



ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

Mark scheme

June 2003

GCE

Sociology

Unit SC3W

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Unit 3: Sociological Methods**Total for this question: 60 marks**

1(a) Explain what is meant by a “pilot study” (**Item A**, line 8). (2 marks)

Two marks for an appropriate explanation or definition of a pilot study, such as testing a research instrument or work that ‘opens up’ a research issue.

1(b) Suggest **two** reasons why it may be difficult for researchers to persuade athletes “to be open about their drug use” (**Item A**, line 3). (4 marks)

Two marks for each of two acceptable reasons why it may be difficult for researchers to persuade athletes ‘to be open about their drug use’.

Reasons could include:

- drug use may be criminal;
- acknowledging drug use may lead to being banned from sport;
- researchers may use inappropriate methods;
- drug users may identify researchers with the judicial system;
- gaining the confidence of research subjects.

1(c) Suggest **three** “factors that influence a researcher’s choice of method” (**Item A**, lines 6 – 7) **other than** those mentioned in **Item A**. (6 marks)

Two marks for each of three appropriate factors.

These could include:

- time;
- cost;
- funding body;
- a need for informed consent;
- maintaining research subjects’ anonymity;
- theoretical preference;
- chance/research opportunity;
- furthering researcher’s career.

Note No marks for ‘difficulties in persuading athletes to be open about their drug use’ or issues of access or need for researchers to participate/or establish rapport.

1(d) Identify and briefly explain **two** problems with carrying out “covert observation of group behaviour” (Item A, lines 17 – 18). (8 marks)

Two marks for each of two problems with **covert** observation, such as:

- the observer’s role may limit access to some aspects of group behaviour;
- recording behaviour is more difficult;
- inability to ask direct questions of research subjects;
- difficult to sustain over any lengthy time period;
- the real purpose of the observer may be uncovered;
- a lack of informed consent by research subjects.

Two further marks in each case for an appropriate explanation of the problem identified. For example:

- limited access to some aspects of group behaviour would make the research incomplete with aspects of the group’s behaviour being unobserved;
- recording behaviour is more difficult so field notes have to be written up after the event with the consequent problems of remembering precisely what had been observed and experienced resulting in a loss of validity;
- being unable to ask direct questions of research subjects means that it is difficult to explore or clarify meanings.

1(e) Examine some of the problems that sociologists may encounter when using questionnaires in their research. (20 marks)

0 No relevant points.

1 - 7 Answers in this band will show only a limited knowledge and understanding. Lower in the band, this may be one or two quasi-commonsensual points about questionnaires in general. Higher in the band, answers will show a limited, undeveloped sociological knowledge, for example, two or three weak descriptive points about questionnaires. Interpretation of material may be simplistic or at a tangent to the question, for example a weak account of a research study that used questionnaires. Analysis will be very limited or non-existent.

In this band, candidates’ answers are likely to be characterised by the poor logical expression of ideas and the use of a limited range of conceptual terms, perhaps often used imprecisely and/or inaccurately. Spelling, punctuation and grammar may show serious deficiencies and frequent errors, perhaps impairing the intelligibility of significant parts of the answer.

8 - 14 Answers in this band will show a reasonable knowledge and understanding. Lower in the band this might be confined to a competent if basic account of one or two problems with questionnaires. Interpretation may be limited and not explicitly linked to the demands of the question; for instance, answers may be diverted into often lengthy descriptive accounts of particular examples of questionnaire use, poorly linked to the question.

Higher in the band, knowledge will be broader and/or deeper, and will begin to identify a broader range of problems with questionnaires. Material will be accurate, though at times its relevance may not be made explicit. There may be some limited explicit analysis or evaluation, for instance, through some weakly developed awareness of ways problems might be dealt with by researchers. However, this is **not** a requirement, even to reach the top of the band.

In this band, candidates’ answers are likely to be characterised by the fair to good logical expression of ideas and the competent use of a reasonable range of conceptual terms. Spelling, punctuation and grammar will be of a reasonable standard. Commonly used words and sociological terms will generally be spelt correctly. There may be minor errors of punctuation and grammar, but these will not seriously impair the intelligibility of the answer.

15 - 20 Answers in this band will display a sound, conceptually detailed knowledge and understanding of problems with questionnaires. This will be accurately and sensitively interpreted to meet the demands of the question. The candidate will show the ability to organise material and analyse and/or evaluate so as to produce a coherent and relevant answer.

