

Sociology - Year 12 to 13 Summer Independent Learning 2026

You will need your new T&M booklet to complete these tasks.

TASK 1: Read the following information and answer the questions that follow:

Introduction: The Development of Sociological Theory

Many of the assumptions underlying modern sociological theory can be traced back to the 18th century Enlightenment, an extremely influential philosophical movement. It had two key features:

- ***The power of human reason***, especially science, would enable us to understand the world by providing us with true knowledge – correct theories – about how it works.
- ***Human progress*** – Knowledge gained through reason and science would enable us to create a better world. Technology would cure disease, while social science would solve problems such as poverty and conflict.

These two features have been described as the “Enlightenment Project” – the goal of changing the world for the better by the application of human reason.

Sociology first emerged in the 19th century in the rapidly developing modern industrial societies of Europe. In keeping with the Enlightenment project, sociologists sought to develop theories that they could use to improve society, or perhaps even to create the perfect society. These theories are often called modernist theories.

However, sociologists have never agreed about what kind of society is desirable, or how to create it. As a result, rather than one theory of modern society, there are a number – Functionalism, Marxism, Feminism, Social action theories.

More recently, society has begun to undergo changes that many people see as being just as profound as the industrial revolution of the 19th century, especially in relation to the process of globalisation and the impact of new information technology and the media.

In this context, postmodernist writers rejected the Enlightenment project, arguing that it is not possible to gain true knowledge of how the world works.

If modernist theories are correct in believing that we can gain true knowledge about society, how is this to be achieved? Positivist sociologists argue sociology should model itself on the natural sciences. After all, the sciences have had spectacular success in understanding the natural world, so perhaps sociology can achieve similar success in understanding society by borrowing the logic, methods and procedures of science. Whether this is possible or desirable leads to a debate on whether sociology should be considered a science or not. Interpretivist researchers would argue the answer to this question is no, as the job of sociology is to uncover the meaning behind human action, rather than develop a “science of society”.

This leads to a debate about the role of values and objectivity in sociology. Given that sociologists are humans who study other humans, is it possible or desirable for them to keep their personal values

out of their research? Can and should we seek to be detached and objective, as the natural sciences are said to be, or do values inevitably intrude into sociology?

Finally, this topic, “Theory and Methods” deals with the relationship between sociology and social policy. This picks up the theme of the Enlightenment project, which was to provide true knowledge so that we could use it to improve society – in this case, through appropriate social policies implemented by governments.

Questions:

1. Explain what is meant by the “Enlightenment”.
2. Sociology emerged in the 19th century – identify two countries that would have been regarded as the “rapidly developing modern industrial societies of Europe” during that time.
3. Identify two sociological theories that we would define as “modernist” theories.
4. Identify two recent changes in society which suggest we are going through a period of change as important as the industrial revolution was in changing society.
5. Why do postmodernists reject the Enlightenment project and modernist theories?
6. Which perspective argues that sociology can be a science and which perspective argues it can’t be?
7. Explain what is meant by “objective” in sociology.
8. Explain what is meant by “social policy”.

TASK 2: Functionalism – read the following information about Durkheim’s classic study of suicide and answer the questions that follow.

Durkheim’s study of suicide gave birth to sociology. He wrote in the late 19th century using a positivist belief system that society can be studied as a science, and be observed and studied just as we do when studying the natural world. Durkheim wanted to show that suicide was linked to society, and then the value of sociology could be established.

From Durkheim’s perspective, behaviour is caused by social facts, which are social forces that surround society, and therefore suicide is a social fact in its own right.

Durkheim based his research on statistics and looked at different societies, and different cultural and social groups within the same society in the 19th century. He found a number of social patterns, arguing that the social patterns found demonstrate that suicide is not a random individual act.

- *Suicide rates varied between different countries, for example they were higher in Protestant countries than in Catholic countries.*
- *The rise and fall in suicide statistics appeared to be related to social factors, for example, they rose in periods of economic recession and fell during wartime.*
- *There were variations between different groups within the same society, for example unmarried and childless people had higher rates than those married with children.*

Instead of using a psychological explanation to study these results, Durkheim explains these suicide rates as the effect of social facts and forces that act upon individuals.

Durkheim therefore suggested that these patterns were due to two factors affecting these individuals; their levels of integration within society, and their levels of regulation. The level of integration refers to a feeling of belonging to a group, so in a strongly integrated society, people are bound together by shared norms and values. The level of regulation refers to the level of control a society has over its members.

