### **What's A level Sociology about?**

Sociology is the study of society - how people interact in groups. A level Sociology examines social behaviour from a variety of perspectives: how it originates and then develops, and the ways people are organised into groups according to distinctions such as class, gender and race. A level Sociology also looks at the institutions and forces which shape and are shaped by groups within a society, such as the media, religion and education.

A level Sociology focuses on contemporary society, providing an awareness of the importance of social structure and actions in explaining social forces and issues. Some questions A level Sociology covers include:

* Why do boys underachieve in the education system?
* Why are black people five times more likely to be stopped and searched?
* Why are women more religious when religion oppresses them?
* Why are people from single parent families more likely to grow up in a non-nuclear family?

A level Sociology helps you to develop knowledge and understanding of the essential sociological theories and methods (such as Functionalism, Marxism and Feminism) with which sociologists make sense of the diversity of societies, and of the forces which have and will continue to shape social change.

Sociology will help you to think about society in a new and critical light, questioning the status quo (the perceived ‘normal) and developing a sophisticated understanding of the real issues that affect the society we live in. It is an excellent subject for showing you how society works and for making you aware of the range of conditions that individuals within society experience. Students often comment that they didn't realise how varied the human experience can be and how powerfully group identity shapes a person's future.

We will teach the [AQA exam board](https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/sociology/as-and-a-level/sociology-7191-7192) course as it provides an interesting range of option topics teachers can choose from. The topics that we study include one from Families and Households, Education, Beliefs in Society and Crime and Deviance. You will also study a range of research methods, really digging in to how Sociologists find out about society and what methods they use to do this.

All the exam boards cover core areas of Sociology, which include:

* Knowledge and understanding of contemporary social issues and changes
* Understanding and evaluating key sociological theories and perspectives
* Understanding and evaluating the methods of sociological research
* Developing students' interest in the social, political and economic issues that affect society

### **What sort of work is involved?**

Through studying A level Sociology you will learn to think critically and independently about society and the diversity which its citizens experience. You will also develop an informed understanding of our rapidly changing world, as well as your place within it.

Sociology is an essay-based subject, so it involves a lot of reading and writing, strengthening your ability to develop an argument both in class and on paper. The subject requires you to debate issues for which there are several different but well-accepted explanations, and to become critical of different viewpoints. By analysing the strengths and limitations of all perspectives studied, you learn not to take things for granted, or to accept assertions at face value!

### **What background do I need?**

It is desirable to have a GCSE in a written subject, such as English, History or Religious Studies, as this would help prepare you for the essay writing on the course. You need to appreciate the importance of analysis and balance in tackling conflicting points of view.

You should be interested in reading the news on a daily basis to be able to relate the topics learnt in class to the outside world.

Above all you need an outward-looking perspective on the world, and you should be prepared to 'walk in another person's shoes'.

### **Where can it lead?**

Sociology provides an excellent starting point for any social science degree from Economics, Psychology, and Politics to Criminology and Philosophy. You do not need to have an A level in Sociology to take Sociology at university, though it helps.

Sociology A level complements a wide range of other A level subjects, though don't forget that the top universities expect you to be taking a 'challenging' combination of A levels, which means that you might be at a disadvantage if you do not include at least one 'challenging' subject in your programme, or if you also take A levels with a similar outlook (so perhaps best not to combine Sociology with Psychology and Politics A levels unless that's really essential to you).

However, many students choose degrees which combine Sociology with Psychology as the two subjects complement one another. While Sociology studies the influences society has upon individual behaviour, Psychology examines the impact of the individual mind.

Another popular combined degree is the study of Sociology with Criminology. While Sociology covers the study of crime, Criminology goes into greater depth thereby making the two subjects an ideal combination.

A degree in Sociology can lead to many career options including teaching, advertising, research, marketing and business. Sociology is an academic subject teaching you transferable skills so really it’s up to you which area of work you choose to go into afterwards.

### **Assessment**

A level Sociology is a linear qualification, which means **exams take place at the end of two years**. It is assessed through examinations in which consist mostly of essay-based questions, plus several structured questions.

The three A level exams each count for a third of the final mark:

* **Paper 1:** a two-hour exam on Education in Society, with associated sociological theory and methods
* **Paper 2:** a two-hour exam on two option topics (see earlier)
* **Paper 3:** a two-hour exam on Crime and Deviance, with associated sociological theory and methods

**Methods**

One of the first things you will learn in this course is how sociologists conduct research. Watch the videos on two different approaches to conducting sociology and fill in the table below.

