



National
Qualifications
2026

2026 Sociology

Higher

Question Paper Finalised Marking Instructions

These marking instructions have been prepared by examination teams for use by Qualifications Scotland appointed markers when marking external course assessments.

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General marking principles for Higher Sociology

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

- (a) Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.
- (b) If a candidate response does not seem to be covered by either the principles or detailed marking instructions, and you are uncertain how to assess it, you must seek guidance from your team leader.
- (c) The term 'or any other relevant response' allows for possible variation in candidates' responses. Always award marks according to the accuracy and relevance of an answer.
- (d) 'Describe' requires candidates to make factual points or state characteristics and/or features. This will be more than an outline or a list and may refer to, eg, a concept, process, experiment, situation, or facts.
- (e) 'Explain' requires candidates to relate cause and effect and/or make relationships between things clear. This explanation may be the product of a process that includes evaluation and/or analysis.
- (f) 'Analyse' requires candidates to identify parts, the relationship between them, and their relationships with the whole; draw out and relate implications; and analyse data (possibly including calculations and/or a conclusion).
- (g) 'Evaluate' requires candidates to make a judgement based on criteria to determine the value of something.
- (h) A development of a point (of description, explanation, analysis or evaluation) will provide further related information and might include exemplification of the point.
- (i) Candidates gain marks by responding to the questions using sociological knowledge and understanding. Do not award marks for personal opinion that is not supported by sociological knowledge and understanding.
- (j) There may be some degree of flexibility in the way that marks are awarded in a question. This is clearly noted in the specific marking instructions for that question.

Marking instruction for each question

Section 1 – Human society

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
1.			Award up to 3 marks for each explanation.	6	Example: One strength of functionalism is that it explains the relative stability of society. (1 mark) This means that there is widespread agreement among people in a society as to the values that should be cherished. (1 mark) This is called value consensus. (1 mark) One weakness of functionalism is that there is no evidence that society is a meritocracy. (1 mark) Successive studies have shown that social mobility is extremely limited and a person's place in a social hierarchy is not determined by their own hard work and abilities. (2 marks) Or any other appropriate response.
2.			Award up to 3 marks for a well-developed point. The marks may be obtained in a number of ways.	6	Example: Marxists believe that someone's position in society is based on their relationship to the means of production. People with a similar relationship to the means of production are said to be in the same social class. (2 marks) The bourgeoisie are the owners and the proletariat have to work for wages. (1 mark) Marxists believe that under capitalism there are two main classes, the ruling class, known as the bourgeoisie; and the working class, known as the proletariat. (2 marks) The bourgeoisie have better life chances than the proletariat and tend to do better in education and employment as well as enjoy better health and longer lives. (1 mark) Or any other appropriate response.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
3.			Award up to 2 marks for each description.	4	Example: Weber believed that party (a person's political allegiances) and status (how someone is viewed socially in society) contribute to social position. (2 marks) Another feature of Weberism is that Weber pioneered the concept of Verstehen. This means understanding and in particular the search to understand the meaning behind another person's actions. (2 marks) Or any other appropriate response.
4.			Award up to 2 marks for each description.	4	Example: One substage of operationalisation is choosing a research method, such as a questionnaire. (1 mark) This will depend on the type of research that is being carried out and whether the researcher wants quantitative or qualitative data. (1 mark) Another substage of operationalisation is defining any concepts, for instance if the research was into youth subcultures, the researcher would define what age range was involved. (2 marks) Or any other appropriate response.
5.			Award up to 3 marks for a well-developed point about a strength or weakness Candidates are asked to evaluate. Candidates who give only advantages or only disadvantages of questionnaires can be awarded a maximum of 4 marks.	6	Example: One advantage is their simplicity, they are easy to create, use and process. (1 mark) This is because they ask straightforward questions and the answers can be coded, meaning that responses can quickly be collated and presented. (2 marks) However, questionnaires can fail to examine the meaning behind a response because they do not require in-depth answers. (1 mark) For example a questionnaire may discover what percentage of people have been the victim of crime, but that does not tell us what the consequences of that experience have been for different people. (2 marks) Or any other appropriate response.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
6.			Award up to 3 marks for each explanation.	4	Example: Case studies are conducted over a period of time, which may be months or even many years; this means that a lot of often observational data is produced. (1 mark) However this can present problems in collating and editing the evidence produced given the time required and therefore the cost. (1 marks) Another feature of case studies is that the researcher can get very close to the research subject. (1 mark) This can mean that the researcher builds trust and has a real insight into the subject. However, it can be problematic – this could create researcher bias where the researcher could influence the results. (2 marks) Or any other appropriate response.

