1 mark | Pick one

Format: a question followed by four possible answers.

Your next steps

1. Read the whole question. Notice exactly which term or idea it asks for.

2. Recall the meaning before reading the choices.

3. Read all four choices. Remove any that do not fit.

4. Select one answer and fill its circle as instructed on the paper.

See it in action

Which term matches this description?
The correspondence principle is the idea that school organisation mirrors work.

Answer: **The correspondence principle**.

In an exam, choose this term from the options provided. You do not need a paragraph or an explanation.

Before you move on

Have you selected only one option?

If you change your answer, follow the correction instructions printed in the paper.

Do not choose a word just because you recognise it. Check that its meaning fits the question.

1 READ → 2 RECALL → 3 CHOOSE → 4 CHECK

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

2 marks | Spot it + explain it

Format: From Item X, examine one strength or weakness of the research.

Your next steps

1. Check whether the question asks for a strength or a weakness.

2. Find one relevant feature in the item: the sample, method, setting or data.

3. State the feature using a specific detail from the item.

4. Explain why it helps or limits the research. Use a methods concept where it fits.

See it in action

Practice item: A fictional study observes four classes in three schools in the same city.

Question: From the item, examine one weakness of the research.

Answer: The schools are all in one city. Their pupils and policies may differ from schools elsewhere, which limits how widely the findings can be generalised.

Before you move on

One mark rewards a relevant strength or weakness drawn from the item. The other rewards explaining why it is a strength or weakness.

Sentence starter: **The item states ... This is a weakness/strength because ...**

A large sample is not automatically representative. Who is included and how they were selected also matter.

1 SPOT → 2 EVIDENCE → 3 WHY → 4 CHECK

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

3 marks | Make the idea clear

Format: Describe ... OR Identify and describe one example / feature / consequence ...

Your next steps

1. Name or define exactly what the question asks for.

2. Add a clear description of its main features or how it works.

3. Use one specific example if it helps demonstrate the idea.

4. If asked for a consequence, describe the outcome for the people concerned.

See it in action

Question: Describe what is meant by the correspondence principle.

Answer: The correspondence principle is the idea that school organisation mirrors work. For example, pupils follow instructions from teachers, just as employees follow instructions from managers. This may prepare pupils to accept workplace authority.

This develops one coherent description rather than listing unrelated facts.

Before you move on

Point → Explain → Example. The example can come before the explanation if that reads more clearly.

The 3 marks are awarded for the quality of the whole description. Three sentences do not automatically mean three marks.

Check accuracy, detail and relevance. An essay, a debate or a conclusion is usually unnecessary here.

1 NAME → 2 DESCRIBE → 3 EXAMPLE → 4 CHECK

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

4 marks | Read the pattern

Format: Describe the type of data. Identify the trend and explain one factor that may account for it.

Your next steps

1. Read every task. This format may ask for data type, a trend and one explanation.

2. If asked, name and describe the data type: for example, quantitative means numerical.

3. If asked, state the pattern using the item's dates, groups and figures. Check units.

4. Identify one plausible factor and explain the links between it and the pattern.

5. Finish with how the factor could produce this particular outcome.

See it in action

Fictional practice data: the percentage achieving a stated GCSE benchmark rises from 20% to 30% between Year 1 and Year 2.

Question: Describe the type of data. Identify the trend and explain one possible factor.

Answer: The data are quantitative because they are numerical. The measure rises from 20% to 30% between Year 1 and Year 2.

One possible explanation: Better access to quiet study space and learning resources may allow more effective revision. More practice and preparation could improve exam performance.

Before you move on

Only describe data or a trend if the question asks you to. If it asks for one factor, focus on that factor and its explanation.

A pattern does not prove its cause. Say **may** or **could** when giving a possible explanation.

Check whether figures are percentages, counts or rates. Recorded crime is not the same as all crime. Two observations show a change; they do not establish a long-term trend.

1 DATA → 2 PATTERN → 3 FACTOR → 4 LINK

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

4 marks | Build the explanation

Format: From Item X, identify and explain one factor / reason for [outcome].

