specific knowledge that you have gained from the modules you have covered on the A-level course.**

8 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

# Marxism

In some ways Marxism has some similarities to functionalism in that they are both structural theories, meaning that Marxists and functionalists both believe that society shapes the individual. Another similarity is the way in which both formulated their views through positivist methods. However, Marx did not see society in the same positive light as Durkheim, mainly due to the vast inequalities that were being created in the newly industrialised world. Marxism is often referred to as a 'conflict' theory because of its focus on the conflict of interests between the social classes. Also, Marx disagreed with functionalists on their explanation of social change. Instead of change occurring steadily, Marx suggested that change could be revolutionary; in fact, that's what he predicted to happen in the future.

Marx argued that throughout history, man has always required basic material needs such as food, water, shelter and clothing in order to survive, and therefore individuals need to work in order to obtain them.

They gain these material needs through the 'means of production'. In the simplest societies, the means of production were very basic, such as your own hands. However, as a society develops not only do the means of production develop (i.e. tools, machinery, factories, etc.) but so do the 'relations of production', which basically refers to the organisation of that workforce. Essentially, as society develops, a division of labour starts to emerge which results in inequality.

Marx believed that the social institutions fool the proletariat into thinking that they are getting a fair deal and that their status position is natural and therefore unchangeable. The bourgeoisie operate in ways which suggest that they are acting for the benefit of society and the working class accept and share this view due to the influence that the social institutions have on the public. Marx refers to this as the 'false class consciousness', as they are totally unaware of the exploitation that they are facing.

**6 Explain the relationship between the 'economic infrastructure' and the 'superstructure'.**

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**7 Explain the difference between the 'means of production' and the 'relations of production'.**

4 marks

.....

.....

.....

**8 Briefly explain the Marxist view of the education system.**

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**9 Name the five different epochs of a society.**

5 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

**10 Using your knowledge of the modules that you have covered, provide two theoretical critiques of Marxism.**

8 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

# Neo-Marxism

The theory of Marxism is still very influential in contemporary sociology; however, due to the fact that Marx and Engels were writing in the mid-1800s, their ideas are inevitably going to be out of date. Society has moved on considerably since then and therefore the

theory of Marxism needed to evolve as well in order for it to survive. Theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, the Frankfurt School and Louis Althusser have adapted the core principles of Marxism to ensure that it remains relevant in today's discussions.

**11 What did Gramsci mean by a 'counter-hegemony'?**

4 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



**12** Briefly explain the concept 'organic intellectuals'.

4 marks

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**13** What is the difference between an Ideological state apparatus and a repressive state apparatus?

4 marks

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**14** Outline and explain a contribution of the Frankfurt School to our understanding of neo-Marxism.

4 marks

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

## Feminism

The key to success with feminism is to differentiate between the many different types that are covered in the A-level specification. While each group will discuss the gender inequality that exists in our society, it does not necessarily mean that all feminists agree on the same beliefs. At the very least, ensure that you have a detailed understanding of liberal, Marxist and radical feminism; however, there other types that could help you develop your evaluation in the exam.

Liberal feminists seem to be the most optimistic and progressive in their outlook towards the quest for equality. They don't blame men directly for inequality; however they do believe that gender inequality does still exist, although we are moving towards a more egalitarian society.

Marxist feminists take a different view from liberal feminists as they disagree with their positive outlook. As the name suggests, they are heavily inspired by

the work of traditional Marxists; however they would criticise Marx for overlooking the exploitation of women in capitalism. Marxist feminists emerged as they then specifically focused on the way in which women are exploited within the family unit and therefore benefit capitalism. It is important to note that Marxist feminists also do not blame men directly for gender inequality; instead they direct their focus at the bourgeoisie and the capitalist system.

Unsurprisingly, radical feminists take an extreme stance compared to their feminist peers. Their key focus is on 'patriarchy', which means 'rule by fathers' but has become the term commonly used to describe a male-dominated society. They believe that all societies are patriarchal and therefore all men oppress women through 'sexual politics'. Consequently, men are the main enemy of all women and therefore patriarchy is the main form of social inequality according to radical feminists.

