



# **Higher Sociology: guidance on creating assessments**

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## Introduction and purpose

This document provides guidance for teachers and lecturers delivering Higher Sociology to prepare assessments for their learners. You should read this guidance alongside SQA's [guidance on evidence for estimates](#). You should also refer to the course specification and course support effective for the current year, which you can find on the [Higher Sociology subject page](#) on SQA's website.

Assessments may have several purposes, but they will likely be used for:

- ◆ diagnostic information, which helps to inform teaching and learning
- ◆ predictive information, which helps in decisions on course estimates
- ◆ practice for candidates in an external assessment context
- ◆ evidence for exceptional circumstances, should it be needed

Where evidence is used for predictive purposes or as evidence for exceptional circumstances, it is important that the assessments used are as close to the structure and format of the final exam as possible. This document provides guidance on how to meet these criteria; however, different forms of assessment may be appropriate for other purposes.

You can use this guidance to produce prelims and other assessments that are designed to be formative and help prepare learners to sit SQA assessments in future. The guidance illustrates best practice in assessment design and marking to SQA standards. This does not mean that other forms of assessment are not valid, as assessments are carried out for a variety of purposes.

## What are prelims?

You should carry out a prelim or mock exam with the aim of it being as like the final exam as possible. It should be carried out under the same assessment conditions as the question paper, so you can make as accurate a prediction of likely performance as possible. It should be clearly aligned to the course specification, content, and level of demand as exemplified in the [specimen question paper and past papers](#). Because specimen question papers and past papers are in the public domain, and candidates can readily access them, they should not be used in their entirety. However, you can incorporate individual questions from past papers into prelims or mock question papers. Alternatively, you can create your own questions.

# Understanding course assessment requirements and standards

To create valid, reliable, practicable and fair assessments, it is important to have a clear understanding of:

- ◆ the range of skills, knowledge and understanding the question papers cover
- ◆ the assessment requirements and the structure of the question papers
- ◆ the grade descriptions for the course

Information on these aspects is available from the course specification, specimen question papers, past papers, and [Understanding Standards](#) materials for each course.

## Conditions of assessment

Ideally, centre-created assessments should replicate SQA exams as closely as possible, although they may not always cover all of the course. This means that assessments should be closed book (without notes), supervised, and timed whenever possible. The length of time given to answer should correspond to the time allowed for the SQA Higher Sociology question paper. An assessment covering all three sections and worth 80 marks should therefore be completed in 2 hours and 40 minutes. If an assessment is covering one section of the question paper only, the same minutes to marks ratio should be maintained as far as possible, that is 2 minutes per mark. An assessment on the 'Human society' section of the course should be worth 30 marks and therefore last for 1 hour. An assessment on the 'Culture and identity' or 'Social issues' sections should be for 25 marks and therefore last for 50 minutes each.

## Timing (when assessment is carried out)

Assessments that you carry out early in the course of study are likely to be of less use in terms of exam preparation or generating evidence of likely success than evidence you gather later. There are other reasons for carrying out assessments early in the course, such as to ensure fundamental concepts such as sociological perspectives and theories are understood. If you use early assessments, further evidence from assessments later in the academic year may demonstrate a candidate's progression and be useful in building a profile and preparing for the final exam. Assessments taken straight after learning a section of the course and only covering that section are also less likely to be a good indicator of future success, as this does not test recall in a similar way to the final exam.

## Creating an assessment

Centre-created assessments that closely replicate those used by SQA are most likely to prepare candidates well for the final exam.

To produce an assessment, you should consider a number of elements:

### Course coverage

You can ask about any part of the course content in the exam, but only a sample of the course is assessed in any question paper. Centre-created assessments should aim to replicate this by sampling from across the course, and should do so in a manner that mirrors the approach taken in SQA assessments.

There are three sections of the course that are assessed in the question paper: human society; culture and identity; and social issues. You should cover all of these sections in an assessment to give candidates a similar experience to sitting an SQA question paper. Within each of the sections, you can assess a number of elements, and you should select from these to provide coverage that is broad without duplication.

You should take care to avoid questions that invite candidates to use the same material when answering different questions. For example, in the 'Human society' section, the following questions would both be suitable individually; however, they should not appear in the same assessment, as there would be over-sampling of one part of the course and there could be overlap in the answers:

- 1 Explain two features of Weberism.
- 2 Explain one similarity and one difference between Marxism and Weberism.

