

Learner Guide

Cambridge
International
AS & A Level

Cambridge International AS & A Level Sociology

9699

Cambridge Advanced



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How to use this guide

This guide describes what you need to know about your Cambridge International AS and A Level Sociology exam.

It will help you to plan your revision programme and will explain what the examiners are looking for.

The guide contains the following sections:

Section 1: How will you be tested?

This section gives you information about the different exam papers you will take.

Section 2: Examination advice

This section gives you advice to help you do as well as you can. Some of the ideas are general advice and some are based on the common mistakes that learners make in exams.

Section 3: What will be tested?

This section describes the three assessment objectives in Cambridge International AS and A Level Sociology.

Section 4: What you need to know

This shows the syllabus content so that you can check:

- which topics you need to know about
- details about each topic area in the syllabus
- how much of the syllabus you have covered.

Section 1: How will you be tested?

About the examinations

You will take two exam papers for AS Level and three exam papers in total for the full A Level.

Cambridge International AS Level

Paper 1 The Family	1 hour 30 minutes
Answer one compulsory data response question and one essay question from a choice of two.	
Paper 1 is worth 50% of the total marks of your Cambridge International AS Level.	

Paper 2 Theory and Methods	1 hour 30 minutes
Answer one compulsory data response question and one essay question from a choice of two.	
Paper 2 is worth 50% of the total marks of your Cambridge International AS Level.	

Cambridge International A Level

You can take all three papers together or take the A Level in two stages, i.e. AS Level (Paper 1 and Paper 2) in one session and Paper 3 in another session.

Paper 1 The Family	1 hour 30 minutes
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Paper 2 Theory and Methods	1 hour 30 minutes
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Paper 3 Social Inequality and Opportunity	3 hours
Answer three essay style questions from a choice of eight. There are four sections – Education, Global Development, Media and Religion – with two questions in each section. You must answer questions from three different sections.	
Paper 3 is worth 50% of the total marks of your Cambridge International A Level. Paper 1 and Paper 2 together are also worth 50%.	

Section 1: How will you be tested?

Section 2: Examination advice

This advice is to help you do as well as you possibly can in the exams.

General advice

- Read each question carefully and make sure you know what it is asking, and what you have to do, before you begin your answer. Focus your answer on the question – do not write about something else. For longer questions, check every so often to make sure that you are answering the question correctly.
- Look at the command words in the question. These tell you what skills are being assessed and what the examiner is looking for.

What is meant by: give a brief statement which explains the meaning of a sociological term or topic, e.g. What is meant by the term absolute poverty?

Describe: provide a more detailed account, qualifying your answer, e.g. Describe two problems with using laboratory experiments in sociological research.

Explain: show how (description) or why (give reasons) something is the way it is, e.g. Explain why participant observation is a good way of studying human behaviour in depth.

Assess: make points for and against and reach a reasoned and well supported conclusion, e.g. Assess the interpretivist critique of positivism.

- Look at the number of marks for each part of a question. This should guide you as to how long you should spend on it. Some questions will only gain you 2 or 4 marks while others may be worth as many as 25 marks.
- Do not write out the question; this is a waste of time. Just make sure that you write the number of the question, and the sub-part, so that the examiner knows which question you have answered.
- Leave blank spaces between questions; this makes it easier for the examiner to follow. Spaces are also helpful to make separate points, e.g. “Describe two ways ...”
- Manage your time carefully. Don’t spend too long on some questions and leave yourself without enough time to finish the paper. You should also try to leave time to read through your answer and correct any mistakes and/or add anything that you feel is missing.
- Make sure you know **how many questions** you have to answer. On Paper 3, for example, you are required to answer **three** questions, each from a different section. Each year, however, there are some candidates who answer more than three questions. This will have been a waste of their exam time as no more than three answers can be accepted.

Data response questions

The most common problems with answers to data response questions include:

- Inappropriate use of time – candidates spending too long over questions which carry only a few marks, and not long enough over those which have the most marks.
- Failure to use some or all of the information given in the source materials to support answers.
- Misunderstanding key aspects of the information given in the source materials, perhaps because of failure to study the information carefully before attempting the question.
- Candidates copying from the source materials rather than answering in their own words.

- Candidates wasting their time by writing out the question each time.
- Failure to recognise that for some questions, there are clues to the answer in the source materials. For example, a question may ask for a definition of a key term which appears in the source materials. In most cases, there will be clues to what the term means in the appropriate source materials.

Remember that source materials are designed to help you answer the questions, so make full use of them.