Section 2 – Culture and identity

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
7.			They must make clear the relationship between the key points of the selected theories and the study and key factors or elements of their analysis. Candidates can be awarded the 25 marks in a number of ways, but full marks should only be awarded if they analyse by drawing out and relating the implications of the different theories and study to the chosen social issue using appropriate sociological language. Award marks as follows: • introduction and/or definition of sociological concepts: 4 marks • theories: 14 marks (up to 7 marks for each theory) • study: 7 marks	25	Points may include: • definition of culture and subculture • definitions of different types of culture such as high culture/popular culture • definitions of related terms such as cultural appropriation, ethnocentrism and inequality • explanation of the influence of institutions such as media. • changes in gender roles • sub-cultures and gender roles Or any other acceptable response. Theories – 14 marks (up to 7 marks per theory) Candidates can use any structural theory. Answers that use feminism may include an explanation and analysis of the following points: • patriarchy shaping culture • changes in gender roles • sub-cultures and gender roles Or any other acceptable response.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
			Introduction/definitions – 4 marks Marks for this section can be awarded anywhere within the essay. The candidate is likely to present this information either in the introduction or conclusion of their response; however, if a valid point is part of the response elsewhere it should be credited.		Answers that use Marxism may include an explanation and analysis of the following points: • bourgeois domination of culture • the role of the media in identity • repressive sublimation and the argument that post-war mass culture serves to reinforce political repression • cultural hegemony • subcultures as way to express alienation/challenge capitalism Functionalism answers may include explanation and analysis of the following points: • value consensus • cultural pluralism • socialisation • anomie Examples: According to Marxists, there is cultural hegemony as the bourgeoisie defines what is culture, art and so on. They can do this through their control of institutions such as publishers and music studios/labels and leadership of arts etc. Hence high culture is given more status than popular culture and certainly more than subcultures. (3 marks) Functionalists claim that culture reflects the shared values of society, eg, value consensus while subcultures represent a challenge to society's norms and values. Society requires a shared culture to function effectively. Institutions of society such as education and family play their part in helping to socialise people into the cultural norms and values of society. (3 marks)

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
					Any action theory can be used. Answers that use symbolic interactionism may include explanation and analysis of the following points: • influence of cultural symbols such as colours or music, especially to differentiate a subculture from normal cultural norms. • influence of generalised other, eg, media • the interaction of the 'I' and the 'me' • labelling For example: Symbolic Interactionists claim culture is formed through our interactions with others. They claim that interactions happen in a social and cultural context where objects, people, and situations are defined and characterised according to individuals' subjective meanings. (2 marks) Meanings originate from interactions with other individuals and with society; hence the meanings individuals have are created and recreated through a process of interpretation that happens whenever that individual interacts with others. (2 marks) Study – 7 marks Candidates can use any study related to culture. For instance: • Cohen, S. (1972) Folk Devils and Moral Panics • Wood, J. T. (1994) Gendered Media • Eaves, (2012), 'Just the Women' • Lumsden (2017), K, 'Do We Look like Boy Racers?' The Role of the Folk Devil in Contemporary Moral Panics eg, McRobbie and Thornton claim that a moral panic (in relation to a subculture) is a collective process that involves members of the subculture, agents of social control, media, moral entrepreneurs and the public. (2 marks) However the evaluation that folk devils are less stigmatised than they used to be depends on which subcultural group you examine (1 mark) eg boy racers in Aberdeen may not have experienced much stigmatisation but the same can't be said for the current demonisation of refugees. (1 mark) Or any other acceptable response.