**15** According to liberal feminists, what currently prevents women from achieving equality? 4 marks

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**16** Outline and explain one research study from the liberal feminist perspective. 5 marks

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**17** According to Marxist feminists, how are women exploited by capitalism? 4 marks

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**18** Briefly explain how men exploit women from a radical feminist perspective. 4 marks

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

19 Explain the view of 'dual systems' feminism.

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

20 What is unique about 'difference feminism'?

4 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

23 Explain how less state intervention could be achieved using the New Right ideology.

4 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

24 Explain the New Right's approach to education.

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## The New Right

The New Right is based upon centre right wing ideology which is conservative (against change/keeping things the same) in nature. Some of their key values include a belief in less state intervention, the promotion of competition and individual responsibility along with a strong adoration for capitalism.

The New Right perspective first emerged in the USA in the late 1970s before being adopted by Margaret Thatcher (UK prime minister 1979–90) and thus spreading into UK culture. Thatcher famously believed that people should be able to look after themselves and should not rely on anyone else to help them financially or otherwise.

21 Why does the New Right prefer capitalism?

2 marks

.....

.....

22 According to the New Right, how is wealth inequality justified?

2 marks

.....

.....

## Action theories

Action perspectives take the alternative stance to structural views by stating that the actions and interactions of individuals are far more influential than the structures of society. Consequently, action theories suggest that the individual shapes their own society as we possess 'agency' — the ability to make our own decisions. Just like with the other theories we have studied so far, there are many different types of action theory and therefore you will be expected to know the differences between them.

Symbolic interactionists believe that each individual interacts with others through the use of symbols such as words, facial expressions, hand gestures, etc. The issue is that each symbol can have a variety of different meanings depending on who the individual is interacting with (the social audience) and the time and context of the social situation. Mead argued that individuals do not act based on instinct, instead we have to assess the social situation by placing ourselves in the place of our social audience before we can accurately determine the correct symbol to use in a given situation.

Ethnomethodologists are interested in how social order is achieved from an action perspective, as opposed to the structural approach of a functionalist. Garfinkel believed that social order was a far more complex process than functionalists suggest as it can only be achieved through the development of shared meanings of symbols. The problem here is that not everyone interprets the same symbol in the same way and therefore confusion can occur — a concept Garfinkel calls 'indexicality'. When this happens, social order is threatened as if there is not a shared understanding of an act, the interaction has no meaning. To remedy this, the individual attempts to use their 'common sense knowledge' — their past experience of interactions, to make an assumption of what the meaning of the symbol is, this process is known as 'reflexivity'. The problem is that this understanding is based purely on an assumption and therefore the individual cannot guarantee that they have interpreted the social situation in the correct way. This is why Garfinkel believes that social order is very difficult to achieve.

25 Define what is meant by the 'self-concept'.

2 marks

.....

.....



26 Explain Goffman's 'dramaturgical approach'.

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

27 Apply your knowledge of symbolic interactionists to explain their view of the processes within education.

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

28 Briefly outline a key difference between symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology.

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

29 How could symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology be applied to the study of suicide in sociological research?

10 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## Postmodernism and late-modernism

Postmodernism is a unique theory as it clearly distances itself from all the other theories. As the name suggests this theory focuses on society after 'modernism' and is therefore neither structural nor action based. One of the founding principles of postmodernism is that it rejects all that has come and gone before and states that modernist theories such as functionalism and Marxism hold just as much validity as religion, which is no longer relevant to the postmodern society. They believe that society has become fragmented as a reaction to the

overemphasis of the modernist theory's focus on order and certain strict social differences. Lyotard (1984) refers to these old explanations of society as 'meta-narratives' as they tried to comfort people in times of social confusion, i.e. the industrial revolution.

According to late-modernists, we are still in the modernist era, however significant social change has occurred and therefore needs to be explained.