Essay questions

As an AS and A Level learner you will already know quite a lot about the principles of good essay writing technique. These principles apply in sociology just as much as in any other subject. However, in addition, there are some points of advice about essay technique which are particularly relevant for the sociology exam. These points are summarised below:

- Read all the questions on the exam paper and make sure you understand the rubric (i.e. how many questions you have to answer and, if relevant, how many from each section). Look for questions which relate to material you have revised well.
- Make sure that you understand the key terms and concepts in the questions. This is very important in sociology where concepts play a major part in the way questions are formulated. It is a common mistake for candidates to misinterpret the concepts in a question and answer on a different subject; for example, a question referring to sectarianism was wrongly interpreted by some candidates in a recent exam as meaning secularisation; the two concepts have quite distinct meanings and refer to different areas of the sociology of religion.
- Make sure that you can answer all aspects of the question; for example, if you are asked to explain and evaluate a sociological topic, you must do both of these things. Where there are two or more parts to the question, it is particularly important to check that you are confident about being able to answer all of the parts before you start writing.
- It is generally not a good idea to start answering a question before you have made some notes about the points you intend to cover. This need not be a full essay plan, but it should cover enough points to reassure you that you can answer the question effectively. Also, spend some time thinking about how you are going to structure these points in the essay.
- Lateral thinking is always important in an exam situation and this includes the ability to respond to a question at different levels. For example, many questions in one way or another ask about the 'causes' of a particular development or situation in society. Unless the wording of the question specifically rules this out, you should answer by looking at a wide range of possible causes and try to approach the question from different angles. The more differentiated your answer is, in an intelligent and relevant way, the better your essay will be.
- One of the qualities that will be rewarded in the exam is the ability to show that you understand the arguments both for and against sociological ideas and policies. However, your essay is likely to be even better if you can go beyond this to include some evaluation. This means that you assess the different arguments and, for example, give reasons why you find some more convincing than others. Remember that evaluation is one of the key skills that the exam is designed to test.
- Try to bring different perspectives and theories into your answers where relevant. There are contrasting schools of thought on many sociological issues and it is good to show that you understand these debates and can apply your knowledge in an appropriate way.
- Aim to achieve the right balance of coverage. For example, if a question asks you to discuss the causes and consequences of the rising divorce rate, give equal attention to answering both parts of the

question. If you know a lot about one part of the question and very little about the other, it is clearly not a question you should be attempting unless you have no better alternative.

- Confine your answer to the material that is required to address the question directly. For example, if a question asks 'Explain and evaluate the Marxist theory of alienation', it would be inappropriate to outline other theories, such as Blauner's, alongside the Marxist view. The answer should primarily be about the Marxist view. The only place where it might be relevant to refer to other theories, such as Blauner, is as a way of highlighting deficiencies or weaknesses in the Marxist view.
- Make sure you define key terms and concepts, especially those which appear in the wording of the question. Your definitions should be clear, concise and accurate.
- Remember to use examples from recent changes and developments in society to illustrate your answers where relevant. 'Recent' usually refers to the past 20–30 years.
- Where there are two or more parts to a question, be careful not to give away your answer to the second or third part by covering the material in your answer to the first part.
- Make full use of relevant sociological terms and concepts in your answers, but don't use jargon without good reason or if you don't really understand the meaning of the terms.
- Remember that clarity of expression is one of the skills that the exam is designed to test. Lack of clarity is often caused by a tendency for candidates to over-write; shorter, but well-expressed answers are better.
- It is easy under exam conditions to stray from the point and to include irrelevant material. So keep checking that you are following your essay plan and that what you have written is relevant to the question that has been set.
- Don't panic if you have to answer a question or questions on a subject which you have not revised well or where you think that you cannot remember the key points. Logic plays a key part in sociology and for some types of question it is possible to provide a reasonable answer by thinking rationally and applying the analytical skills you have learnt during the A Level course. Detailed knowledge is not necessarily required as long as you can think of a range of relevant points and discuss them in a way that demonstrates your skills as a sociologist. Although the answer will not be of the highest quality, it may be good enough, particularly if you have answered the other questions well.
- Include a conclusion and try to end with an evaluative statement which summarises some key point or points in your answer to the question.
- If you have any time left after completing your answers, check your work for errors and omissions.

What to avoid in the exam

1. Anecdotal evidence from non-sociological sources, i.e. statements like 'My brother used to work in a factory and he says...'
2. Unnecessary use of jargon – never use concepts and terms which you don't understand or for which you are unable to offer clear definitions.
3. Over-use of non-sociological explanations and theories; for example, in an essay on sociological theories of crime, it would be inappropriate to devote more than just a few lines to theories which focus primarily on the biological and/or psychological profiles of offenders, as these are not sociological theories.
4. Lengthy descriptions of a study or studies with little or no analysis and evaluation.
5. Assertion, i.e. statements which are not backed up by evidence from relevant studies or by reasoned argument.
6. Imbalance; for example, answering only one part of a question.