[Research Methods: Positivism](https://www.tutor2u.net/sociology/reference/research-methods-positivism)

[Research Methods: Interpretivism](https://www.tutor2u.net/sociology/reference/research-methods-interpretivism)

**Task**

|  | Key ideas | Methods | Strengths | Weaknesses |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Positivism |  |  |  |  |
| Interpretivism |  |  |  |  |

**Theories**

We will look at a number of sociological theories - these are ways that sociologists look at the world. There are 4 videos to summarise the 4 main theories here. Explain each of these in 5 bullet points below.

**Task**

[Sociological Theory: Functionalism](https://www.tutor2u.net/sociology/reference/sociological-theory-functionalism)

[Sociological Theory: Marxism](https://www.tutor2u.net/sociology/reference/sociological-theory-marxism)

[Sociological Theory: Feminism](https://www.tutor2u.net/sociology/reference/sociological-theory-feminism)

[Sociological Theory: Interactionism](https://www.tutor2u.net/sociology/reference/sociological-theory-interactionism)

Which do you think best explains human behaviour?

**Education**

You will spend your first year of your Sociology A-Level with one of your teachers studying many aspects of the institution of Education. During the year, you will learn:

* the role and functions of the education system, including its relationship to the economy and to class structure
* differential educational achievement of social groups by social class, gender and ethnicity in contemporary society
* relationships and processes within schools, with particular reference to teacher/pupil relationships, pupil identities and subcultures, the hidden curriculum, and the organisation of teaching and learning
* the significance of educational policies, including policies of selection, marketisation and privatisation, and policies to achieve greater equality of opportunity or outcome, for an understanding of the structure, role, impact and experience of and access to education; the impact of globalisation on educational policy.

**Task**

To prepare you for learning the above, we would like you to research the history of education in the UK.

1. Present your research as a structured report (using headings and sub-headings)

2. The focus of the research will be the following questions

a. When did schools start in the UK? (there are many different types of schools- the answer that you give will be longer than you think!)

b. Were there any differences in who used to receive schooling? What were the reasons for this?

c. What are the oldest and newest subjects? Why do you think these subjects were introduced/ are not taught anymore?

d. How have the methods of dealing with behaviour changed over time?

e. What are some of the major changes that have taken place in UK education in the 20th and 21st centuries?

f. Your personal view on – what is the role and purpose of education?

Challenge yourself- Even better if you can relate your own personal view of the role and purpose of education to what the Key Theorists (Functionalists, Marxists, Feminists) think!

[Theories of Education](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/sociology/education/theories-of-education)

[Education – ReviseSociology](https://revisesociology.com/sociology-education-revise/)

[Theoretical Perspectives on Education | Introduction to Sociology | | Course Hero](https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sociology/chapter/theoretical-perspectives-on-education/)

**Families and Households**

During your first year studies, you will engage in the following topics:

* the relationship of the family to the social structure and social change, with particular reference to the economy and to state policies
* changing patterns of marriage, cohabitation, separation, divorce, childbearing and the life course, including the sociology of personal life, and the diversity of contemporary family and household structures
* gender roles, domestic labour and power relationships within the family in contemporary society
* the nature of childhood, and changes in the status of children in the family and society
* demographic trends in the United Kingdom since 1900: birth rates, death rates, family size, life expectancy, ageing population, and migration and globalisation.

To prepare you for your Families and Households topic, please complete the following tasks. They will give you a good grounding for future learning.

**Task Different types of families**

Find out what each of these types of family are

* nuclear family
* Reconstituted family
* Beanpole family
* Single-parent family
* Donor-conceived family
* Extended family
* Single person household
* Adopted family
* Divorce-extended family

Generally speaking, the nuclear family was the most common family type for many years until families began to diversify in the 1960’s and 70’s. Thinking about this, try and apply your sociological thinking to these questions:

1- What reasons do you think there are for the nuclear family declining since the 60’s/ 70’s?

2- Why might there have been a huge increase in the amount of divorced couples living in the UK today?

3- What might be the problems with trying to define families?

4- Which family type do you think are preferred by the theorists below and why?

1. Functionalists
2. Feminists

5- What might be the advantages for society in encouraging nuclear families? What might be the disadvantages?

6- What might be the advantages of having an increase of lone parent families in society? What might be the disadvantages?

**Task Sociological research on families and households.**

As you already know, sociological theory is created by sociologists researching different phenomena.

Research the following studies.

| Study | What did the study find? | Why might this study be helpful for us to know about families and households? | What might the problems with this study be? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Wilmott and Young – The Symmetrical Family |  |  |  |
| Fletcher |  |  |  |
| Oakley (1974) – The Sociology of Housework |  |  |  |
| Bitt man and Pixley (1997) – the Double Life of the Family |  |  |  |
| Duncombe and Marsden (1995) – the triple Shift |  |  |  |
| Crompton (1997) - Employment and the Family |  |  |  |

If you were to conduct your own research…

* What type of family or family issue would you research?
* How would you conduct your research study?
* What would you expect the conclusions to be?