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St Mary's College

SOCIOLOGY A LEVEL (AQA)

Pre-course reading and guidance





A Level Sociology

WHY SHOULD I CHOOSE SOCIOLOGY?

- › The type of person who will enjoy Sociology will be someone who has an enquiring and critical mind who is not afraid to have new ideas. Sociology will suit people who enjoy being challenged by new ideas and who like discussing past and current societal issues. Essay writing forms a key part of the assessment as this is how you will be assessed in exam conditions.

WHAT IS THE COURSE STRUCTURE LIKE?

- › The course is a **two year** course. It consists of **three two-hour long exams**. The exams are evenly weighted, 33% each. All exams will be taken at the end of your second year.

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A Level Sociology Course Units

Year 12

- › Families and Households
- › Research Methods
- › Education

Year 13

- › Theory
- › Beliefs in Society
- › Crime and Deviance

You can find more course information on [AQA's website](#), including the full specification which you can download.



Year 12 Units – Families and Households

In this unit we explore how the family and household structure has changed dramatically over the past 100 years: from mothers and fathers having very separate roles (housewives/ mothers and breadwinners) to what some sociologists see as 'joint' roles, often with both parents sharing these original roles between them. We consider what has led to this shift, such as policy changes and a decrease in the influence of religion and we also evaluate whether these roles are divided as equally as they may seem.

We also look at childhood and how this has changed over time, comparing the ways that children were treated as miniature adults in Victorian times to the ways they are treated today in what is described by some to be 'the golden age of childhood'.

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Year 12 Units – Research Methods

Research methods are the ways in which sociologists investigate the world around us.

The studies which we will be exploring as we progress through the course have been conducted by sociologists using research methods such as interviews, observations, and experiments.

We will examine the strengths and weaknesses of each of these methods, particularly in the context of education. For example, how useful are observations in finding out what really happens in a classroom? And are interviews really that useful in finding out why girls tend to achieve more highly in school? We will also consider their ethics: is it morally right to experiment on children?

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Year 12 Units – Education

The education unit focuses on the differences in achievement in certain groups. For example, you may be aware that on average, girls achieve higher grades than boys, but did you know that one of the greatest differences is between those considered rich versus those deemed poor? (middle class versus working class)

This unit in many ways attempts to answer some questions which you may not have considered about the education system before. For example are the differences between middle and working class students really about money, or is our education system built in favour of more wealthy students, as Marxist sociologists might argue?

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Year 13 Units – Theory

While we do study 'theory' as a discreet unit at the start of your second year, theory underpins all of the other units and is therefore **the most important unit of the entire course.**

There are many different sociological theories and perspectives, but the main ones we will look at are:

- › Functionalism – functionalists see our society as being based on an agreement of what is right and what is wrong. They view our society as a fair one.
- › Feminism – feminists wish to make society a fairer one for women. They see our society as being patriarchal – controlled by and constructed in the interests of men.

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Year 13 Units – Theory

- Marxism – Marxists see our society as a very unfair one but on the basis of social class, not gender. They believe that the rich in our society exploit (take advantage of) the poor in order to stay rich.
- New Right – the New Right is a right wing political perspective which believes our society should be based on hard work and competition. For example they see the benefit system as being too generous and leading to crime.
- Interactionism – interactionists are interested in how our interactions with one another shape how we behave and how we see ourselves.

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Year 13 Units – Beliefs in Society

In this unit we are interested in the role that beliefs play in shaping how we behave. For example functionalists see beliefs (religious or otherwise) as being helpful to society as it brings people together, at the same time as reminding us what is right and what is wrong. Whereas other theorists such as Marxists see religion as reinforcing the power division between the rich and poor.

The other topics which we explore include religious organisations such as cults and sects. We touch on religious fundamentalism (extremism) and we also examine questions such as whether we are really becoming less religious, or whether people's beliefs are changing to incorporate ideas such as spirituality.

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Year 13 Units – Crime and Deviance

The crime unit incorporates a significant amount of theory and centres around exploring the reasons why people commit crime. For example, some feminists see the difference in crime rates between men and women as being linked to our gender roles, whereas the New Right see crime as being a rational choice, whereby criminals weigh up the pros and cons before deciding to commit crime.

Other key topics which we focus on include the media and how it is criticised for glamorising crime. We also consider crimes committed by the state, crimes committed against the environment and we examine how poorer countries are exploited by richer ones. We also examine crime control and punishment measures and look at who is more at risk of being a victim of crime – and this may not be who you think(!)

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Texts for pre-course reading

- › Because sociology is really about society itself the best way to prepare yourself is to read the news especially about the units we cover:
 - Family and households
 - Education
 - Beliefs (religious or otherwise)
 - Crime
- › Particularly useful is anything which includes the topics of class, gender and ethnicity and social policy(See next slide for some examples).

Key term: Social Policy

Social policies are the laws and guidance given by our government. Examples include the educational policy such as the new 9 to 1 grading system, benefits policies or the Equal Pay Act 1970

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Texts for pre-course reading

ARTICLES

- Are men and women equal today? Study finds that 90% of people are still gender biased
- TikTok filtering out videos from 'ugly, poor or disabled users' (Supportive of the Marxist view on media)
- Does our Education System need Reforming?
- 72 people died in the Grenfell Tower disaster including 18 children. Was a crime committed?
- Is this hack good or bad? Hackers leak thousands of coronavirus research papers
- What really happens to immigrants coming into America?
- Will the Coronavirus Pandemic lead to an increase in religiosity?

This is a **very** brief list – there are many articles produced every day which ask questions about our society.

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Texts for pre-course reading

There are no specific texts which are essential for A level Sociology (again, articles on the topics mentioned on slide 11 are the best)

However here are some suggestions of fiction which encourage you to think differently about our society:

- Animal Farm – George Orwell
- 1984 – George Orwell
- Lord of The Flies – William Golding



Other sources of information

PODCASTS

Podcasts are a good source of current information. Here are some examples of podcasts are:

- › The Inquiry (BBC)
- › Freakonomics Radio
- › Science VS
- › TED Talks Daily

See the next slide for recommended episodes

If you're new to podcasts, you can get them from iTunes if you use an iPhone or a wide variety of podcast apps on Android – just search the app store for 'podcasts'. You can also download the BBC Sounds app for BBC podcasts.



Other sources of information

PODCASTS

Some recommended episodes:

- › Should we ban billionaires? (the Inquiry)
- › Can we protect our elections from social media manipulators? (the Inquiry)
- › Do children in two-parent families do better? (the Inquiry)
- › How cult de-programming works (Stuff you should know)
- › Gun violence (Science vs)
- › The rise of anti-vaxxers (Science vs)



Other sources of information

Documentaries are also a good source of current information. Here are some examples:

- Explained (Netflix)
- Panorama (BBC1)
- Tonight (ITV)
- Dispatches (All4)
- Stacey Dooley Investigates (BBC iPlayer)
- Louis Theroux (BBC iPlayer)



Any further questions?

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