Similarly, questions that ask candidates to respond using a research method that tended to produce qualitative data would not be asked alongside a question about official statistics, as this method may have been used in the other question.

Avoid over-sampling from one particular aspect of the course and do not include combinations of questions that would allow candidates to gain marks in different questions using similar answers. Please note that, although these examples are from the 'Human society' section, this advice equally applies in the other two areas of study.

You can only assess the topics that are covered in the course specification. For each of the three sections, this means:

## **Human society**

**Perspectives:** structural; action.

**Theories must include:** consensus, conflict, feminism, functionalism, Marxism, symbolic interactionism, Weberism.

Analysing relationships among individuals, groups and institutions by describing, explaining, and evaluating:

- ◆ sociological perspectives, concepts and theories
- ◆ features, strengths and weaknesses of structural and action perspectives
- ◆ features, strengths, weaknesses of consensus and conflict theories, feminism, functionalism, Marxism, symbolic interactionism and Weberism
- ◆ similarities and differences between theories
- ◆ common-sense and sociological approaches and the differences between them
- ◆ the research process in sociology: theory, hypothesis, operationalisation, fieldwork, presentation of results
- ◆ research methods which tend to generate quantitative data, which must include: surveys, questionnaires, structured interviews and official statistics
- ◆ research methods which tend to generate qualitative data, which must include: unstructured interviews, participant observation, non-participant observation, case studies and focus groups
- ◆ strengths and weaknesses of research methods used in sociology
- ◆ choice of research method to use in particular contexts

Although you should only question items in the paragraphs above, there are certain assumptions made, for example no explanation of feminism would be complete without reference to the patriarchy, or Marxism without social class, therefore a question could include those terms. However, this would not extend to a question naming a theory other than those shown above.

## **Culture and identity**

**Perspectives:** structural; action.

**Theories must include:** feminism, functionalism, labelling, Marxism, symbolic interactionism.

Applying structural and action perspectives and the sociological theories (feminism, functionalism, labelling, Marxism and symbolic interactionism) to describe, explain, analyse and evaluate:

- ◆ culture and identity
- ◆ sociological concepts which must include: primary socialisation, secondary socialisation, identity, culture, subculture, diversity, power and status, prejudice and discrimination, giving examples
- ◆ the impact of socialisation on the formation of identity
- ◆ significance of power and status in terms of relationships, with reference to a culture and subculture
- ◆ aspects of identity which must include both age and gender
- ◆ aspects of culture which must include high culture and popular culture
- ◆ sociologically-relevant research and evidence for aspects of culture and identity, which must include at least two appropriate research studies:
  - 1 the main findings and conclusions of Cohen, S. (1972) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. MacGibbon and Kee, London — to explain deviance within a subculture
  - 2 one other research study, of the candidate's choice, to explain aspects of culture and identity
- ◆ practical, ethical and theoretical criteria used to evaluate sociological research

You can ask questions specifically about the Cohen study or another piece of research that the candidate has looked at in relation to culture and identity; however, that study should not be named in the question.



## Social issues

**Perspectives:** structural; action.

**Theories must include:** feminism, functionalism, labelling, Marxism, symbolic interactionism, Weberism.

Applying structural and action perspectives and the sociological theories (feminism, functionalism, labelling, Marxism, symbolic interactionism and Weberism) to describe, explain, analyse and evaluate:

- ◆ social mobility
- ◆ sociological research related to social mobility including:
  - Goldthorpe, J. H. (1972) *Oxford Mobility Studies*. Oxford University, Oxford and
  - \*Blanden, J. and Machin, S. (2008) *Up and Down the Generational Income Ladder in Britain: Past Changes and Future Prospects*. National Institute Economic Review, Sage publications
- ◆ a social issue other than social mobility, and two sociological research studies relating to this social issue
- ◆ practical, ethical and theoretical criteria used to evaluate sociological research

\*Note: when the Blanden and Machin (2008) study is mentioned, candidates can refer to previous research which informed this study.

As with the 'Culture and identity' section, you can ask questions that name either of the mandatory studies or that ask candidates about one or two pieces of research related to an issue other than social mobility; however, this research should not be named in the question. Similarly, you can ask questions about research related to social mobility or an issue other than social mobility, but that research cannot be named in the question.

