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Revision

Revision practice

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Following on from SOCIOLOGY REVIEW Volume 33, Number 1, this resource focuses on the AQA 10-mark questions in three more topics. Many students fail to do justice to this type of question, and lose the opportunity to gain marks. It is always worth practising answering exam-style questions, or questions from past papers as often as possible throughout your course. Remember that even if you are not following the AQA specification, answering these questions will still give you useful practice and some revision. There is also a task to help you develop your application skills, along with revising some sociological concepts and theories. The PowerPoint presentation looks at pupil absences from school in England and Wales.

10-mark questions

The examples below are typical of the second 10-mark question in AQA Paper Two, 'Topics in Sociology', in which you are asked to analyse two somethings — e.g. ways, reasons etc. There are some general points that can be applied to all such questions, and it is worthwhile learning what these are. The examiners' reports, issued at the end of each exam series, indicate that many students are making the same kinds of mistake, and failing to gain top marks in these questions. Here are some of the important things to know when answering this type of question.

- 1 There is no need to write an introduction or conclusion in this type of question, though it is always a good idea to separate out the two parts of your answer.
- 2 You cannot simply rely on your knowledge of the topic and recite that. The question will require you to make links between different aspects of the topic, often needing you to show how one aspect has an effect on, or is related to, something else.
- 3 In the type of question below, which has a short item and then asks you to 'analyse' something, you must use the 'prompts' or 'hooks' in the item to inform your answer. This means that you should take time to read the item carefully, and not just jump straight into answering the question.
- 4 You should state your point clearly, then develop it, using appropriate sociological concepts, evidence and, if relevant, theories. Remember when developing your point that you should be making links between social phenomena.
- 5 Watch your timing! You should spend about 15 minutes preparing and writing your answer, so focus on making every word count. Don't be tempted to go into great detail about particular research findings, make sure that you are using relevant sociological concepts. There is no need to explain these — examiners will know what is meant by the domestic division of labour, or pupil subcultures, or social media etc.

This may all sound complicated, but if you practise answering this kind of question regularly, you will develop the appropriate skills, and will automatically demonstrate those skills in the exam.

Work, poverty and welfare

Item

Having a job can bring many advantages, both financial and in terms of self-esteem and good mental health. There are currently many unfilled vacancies in the employment market.

However, a considerable number of people of working age are not in paid employment, despite measures by the government to try to get people off benefits and into work.

Applying material from the item, analyse two reasons why many people of working age are not in employment.

Here you have to think about why there is a mismatch between the number of job vacancies and the number of people who are not in employment. The articles by Chris Thomas on page 2 and Joan Garrod on page 23 will give you some ideas — but remember to try to make your two reasons different from each other. You could consider, for example, whether all jobs bring the benefits identified in the item, and what kinds of skills are required. Have changes in the nature of work made it less likely that some people have the appropriate skills? Might some groups of people have particular difficulties in meeting employers' requirements? Does where you live make a difference — and if so, why?

Beliefs in society

Item

It would appear that the UK is becoming a more secular society. Results from the 2021 Census showed that, for the first time, less than half (46%) of the population of England and Wales self-identified as 'Christian', while 37% said that they had 'no religion'.

Yet the picture is not straightforward. Despite the overall decline in Christian churches, congregations in evangelical and Pentecostal Christian churches are increasing in number, particularly in large urban areas.

Applying material from the item, analyse two reasons why some groups of people may be drawn to evangelical churches.

You obviously have to identify which groups of people are likely to form the congregations of such churches, which should involve mentioning some of the effects of globalisation and migration. You could consider the existing beliefs of certain groups, and also perhaps possible differences in the organisational structure and the experience of worship between long-established churches and evangelical organisations. You may also consider whether the two types of church play different roles in their communities, and whether their congregations have different needs.

The media

Item

Dissemination of the national news used to be dominated by a few television and radio channels and the national newspapers.

However, technological changes, particularly the advent of social media and user-generated content, have meant that people now consume the news in many different ways.

Applying material from the item, analyse two changes in the way that people now access the news.

There are many possibilities here. You could use the 24/7 availability of news, the immediacy with which stories and pictures can appear, often from non-professionals, how it is possible to choose the type of content in which you are interested, the opportunity to comment on news stories, and access the comments of others, and receive alerts when something appears that might be of interest to you. Remember to make your two types of change different from each other, and also the importance of showing the skill of analysis, rather than just listing changes.

Task

Developing application skills

This is an exercise which is useful to do now and then, especially with someone else from your sociology group. Look online to see what the lead stories are on the front pages of newspapers on that day, or the day before. Choose one story, and see what sociological issues, concepts and theories you could apply to it. Obviously, some stories will be more fruitful than others, but you should find something in almost any story you choose. You can use such stories, where relevant to the question, as evidence to support or refute a particular argument, or simply as an example.

Here are a couple of examples from early October 2023.

There was a story that the TV presenter Holly Willoughby, in the early stages of her career, was told by male TV executives to go 'bra-less' on TV to 'make herself more attractive' to male viewers. Some concepts here might include misogyny, power/patriarchy and gender stereotypes — you might think of others. What might feminist sociologists, in particular, think of this story?

Another story concerned the pledge by the chancellor, Jeremy Hunt, that he was going to 'crack down' on some of the people not in employment and not looking for work, threatening a cut in their benefits. One newspaper reported this as a much-needed response to the large numbers of 'work-shy' people. Some useful concepts here would include media stereotyping, stigma, health, poverty and social policy.