7. Claims about a fixed human nature – sociologists generally reject the idea that social actions can be explained by reference to qualities which are supposedly inherent in people as ‘characteristics of the human species’. For example, the idea that there is a maternal instinct governing the behaviour of women finds little support among sociologists. If you refer to ideas of this kind in your answers, be clear in pointing out that there are problems in accepting such speculative claims about human nature.
8. Over-generalisation – avoid sweeping statements, such as ‘the old sexual inequalities have now disappeared and women are equal with men’. Clearly, the situation with regard to gender divisions today and in the past is much more complex than this simplistic statement suggests. Aim to make your comments more precise by using qualifying clauses. The words in italic in the following example are qualifying words and clauses:

‘*Many* of the inequalities which existed between the sexes *in the first half of the twentieth century* have been reduced and, *in some cases*, overcome altogether, *although* most commentators would agree that complete equality in this area has still to be achieved.’
9. Common sense answers – these are usually highly personal answers, i.e. where the candidate writes ‘what I think the answer is’, rather than drawing on information and ideas from relevant sociological sources. For example, if the question asks you to write about the causes of racial discrimination, the examiner is not really interested in reading what you personally think the causes are. What the examiner wants to read is an account of the different explanations which sociologists have developed together with your assessment of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each explanation.
10. Bias – there is nothing wrong with holding strong views on sociological issues and expressing this in your answers if you want to, but your points must always be supported by relevant evidence and/or reasoned argument. For example, you might consider that the only really convincing analysis of modern societies is the structural Marxist theory. However, it would be quite inappropriate to answer an exam question by referring solely to this theory and ignoring all of the other relevant perspectives. You would need to consider the other perspectives, if only to show the examiner why you think the structural Marxist theory is superior in its explanatory power.

Section 3: What will be tested?

Assessment objectives

The syllabus sets out the three assessment objectives in Cambridge International AS and A Level Sociology.

Assessment objective	What you need to be able to do
AO1 Knowledge and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> offer definitions and explanations of relevant sociological terms and concepts demonstrate appropriate knowledge of relevant principles, theories and methods demonstrate awareness of relevant sociological arguments, debates and issues discuss the theoretical and practical considerations influencing the design and execution of sociological enquiry outline the findings from relevant sociological studies and research data.
AO2 Interpretation and application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> interpret sociological material presented in a variety of forms, including qualitative and quantitative data recognise the special character of sociological knowledge and distinguish it from the knowledge and understanding produced by other academic subjects such as biology and psychology identify and explore the links between relevant sociological concepts, theories and research findings select and use sociological material appropriately to analyse relevant arguments and debates apply concepts, theories and evidence to support arguments and conclusions.
AO3 Analysis and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> evaluate the strengths and limitations of particular sociological theories and methods analyse and assess sociological and non-sociological evidence and arguments reach conclusions based on a reasoned consideration of available evidence and arguments recognise limitations and bias in evidence, and distinguish between fact, opinion and value.

Section 3: What will be tested?

The following table shows the relationship between the assessment objectives and the different exam papers.

Assessment objective	Paper 1 (%)	Paper 2 (%)	Paper 3 (%)
AO1 Knowledge and understanding	40	40	30
AO2 Interpretation and application	30	30	30
AO3 Analysis and evaluation	30	30	40

The assessment objectives are weighted to give an indication of their relative importance. They are not intended to provide a precise statement of the number of marks allocated to particular assessment objectives.

Section 4: What you need to know

A table is provided below that describes the topics that will be tested in your exam papers. You can use the table throughout your course to check the topics you have covered. You can also use it as a revision aid.

The column headed 'comments' can be used:

- to add further information about the details of each bullet point, or to give appropriate examples
- to highlight areas of difficulty which you might need to ask your teacher about.

AS Level			
Unit	Topic	Details	Comments
1 The Family	The family and social change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The distinction between households and families, and between types of families: lone parent, nuclear and extended. • Changes in family and household structure and their relationship to industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation. • Diversity in family forms according to class, ethnicity, religion, family size, marital status, age and family life cycle. • The debate about the postulated universality of the nuclear family. • Different theories about the relationship between the family and the economy. 	
1 The Family	Family roles, marriage and changing relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes and continuities in family functions; debates about the relationship between the family and the state. • Roles and responsibilities within the family, including the roles of parents, children and grandparents. • Conjugal roles and debates about gender equality within the family. • Changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, civil partnerships, divorce and child bearing; the causes and consequences of these changes. • The impact of family life on individual members. 	