Section 3 – Social issues

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
8.			Candidates are asked to use the findings of <i>The Oxford Mobility Study</i> by Goldthorpe to analyse the extent to which social mobility is possible. Award a maximum of 6 marks. Award up to 3 marks for each developed point. Generic points about the study, eg, sample size should not be credited. Marks should be awarded where the candidate links the finding to the extent of social mobility in UK. The candidate's analysis must be based on specific findings of the study.	6	The candidate's analysis could be based on any of the following findings: Goldthorpe: • downward mobility was on the decline – but more men in the working classes were unemployed • it was found that two thirds of the sons of unskilled or semi-skilled workers were in manual occupations so achieved short range or limited social mobility • there were indications of high rates of absolute social mobility but low rates of relative mobility Example: Although there were indications of high rates of absolute social mobility across all social classes, this could be explained by structural changes in the economy – for instance an increase in white collar occupations and a decrease in manufacturing. However, Goldthorpe found low rates of relative mobility meaning those born into lower social classes were more likely to remain in them. (3 marks) Or any other appropriate answer.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
9.			Candidates are asked to evaluate <i>Up and Down the Generational Income Ladder</i> by Blanden, J. and Machin, S. (2008). Up to 3 marks may be awarded for each strength or weakness. Candidates must explain why their point is a strength or a weakness. A maximum of 4 marks may be awarded if only strengths or weaknesses are given.	6	Strengths may include explained points relating to: - the study linking educational achievement and mobility as opposed to occupational structure - using income differences as a measure of social mobility Weaknesses may include explained points relating to: - incomplete data for 1985-2000 cohort - assumed that those who go onto higher education will get a higher-than-average paid job Example: A strength of Blanden and Machin is they use income differences rather than occupation as a measure of social mobility – so this made it easier to compare mobility in Britain with other countries, especially as over time there can be a change in status of particular professions. For example, the status of teachers has dropped significantly over the decades. (3 marks) Or any other appropriate answer.

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
10.			Candidates are asked to use Marxism and one other theory to analyse a social issue of their choice. This could be social mobility or any other social issue. Award up to 7 marks for each theory (Note: where one theory achieves 7 marks the other theory can only achieve up to 6 marks). Marxism is specifically asked for in the question. If candidates do not use Marxism only credit the points they make about one other theory. Award up to 3 marks for each developed point.	13	Example – Social Mobility: Points of analysis for Marxist theory could include: • class inequalities caused by capitalism make social mobility difficult for the proletariat • social closure inhibits social mobility • Bourgeois control of institutions of the superstructure maintain the illusion of meritocracy and mask the limited opportunities for long range social mobility for the proletariat Marxist theory highlights the exploitative nature of capitalism, which permeates all aspects of life and not just the economy. The institutions of the superstructure are run in such a way that benefits the wealthy, who protect their position and wealth in society, but disadvantages those with low pay or no work by limiting access to social resources. Hence inequalities are reproduced and rather than providing opportunities for social mobility capitalism limits these opportunities. (3 marks) Functionalism: Points of explanation for functionalist theory could include: • notion of meritocracy and equal opportunities • the socio-economic system requires us to reward the most talented, hardworking to ensure they are pushed to the top of the social system etc, perhaps linked to open meritocratic system often accessed by public resources such as education rather than background (highlighted by both T Parsons and P Saunders) • inequality can be argued to be a motivational factor in improving social status (Saunders)

Question			General marking instructions for this type of question	Max mark	Specific marking instructions for this question
					Functionalists claim that social mobility is frequent and can be achieved through hard work. This is because they claim we live in a meritocracy where people can achieve success regardless of their class of origin or ethnicity. They claim this open system provides incentive to people who experience lower socioeconomic circumstances to access opportunities and therefore allows people to experience social mobility. (3 marks) OR Weberism: • concept of social closure • social mobility and class, status and party • contrast to Marxism on status and party Weber claims that social closure inhibits social mobility. This elite self-recruitment enables those in high social classes and positions of power to restrict access to their group, for instance certain jobs, to people like themselves financially, socially and culturally. Hence 75% of High Court Judges in England and Wales attended private schools and 74% attended Oxford or Cambridge compared to 7% and 1% of the general population respectively. (3 marks) Or any other appropriate answer.

[END OF MARKING INSTRUCTION]