## Question paper structure

Assessments that you create for a single section should have a blend of question types within that section (however, see the 'Essay question' section below for an exception).

When you create an assessment with full course coverage, including all three sections, then you should include a blend of questions across the whole question paper. You should consider this if the assessments are three separate sections, taken at different times but combined for an overall estimate of candidate performance.

The 'Human society' section should include five or six shorter-response questions, although this is not rigid. Each question, or part of a question, is usually worth between 2 and 6 marks, remembering that questions may be subdivided.

## Level of demand

A centre-created assessment's level of demand should match the level of demand in SQA question papers for Higher Sociology. There should be questions that are easily accessible for C-grade candidates and questions that allow A-grade candidates to display their abilities. You can achieve this with balance across the assessment, and the best way to do this is by following the pattern of questions from previous exam diets. However, please remember that many questions in Higher Sociology have differentiation by outcome — it is in part the candidate's responses that determine their ultimate grade, rather than the 'difficulty' of the questions that they can answer correctly.

## Constructing a question

Question stems and the command words used are important in Higher Sociology and due regard should be paid to their use. The question stem is not necessarily an indicator of how difficult the question is, however there is a hierarchy of process involved:

- ◆ 'Describe' questions require candidates to make factual points or state characteristics and/or features.
- ◆ 'Explain' questions require candidates to relate cause and effect and/or make relationships between things clear.
- ◆ 'Evaluate' questions require candidates to make a judgement based on criteria, to determine the value of something.
- ◆ 'Analyse' questions ask candidates to make points that identify parts, the relationship between them, and their relationships with the whole; draw out and relate implications.

Where questions ask candidates for a number of responses, such as 'Describe **two** features of Weberism', they will usually have 2 marks per description requested. If they ask for a specified number of explanations, such as 'Explain **one** similarity and **one** difference between functionalism and feminism', they will usually have 3 marks for each explanation required.

## Essay question

In each full question paper, there should be one 'essay' question, a 25-mark single question that will appear in either the 'Culture and identity' section or in the 'Social issues' section. This will be the sole question in that section. The question should contain guidance on the theories and study to be used in the essay. For example:

'In your answer you must:

- ◆ use one structural and one action theory
- ◆ use at least one sociological study of your choice
- ◆ link your study to your theories'

## Writing inclusive questions

The best way to make sure that you write inclusive questions is to use the wording of the 'Course content' section of the course specification, along with the command word. The wording of the course specification should be familiar to candidates and using it will help them to decode the question more quickly and focus on their response.

Furthermore, you should follow the guidelines below:

- ◆ Write questions that are clear, precise, and easy to understand. Apart from appropriate sociological terminology, avoid using jargon or difficult language.
- ◆ Use terminology that is familiar to all candidates.
- ◆ Consider the impact of cultural and linguistic issues when writing questions.
- ◆ When constructing scenarios or arguments, avoid stereotyping. For example, think about using a female name when creating a scenario that includes a stereotypical male role or occupation, and vice versa. Or use gender-neutral names.
- ◆ Use names that reflect the cultural diversity of the community of your centre, and of Scotland.
- ◆ As much as possible, try to make questions concise and easy to read.

## Marking reliability

Published marking instructions are available for SQA past papers and the specimen question paper. These demonstrate the required marking standard.

It is good practice to prepare the marking instructions at the same time as you construct the assessment. You can then refine marking instructions considering candidate responses. They should be agreed between all markers and applied consistently. Cross-marking of a sample of each marker's work should occur to ensure the marking instructions have been applied accurately and consistently.

Some common marking issues include:

- ◆ inconsistent application of the marking instructions
- ◆ markers being over-lenient or too harsh
- ◆ candidates being awarded marks despite the fact they have not given sufficient detail to answer the question

In addition, you should only allocate marks based on the written response and not on what the response infers.

## Checklist for prelim writing

Yes or No	Checklist
	Contains questions drawn from at least three past papers or specimen question papers (if using).
	Approximately 30% of marks are A-type, 20% are B-type, 50% are C-type.
	Each question assesses only what is listed in the course specification.
	Paper structure, format, and language mirrors that of an SQA question paper.
	Questions and scenarios are inclusive.

# Administrative information

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## History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Note: please check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.