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Revision

Revision practice

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This issue gives some hints about using some helpful resources which provide secondary data on a variety of topics. You will be able to find many more than are listed here, and it is always a good idea to do an internet search from time to time on the topics that you are currently studying to see what helpful material is available. It is also very useful for developing your application skills — you may have potentially helpful information, but how will you use it? How does it help to inform a discussion about what it is you are researching and writing about? Remember, it is important to show the relevance of something, rather than simply stating the information.

There are also some suggestions of useful phrases to use in your essays and exam answers to give your work a coherent structure and to highlight the skills you are demonstrating.

The PowerPoint presentation looks at the complex interplay between social and cultural norms and social policies, using Chinese population statistics as the example.

Here are a few secondary data resources to get you going. Try to find more.

Some secondary data resources

British Social Attitudes Survey

This has been mentioned several times before in the magazine, but is always worth a look. It is a good example of a long-running longitudinal study covering a number of relevant topic areas for sociology students. For example, the latest release looks at so-called 'Broken Britain'. It covers people's attitudes towards several issues useful for sociology students. Included are what people think about the cost-of-living crisis (poverty and inequality), the NHS (health and welfare), regional disparities (stratification and levelling up), and the 'culture wars' (culture and identity). There is a short introductory video showing how attitudes to some issues have changed over the years. The findings can be accessed at: <https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/>

Good Childhood Report 2022

This report, published by The Children's Society, draws on its own research and that of other trusted sources, such as Understanding Society. It shows that since the first report in 2009–10, children have become more anxious and less satisfied with many aspects of their life, and this downward trend continues. A growing number of children are increasingly anxious and unhappy with their life as a whole, and also with school, with friends and (particularly girls) with how they look. They (and their parents or carers) are also worried about the cost-of-living crisis and its effects. The link below takes you to a summary of the report, and shows the extent of children's concerns about issues such as the environment, new illnesses and pandemics, crime and social inequality. This provides useful material for aspects of the family and childhood.

<https://tinyurl.com/yxyp4tcj>

The Refugee Council

This is a UK-based organisation that works with refugees and asylum seekers, offering help and support. Migration and asylum are much-discussed topics in government, the media and on social media, and this is an area about which there is much disinformation. The link below will give you some important facts about the issue, including the contribution that refugees make to the economy. The material would be useful for the topics of social inequality, globalisation, and the media.

<https://tinyurl.com/tzwk98fz>

FFT Education Datalab

This organisation regularly carries out independent research about aspects of education and education policy that is used by policymakers and educational establishments. Their findings will also give you practice in understanding and interpreting graphical and statistical information. The link below will allow you to look at the gendered nature of A-level subject choices, and some recent changes. You may be interested to see that while sociology comes fourth out of the ten most popular subject choices for girls, it does not appear at all in the top ten for boys. Consider what, if any, are the implications for people's future lives and employment of these gendered choices.

<https://tinyurl.com/3syv2459>

The link below is to the main site for this organisation, where you can browse earlier postings. Among recent ones are how measuring 'persistent absence' from school is carried out (and whether this needs to change), and whether Ofsted inspections are helpful when choosing a secondary school. This is a valuable resource for all aspects of education and education policy.

<https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/>

Writing well-constructed answers

Below are some useful phrases to adopt, particularly at the start of new sections of homework essays or exam answers to longer questions. Obviously, you will need to be selective — much depends on the nature of the question asked and how much you are expected to write. However, the phrases are useful not only in giving a good structure to your work, but also helping to signal the particular skill you are displaying in that section. Guidance has been given on this many times in SOCIOLOGY REVIEW, but it never hurts to be reminded of things that can help you. Look back at some of your homework essays and see whether any of the following would have been useful. Remember that not all of them will be relevant to the particular question you are answering, and the list is by no means exhaustive.

Showing knowledge and understanding

Obviously, everything that you write is showing your knowledge (though it counts for little if it is not relevant!) but there are still a few useful indicators.

- The view expressed in this statement is Marxist (or feminist, functionalist, postmodern etc.)
- This view is particularly associated with the work of (sociologist's name).
- The concept of meritocracy (or whatever) means/refers to...
- A study that tested this hypothesis/looked at this issue was...
- This research was carried out using (primary/secondary) data.
- Findings from a longitudinal study of (X) showed that...

Showing application

- The concept of (X) would be important here, as it describes...
- The views of radical feminists (or other theorists) would be useful here, as they believe that...
- This evidence is important as it shows that gender (or other characteristic) has a significant impact on...
- An example of increasing secularisation (or something else) would be...
- This research shows the importance of choosing a suitable sample (or something else) when exploring the topic of...

Showing analysis and evaluation

- However, not all theorists would agree with this viewpoint. Critical criminologists, for example, would argue that...
- At the heart of feminist theories is the belief that...
- However, a major difficulty with this concept is how to operationalise it in research.
- We should not forget that this theory was developed when society was very different from today.
- One of the major problems with participant observation (or other method) is...
- It could be argued that this research was unethical, because...
- However, it is possible to interpret these findings in a different way. For example...
- On balance, it could probably be argued that the benefits of this type of research outweigh its problems, as...