30 Define what is meant by a 'meta-narrative'.

2 marks

.....

.....

31 According to Lyotard, what are the two reasons behind the modernist theories losing their relevance to the postmodern world?

10 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

32 What did Baudrillard mean by the 'death of the social'?

4 marks

.....

.....

.....

33 Explain the postmodernist view of crime and deviance.

6 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

34 Outline and briefly explain one criticism of postmodernism.

4 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

35 Apply the work of Ulrich Beck to explain how individuals make decisions in contemporary society.

4 marks

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

### Exam-style questions

45

1 Outline and explain two ways in which society is compared to a biological organism.

10 marks

*Exam hint:* Hopefully you have identified that this is a functionalism question and therefore can think of a few different examples that could be relevant for the question. Before attempting to answer the question, sketch out a quick plan that will help you add the detail that you need to include to achieve the most marks. Remember to attempt to write around half a page of A4 for each paragraph and include as many key concepts as you can.

*Plan your answer in this space.*

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

### Item

The contributions of feminism to society cannot be ignored as it has highlighted the extent to which gender inequality has existed in many forms, for many generations. Whether it be in social policy, the family, the criminal justice system, religion or even education, there are many areas of our society where clear discrimination has been experienced by women in the past and present.

2 Applying information from the Item above and your knowledge, evaluate the impact that feminism has had on our understanding of society.

20 marks

*Exam hint:* To succeed in this question, remember to include a variety of feminist perspectives in your answer. Although you may not have time for them all, it would be valuable to show the examiner that you are aware that there are different types of feminists that do have differences in opinion. By highlighting the differences between them, you should also gain credit for evaluation which is the essence of the question. It would also be useful to externally evaluate feminism using one or two of the other theories. Try to use knowledge from specific modules from across the course to add substance to your answer.

*Plan your answer in this space.*

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

# Topic 7 Debates in sociology

## Sociology and science with value freedom

After being impressed by the way in which the natural sciences were developing, Comte developed the theoretical perspective of positivism with regard to conducting research. As you already know, functionalists, Marxists and a few others are positivists in the way in which they conduct research and this can be clearly seen throughout their theories. Their belief was that society could be explained with scientific principles based on objectivity, reliability and generalisation, which are obtained from quantitative data. From this, positivists believe that you can acquire cause and effect relationships — when one thing occurs or changes it always provides the same result. Once these trends are found, positivists can make generalised claims built on cause and effect relationships within the data. Positivists believe that if these results can be 'verified' they can be then used to explain why things occur in the social world and therefore give us a rational understanding. The other methods used by positivists are questionnaires, structured interviews, experiments

and the use of official statistics. As a consequence, positivists believe that sociology is a science.

Interpretivists hold the opposite view to positivists when it comes to the way they conduct research. Made up of both interactionists and ethnomethodologists, interpretivists believe that the study of human behaviour cannot be scientific as our nature is completely unreliable and our actions can have a variety of complex meanings. Due to our interactions being small scale, interpretivists such as Mead believe that research should focus on the individual rather than large samples that produce the generalised data favoured by positivists. Consequently, interpretivists suggest that in order to get a valid understanding of the experiences of an individual, the researcher must try to understand them through abandoning the principles of objectivity by putting themselves in the place of the other — known as 'verstehen'. Therefore, according to interpretivists, sociology is not a science.

1 Define what is meant by the 'Enlightenment'.

2 marks

2 Define the term 'objectivity'.

2 marks

3 How does Durkheim's study of suicide illustrate the positivist method of research?

6 marks

4 How do modern-day positivists maintain their objectivity?

4 marks

5 Define what is meant by 'verstehen'.

2 marks

6 Briefly explain why interpretivists claim that sociology is not a science.

4 marks

7 Outline Alvin Gouldner's view of value freedom in sociological research.

6 marks

8 Define the term 'falsification'.

2 marks

9 According to Karl Popper, why is sociology not a science?

6 marks