From these two social facts, Durkheim came up with four types of suicide to categorise:

- 1. Altruistic suicide -> this refers to having too much social integration. The individual is too integrated into society. An example of altruistic suicide are suicide bombers.*
- 2. Egoistic suicide -> this refers to having not enough integration into society, the opposite of altruistic suicide. For example, Protestants compared to Catholics, as Protestants have a looser social network.*
- 3. Fatalistic suicide -> this refers to having too much regulation. This is where the individual is heavily controlled by society. An example is prisoners or slaves.*
- 4. Anomic suicide -> this refers to having not enough regulation, the opposite of fatalistic suicide. Think of anomie, meaning normlessness. An example of this suicide would be suicide that occurs in times of economic depression.*

Questions:

1. Explain the “positivist belief system” – what does this mean?
2. Explain how Durkheim’s study might help establish the value of sociology as a subject.
3. What are “social facts”?
4. What research method did he use?
5. How does Durkheim explain the rise and fall of suicide rates?
6. Identify two social groups that had higher rates of suicide.
7. What two factors found in society might explain suicide rates? Explain them.
8. Outline two types of suicide Durkheim identified and give examples.

TASK 3: Marxism and Neo-Marxism – Using 4T&M to help you, explain the following key terms/concepts:

Karl Marx:

- Superstructure
- Alienation
- Historical materialism
- Polarisation of the classes
- Class consciousness

Gramsci:

- Counter-hegemony
- Coercion
- Consent
- Dual consciousness
- Counter-hegemonic bloc

Althusser:

- The economic level

- The political level
- The ideological level
- Repressive state apparatus
- Ideological state apparatus

TASK 4: Using 5T&M to help you, complete the following questions on the positivist approach to research methods.

1. Which of these methods is preferred by positivists? (write down all that apply)

- a) Closed-ended questionnaires
- b) Unstructured interviews
- c) Participant observation
- d) Official statistics
- e) Personal and historical documents
- f) Structured interviews
- g) Experiments
- h) Non-participant observation
- i) Structured observation

2. Identify two indicators of the following concepts:

Domestic violence:

Working class:

Emotion work:

3. Which of the following are more likely to have high reliability? (write down all that apply)

- a) Crime statistics.
- b) A personal diary.
- c) An unstructured interview where the respondent is allowed to answer questions in their own words.
- d) An observation of a lesson in a primary school where the researcher takes notes describing what they see.
- e) An observation of a lesson in a school where the researcher uses a structured observation schedule.
- f) An anonymous questionnaire containing fixed response questions that asks young people about drug use.

4. Explain why objectivity is likely to be higher in....

- a) A study that uses questionnaires rather than unstructured interviews.
- b) A study that uses official statistics rather than media reports.

TASK 5: Feminism: Using 6T&M to help you, complete the following work on Feminism.

1. What do Radical feminism and Marxist feminism have in common and how are they different?
2. Identify as many ways you can think of that gender equality/women's rights have been achieved.
3. Read the evaluation points below and decide which type of feminism each one best applies to.

This type of feminism.....

- a. emphasises the variation in women's situation and experience
 - b. exposes the exploitation within family life
 - c. shows the importance of structural factors in determining women's position
 - d. has helped to improve the position of women at work and in law
 - e. largely ignores the increased economic independence of women
 - f. fails to address the underlying causes of gender inequality
 - g. ignores the fact that women may choose to live with men
 - h. focuses too much on differences between women and too little on the experiences all women face
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4. What does Wolf mean by "the beauty myth"?
 5. Give two examples of the way in which society may promote the "beauty myth".
 6. Do some online research and find out about "fourth-wave feminism".

TASK 6: Complete the following "Methods in Context" Essay Question

Read **Item B** below and answer the question that follows.

Item B

Investigating pupils' decisions on future education and careers

At various stages in school, all children are faced with decisions about their future. For example, some pupils may choose to go to university for a variety of reasons. Other pupils may consider options such as apprenticeships or going directly into a job.

Some sociologists may use structured interviews to study pupils' decisions on their future education and choice of career. They are conducted face to face in a formal way, as each interviewee is usually asked the same questions in the same order. However, structured interviews may be influenced by the assumptions of the researcher about how and why career choices are made.

Applying material from **Item B** and your knowledge of research methods, evaluate the strengths and limitations of using structured interviews to investigate pupils' decisions on their future education and careers.

[20 marks]