Your next steps

1. Read the outcome carefully. What needs explaining?

2. Select one relevant factor from the item.

3. Explain how that factor works.

4. Link each step to the outcome in the question.

See it in action

Practice item: Divorce has become more socially acceptable.

Question: From the item, identify and explain one factor that may increase lone-parent households.

Answer: Less stigma attached to divorce may make it easier to leave an unhappy marriage. When parents separate, some children live mainly with one parent. This may contribute to more lone-parent households.

Before you move on

Have you explained **how** the factor leads to the outcome?

Use the item, then add your sociology. Copying an item sentence alone does not develop an explanation.

Try: **One factor is ... This may ... As a result ...**

One developed factor is enough when the question asks for one.

1 FACTOR → 2 HOW → 3 OUTCOME → 4 CHECK

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

4 marks | Explain their idea

Format: From Item X, identify and describe one idea / reason / finding, including the perspective or approach.

Your next steps

1. Read the item and select one idea that answers the question.

2. Identify the sociologist's perspective or approach when requested.

3. Describe the idea in your own words, using a relevant item detail.

4. Develop how it works or why it matters for the issue asked about.

5. Check that you have answered both the idea and the perspective/approach.

See it in action

Practice item focus: Ball and teacher expectations linked to banding.

Answer: Ball uses a interactionist perspective. One relevant idea is teacher expectations linked to banding. Teachers may expect less from pupils in a lower band and give them less encouragement. Pupils may lose motivation and participate less, which could affect learning and achievement.

Use the actual item to select and support your answer. This example demonstrates the structure.

Before you move on

In AQA's Oakley and Ball examples, a developed answer missed the top mark when it omitted the requested perspective.

An approach may concern how something is understood or measured. Do not invent a named theoretical perspective just to fill a sentence.

One relevant point, explained fully, is better than several named findings with no description.

1 IDEA → 2 VIEWPOINT → 3 EXPLAIN → 4 LINK

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

4 marks | Show how they researched

Format: From Item X, identify and describe the research method, including the approach or perspective if requested.

Your next steps

1. Find evidence of what the researcher actually did.

2. Name the method precisely. Distinguish interviews, questionnaires, observations and existing sources.

3. Explain how it was used in this study: who, what and how.

4. Describe the requested approach or perspective and connect it to the research.

5. Check all parts of the wording. Do not turn a description into an unrelated list of weaknesses.

See it in action

Fictional practice item: A researcher sends households a questionnaire with fixed response options about pupils' experiences of streaming.

Answer: The method is a self-completion questionnaire. Households choose from set answers about pupils' experiences of streaming. This produces responses that can be counted and compared across households.

If the item also describes an approach, add and explain it. For example, an approach to poverty based on relative deprivation compares resources and participation with usual living standards in that society.

Before you move on

A questionnaire is a method. Random sampling is a way of selecting participants. Quantitative describes numerical data. These labels answer different questions.

If asked about a named study, use that study's actual procedure. Do not attach the fictional practice example to a real sociologist.

AQA's Townsend commentary shows that naming the method alone leaves important parts unanswered.

1 METHOD → 2 PROCEDURE → 3 APPROACH → 4 CHECK

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

4 marks | Connect method + topic

Format: Identify and explain one advantage / disadvantage of a method or sampling technique for a named investigation.

Your next steps

1. Check the direction: advantage or disadvantage.

2. Identify one relevant point about the named method or sampling technique.

3. Explain the feature of the method that produces this effect.

4. Give a specific example of what would happen in this investigation.

5. Explain the effect on the findings: detail, comparison, validity, reliability or representativeness, as appropriate.

See it in action

Question: Identify and explain one advantage of unstructured interviews to investigate pupils' experiences of streaming.

Answer: Unstructured interviews allow pupils to explain how being placed in a stream feels. Follow-up questions can explore why a pupil feels encouraged or underestimated. This can provide a fuller account of the meaning of streaming for that pupil, improving validity.

