

What is Sociology?

Expectations of you if you take this course:

- Attend all sociology lessons.
- In lessons work on your own, in pairs and in small groups, as well as contribute to discussions.
- Keep up to date with assessed pieces of work.
- Use the teachers to help you understand if you get stuck.
- Use the library, the internet and other media for reading to understand concepts and ideas outside lessons time.
- Keep a record of your assessment feedback as well as your grades.
- Re-do any assessments in which you get below your predicted grade.

Introduction.

1. Most, if not all of you will begin this course with a fairly vague idea about what is involved in the “study of society”. A copy of the syllabus is an initial starting point because it maps-out for you the areas you will be studying during your course. You will be given one of these in September. However, it doesn't tell you a great deal about what Sociology is. These Summer tasks, are designed to help you identify the subject matter of Sociology.

The subject matter of Sociology.

1. Sociology is the study of human societies. It is usually classed as one of the social sciences (along with subjects like psychology) and was established as a subject in the late 18th century through the work of people like the French writer Auguste Comte.

- However, the subject has only really gained acceptance as an academic subject in the 20th century through the work of writers such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Talcott Parsons (all

names that, for the present, probably mean very little to you). One name that you may have heard of - Karl Marx (the founder of modern Communism) - has probably done more to stimulate people's interest in the subject than anyone else, even though he lived and wrote (1818 - 1884) in a period before Sociology became fully established as an academic discipline.

Sociology, therefore, has a reasonably long history of development (150 - 200 years) although in Britain it has only been in the last 30 - 40 years that Sociology as an examined subject in the education system has achieved a level of prominence equivalent to or above most of the other subjects it is possible to study. At present, approximately 60,000 students sit an A-level Sociology exam, making it one of the most popular A-levels in our society.

2. A precise definition is not always easy to come by, each of the following have sufficient in common for us to draw some sort of overall conclusion about how Sociology can be defined.

a. Ginsberg (*"The Study of Society"*, 1939):

"Sociology may be defined as the study of society; that is of the web of human interactions and relationships".

b. Sugarman (*"Sociology"*, 1968):

"Sociology is the objective study of human behaviour in so far as it is affected by the fact that people live in groups".

d. Ritzer (*"Sociology"*, 1979):

"Sociology is the study of individuals in a social setting that includes groups, organisations, cultures and societies. Sociologists study the interrelationships between individuals, organisations, cultures and societies".

e. Giddens (*"Sociology"*, 1989):

"Sociology is the study of human social life, groups and societies. It is a dazzling and compelling enterprise, having as its subject matter our own behaviour as social beings. The scope of sociology is extremely wide,

ranging from the analysis of passing encounters between individuals in the street up to the investigation of world-wide social processes”.

f. Lawson and Garrod (“The Complete A-Z Sociology Handbook”, 1996):

“Sociology is the study of individuals in groups in a systematic way, which grew out of the search for understanding associated with the industrial and scientific revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries”.

3. We have deliberately provided a relatively large number of possible definitions to enable you to get some initial flavour of the subject matter of Sociology.

Identify the two major common themes in the above definitions.

a. What sociologists study

- Sociology is the study of the social world. It involves studying human beings and their patterns of behaviour. In order to do this, we focus on the way people form **relationships** and how these relationships, considered in their totality, are represented by the concept of a “**society**”.
- In this respect, the focus of the sociologist’s attention is group behaviour. That is, the effect that the groups people join or are born into (family, work, education and so forth) have upon people’s social behaviour.

b. How sociologists study the social world.

- The definitions included words like “**scientific**”, “**systematic**” and “**objective**” - ideas that tell us something about the both the way sociologists study social behaviour and the kind of knowledge they are trying to produce about social life. While we will develop these ideas in much greater detail in another part of the course (“Theory and Methods”), we need to note a couple of things about them now.

a. **Objective** basically means that sociologists try to create knowledge that is factual, rather than simply based on opinion. In simple terms, sociologists try to avoid personal bias intruding into their research. To do this, they use:

b. **Systematic** ways of studying social behaviour. By this is meant that sociologists try to use methods of research (questionnaires, observations, experiments and so forth) that are governed by certain rules of evidence. For example, a sociologist will try to test his or her ideas in some way. As sociologists you will be able to identify that there is a difference between **Naturalistic (commonsense)** and **sociological** explanations of human behaviour.

5. Write your own definition of what Sociology is using what you have learned so far.

Sociology is

Key words in Sociology

Try to match as many definitions to key words as you can before watching https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQwnD_5KvIA

Socialisation	
Norms	
Culture	
Values	
Value consensus	
Social solidarity	
Role	
Exploitation	
Ideology	
Ruling class	

Marx	
Capitalism	

When capitalists force the labourer to work beyond what is necessary for survival, then take away the surplus value for their own.	The process whereby the young in society learn the values, culture and roles of their society.
The way of life of a society, e.g. language, customs, dress etc.	Social rules which define what is expected of individuals in certain situations.
One of the classical sociologists. He had enormous influence on world politics. From 1917 followers of his theory seized political power throughout a third of the world until the collapse of soviet communism in the 1980s.	A type of society in which the private ownership of the means of production is the dominant form of providing the means to live.
The group at the top of the social order who govern the rest of society.	A general agreement about what things are worth in society.
A systematic set of beliefs which serve the interest of some social group in society.	The expected pattern of behaviour associated with a particular social status

The shared feeling of identification and mutual interest in a social group	Ideas or beliefs which are thought to be valuable to those who hold them.

As you watch the video check your answers or fill in ones you haven't got.



Functionalism and the Organic Analogy.

Watch the clip the following clip

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQwnD_5KvIA

Now consider the following Diagram:

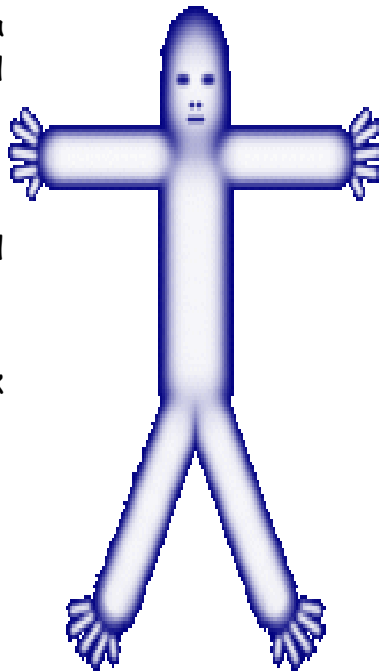
Body

Every part of the body has a function to keep it alive and healthy

The human body grows and develops

All parts of the body link together into one big system

The body fights disease



Society

Every part of society keeps society going. For example the family helps by bringing up the next generation

Societies gradually develop and change

All of the parts of society work together and depend on each other - they are interdependent

Society has mechanisms to deal with problems when they occur

Using a large piece of paper, draw a body. Then decide what function each body part performs if the body represent society.

Please complete all the summer tasks and hand in during your first lesson in September. This work will be assessed by staff and will be used to inform decisions about your target grades and your suitability for the course.