Section 4: What you need to know

AS Level			
Unit	Topic	Details	Comments
1 The Family	The social construction of age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social significance of divisions based on age groups. • Childhood as a concept that is socially constructed. • Class, ethnicity and gender as factors affecting the experience of childhood. • Debates about the social position of the elderly in different societies 	
2 Theory and Methods	The sociological perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociology as a reasoned and rigorous study of social life. • Sociology as a science: positivist, interpretivist and post-modernist perspectives. • The uses of sociological knowledge; the role of values in sociology. • Sociology and social policy; the differences between sociological problems and social problems. • The diversity of human behaviour and cultural variation. • The nature of social order, social control and social change. 	
2 Theory and Methods	Socialisation and the creation of social identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structuralist and interactionist views of the relationship between the individual and society. • The processes of learning and socialisation; how the individual becomes a competent social actor. • Agencies of socialisation: family, education, peer group, media, religion. • Culture, roles, norms, values, beliefs, ideology and power as elements in the social construction of reality. • Social class, gender and ethnicity as elements in the construction of social identities. • Theories of culture and identity with reference to modernism and post-modernism. 	

AS Level			
Unit	Topic	Details	Comments
2 Theory and Methods	Methods of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The distinctions between primary and secondary data and between quantitative and qualitative data. The different quantitative and qualitative methods and sources of data, including questionnaires, interviews, observation techniques, experiments, longitudinal studies, case studies, content analysis, semiology, documents and official statistics. The stages of research design: deciding on research strategy; formulating research problems and hypotheses; sampling and pilot studies; conducting the research; interpreting the results and reporting the findings. 	
2 Theory and Methods	The relationship between theory and methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positivist and anti-positivist approaches. The theoretical, practical and ethical considerations influencing the choice of topic, choice of method(s) and the conduct of research. The strengths and limitations of different sources of data and methods of research. Validity, reliability, objectivity and representativeness as key concepts in assessing the value of different methods of research. Triangulation and methodological pluralism 	

Section 4: What you need to know

A Level			
Unit	Topic	Details	Comments
3 Education	Education in social context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theories about the links between education and the economy. Explanations of educational achievement and intelligence. The relationship between education and social mobility. Debates about the links between social inequality (class, gender, ethnicity) and educational opportunity and achievement. 	
3 Education	Structures and processes within schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social construction of knowledge and learning; power and social control as factors influencing the structure, content and development of the curriculum. Language, deprivation and knowledge. Teacher/pupil relationships: streaming, labelling, hidden curriculum, and the gendered curriculum. Pupil sub-cultures and attitudes to education. 	
4 Global Development	Development and inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concepts of development and global inequality. Population growth and development. Debates about aid and development. Different theories of development; modernisation theory, underdevelopment theory, world system theory, state-centred theories. 	
4 Global Development	Global issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migration, international employment patterns and demographic change. Theories of the causes and consequences of poverty; distribution of wealth within and between countries. Sociological theories of globalisation and its effects. The role of transnational organisations in national economic and cultural systems. 	

A Level			
Unit	Topic	Details	Comments
5 Media	Ownership and control of the media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends in the organisation and control of the media; ownership patterns. • Different perspectives on the relationship between ownership and control of the media. • Pluralist, Marxist and Post-Modernist theories of the nature and role of the media. • Different explanations of the processes of selection and presentation of media content. • Debates about the relationship between the media and the State. • The impact of the media on the political process in democratic and authoritarian states. • The impact of the 'new media' on society. 	
5 Media	Media representation and effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of the media in the representation of social groups and ideas, with particular reference to class, gender, ethnicity and age. • Social patterns in listening, viewing and reading. • Different theories of the effects and uses of the media; hypodermic syringe; uses and gratification; cultural effects studies. • Impact of the media on behaviour, violence, deviance amplification. • Problems of researching the effects of the media on audiences. 	
6 Religion	Religion and social change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociological perspectives on religion. • Religion and social change. • Religion and its links with modernity and post-modernity. • Fundamentalism. 	

Section 4: What you need to know

A Level			
Unit	Topic	Details	Comments
6 Religion	Religious movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Different religious movements and their power within society: cults, sects, denominations, churches, new religious movements, New Age ideas.• Debates about secularisation.• Sociological studies of the relationship between religious beliefs, organisations and social groups (including links to class, gender and ethnicity).	

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