Chain: **method feature → what happens in this study → effect on the evidence.**

Before you move on

For snowball sampling, participants recommend others. Friends may have similar experiences, so some viewpoints may be missed. Explain which viewpoints could be missed in the stated topic.

AQA's illustrated methods answers without context were limited to 2 marks. Repeating the topic name is weaker than explaining what happens in that study.

Validity: does evidence reflect what is being studied? Reliability: consistency. Representativeness: how well a sample reflects its target population.

1 FEATURE → 2 CONTEXT → 3 EFFECT → 4 CHECK

4 marks | Protect the people

Format: Identify one ethical issue and explain how you would deal with it in the investigation.

Your next steps

1. Name one ethical issue: consent, privacy, distress or pressure to participate.

2. Explain why it matters for these people in this study.

3. Give a realistic action the researcher could take.

4. Explain how the action addresses the issue.

See it in action

Question: Identify one ethical issue when studying pupils' experiences of streaming and explain how you would deal with it.

Answer: Pupils may feel pressured to take part if their teacher selects them. Explain that participation is voluntary and will not affect grades. Obtain appropriate consent and pupil agreement, and allow withdrawal. This helps pupils make a free choice.

Before you move on

Your action must solve the issue you named.

Ethical = protecting people and their rights.
Practical = organising the research.

Try: **An ethical issue is ... This could arise because ... I would ... This would ...**

Explain confidentiality and its safeguarding limits. Do not promise secrecy that cannot be kept.

1 ISSUE → 2 WHY HERE → 3 ACTION → 4 EFFECT

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

4 marks | Solve the practical problem

Format: Identify one practical issue and explain how you would deal with it in the investigation.

Your next steps

1. Name one practical issue: access, time, cost, reading ability or managing data.

2. Explain why it could arise in this investigation.

3. Give a workable action.

4. Explain how the action helps the researcher deal with the problem.

See it in action

Question: Identify one practical issue when using questionnaires to study parents' literacy skills and explain how you would deal with it.

Answer: Some parents may find the questions hard to read, so may skip or misunderstand them. Offer an accessible version with clear wording and suitable reading support. This helps respondents understand the questions while keeping their answers private.

Before you move on

Have you given both a problem **and** a solution?

Keep the solution suitable for the method and participants.

Try: **A practical issue is ... This may ... I would ... This helps because ...**

Changing method can be appropriate, but explain how it solves the named problem rather than just naming another method.

1 PROBLEM → 2 WHY HERE → 3 ACTION → 4 EFFECT

AQA GCSE SOCIOLOGY / BOTH PAPERS / ALL TOPICS

12 marks | Build a debate

Format: Discuss how far sociologists would agree that [claim]. Both essays in each section are compulsory.

Your next steps

1. Break down the claim. Notice words such as main, equal, most important or Britain today.

2. Plan at least two relevant viewpoints or competing explanations. Select accurate evidence.

3. Introduce the debate briefly. Define a key term only if it helps.

4. Develop a supporting argument: explain the mechanism, use evidence and link to the claim.

5. Evaluate it. Explain a limitation, competing explanation or difference between groups.

6. Develop the alternative argument and evaluate it too.

7. Judge how far the claim is supported and explain why.

PEELE: your writing prompts

Point: a clear argument.
Explain: how and why it works.
Example/evidence: a relevant study, concept or illustration.
Link: what this shows about the claim.
Explicit evaluation: why the argument is convincing or limited.

Develop every causal link, as in Education: **assumption → treatment → experience → possible outcome.**

Two well-developed arguments plus a supported judgement can work. Add another argument when it contributes; there is no fixed paragraph count.

What moves it up?

Limited → Developed → Debated → Judged.

L1 (1-3): fragments and assertions.
L2 (4-6): limited development and evaluation.
L3 (7-9): good applied sociology and analysis, with gaps in development or judgement.
L4 (10-12): detailed applied arguments, developed evaluation and supported judgements.

These are reminders, not a checklist that guarantees a mark. AQA judges knowledge, application and evaluation together using best fit.

1 CLAIM → 2 DEBATE → 3 EVALUATE → 4 JUDGE