Candidates will consider a range of problems. Material may be drawn from issues of question design, types of question, mode of delivery (mailed/telephone/self-completion), appropriateness for particular research issues/groups, validity and reliability.

Lower in the band, answers may examine a more limited range of material. Higher in the band, answers may be more detailed and complete, and/or may show a clear rationale in the organisation of material leading to a distinct conclusion.

In this band, candidates' answers are likely to be characterised by the very good to excellent logical expression of ideas and the precise use of a broad range of conceptual terms. Spelling, punctuation and grammar will be of a very good to excellent standard. Commonly and less commonly used words and sociological terms will almost always be spelt correctly. Punctuation and grammar will be used correctly throughout to facilitate the intelligibility of the answer.

1(f) Using material from Item B and elsewhere, assess the usefulness of official statistics in sociological research. (20 marks)
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0 No relevant points.

1 - 7 In this band, analysis/evaluation will be very limited or non-existent, and answers will show only a limited knowledge and understanding. Lower in the band, this may be one or two quasi-commonsensical points about statistics in general, or material ineffectually recycled from Item B with little understanding of relevant issues. Higher in the band, answers will show a limited, undeveloped sociological knowledge, for example a few insubstantial points about statistics in general. There may be little or no specific focus on the 'official' dimension. Interpretation of material may be simplistic or at a tangent to the question. Analysis/evaluation will be very limited or non-existent.

In this band, candidates' answers are likely to be characterised by the poor logical expression of ideas and the use of a limited range of conceptual terms, perhaps often used imprecisely and/or inaccurately. Spelling, punctuation and grammar may show serious deficiencies and frequent errors, perhaps impairing the intelligibility of significant parts of the answer.

8 - 14 In this band, there will be some limited analysis and/or evaluation (though lower down the band this will be implicit), and answers will show a reasonable knowledge and understanding of relevant material. Lower in the band, some suitable material will be correctly identified and a broadly accurate if basic account offered of some relevant aspects of official statistics. Some unfocused material may also appear, for example, reference to social surveys.

Higher in the band, knowledge and understanding of material will be broader and/or deeper, and the answer may begin to deal explicitly with some characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of official statistics. However, answers may lack a balanced coverage of both advantages and disadvantages of official statistics. Interpretation of material will be largely appropriate to the demands of the question. There will be some limited explicit analysis and/or evaluation, for example through some brief reference to methodological issues or weak comparison with other methods/sources of data.

In this band, candidates' answers are likely to be characterised by the fair to good logical expression of ideas and the competent use of a reasonable range of conceptual terms. Spelling, punctuation and grammar will be of a reasonable standard. Commonly used words and

sociological terms will generally be spelt correctly. There may be minor errors of punctuation and grammar, but these will not seriously impair the intelligibility of the answer.

- 15 - 20** In this band, analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant, and answers will show a sound, conceptually detailed knowledge and understanding of sociological material concerning the usefulness of official statistics, drawn from Item B and elsewhere. This will be accurately and sensitively interpreted to meet the demands of the question. Analysis and evaluation will be explicit and relevant.

Answers may identify practical, ethical and theoretical advantages and disadvantages of official statistics and may draw on issues such as availability, time, cost accessibility, coverage, the nature of quantitative data, the social construction of such data, comparability of data etc. Clearly, however, not all of these issues need to be addressed, even for full marks. Analysis and evaluation will be explicit, perhaps being anchored in an application of the concepts of reliability, representativeness and validity, or through linkage to the an understanding of relevant theoretical positions and concepts or through reference to the relative usefulness of official statistics in the study of particular issues. Explicit analysis and evaluation of the usefulness of official statistics may also be displayed through the direct comparison with alternative research methods or by a comparison of the different advantages and disadvantages of those official statistics generated as a by-product of government activities and those created through ad-hoc or regular surveys.

Lower in the band, interpretation may be less selective or evaluation less developed and more list-like. Higher in the band, interpretation will be more focused and evaluation more thorough, and answers may show a clear rationale in the organisation of material leading to a distinct conclusion.

In this band, candidates' answers are likely to be characterised by the very good to excellent logical expression of ideas and the precise use of a broad range of conceptual terms. Spelling, punctuation and grammar will be of a very good to excellent standard. Commonly and less commonly used words and sociological terms will almost always be spelt correctly. Punctuation and grammar will be used correctly throughout to facilitate the intelligibility of the answer.