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MASTERING SOCIOLOGY

SECOND EDITION

GERARD O' DONNELL

M
MACMILLAN
EDUCATION

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To Sara, Duncan (Young Social Scientist of the Year 1982)
and Rory, my expert advisers

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PREFACE

Mastering Sociology is a systematic introduction to the study of society; combining a comprehensive coverage of the various sociology GCSE syllabuses in the text, with a wide range of extracts from a variety of source materials which both extend the text, allow the students to experience something of the flavour of the originals, and can provide a base for the kind of data response and stimulus questions which are integral to all GCSE Sociology examinations.

Unusual and valuable features of the book are specimen questions with examples of the kind of outline marking schemes used by GCSE examiners and specimen answers of a length and content calculated to get high marks in GCSE Sociology, but within the capability of good candidates. These schemes and answers, together with specimen GCSE Questions from all the Examining Groups and examples of recent GCE O-Level Questions similar to those now set for the GCSE, makes the book particularly appropriate to the self taught student, while enhancing its value as a class text.

All areas of the following Sociology GCSE syllabuses are covered – the London and East Anglian, Midland and Southern Examining Groups; the Northern Examining Association; the Welsh Joint Education Committee and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate International Examinations – although the book in general follows the sequence of the Southern Examining Group syllabus.

The book also covers most areas of the GCSE Social Science or Social Studies syllabuses including that of the Northern Ireland Schools Examinations Council (which does not have a Sociology syllabus) and it will be useful for a number of other syllabuses, such as the GCSE (Mature) Community Studies syllabus of the London and East Anglian Group: and for the Advanced Supplementary Level GCE Examinations in Sociology and Social Sciences.

The test is designed to be within the capability of most students while the source material will often stretch the most able and provide a base for A-Level work. Each extract from source material can be used as stimulus material for questions (see p. 120).

As you start this book your examination may seem a long way off, but it is useful to bear in mind some points about the examination so that you can get used to practising them as you answer the sample questions set at the end of each section.

THE EXAM AND PREPARING FOR IT

1. In answering the sample examination questions set in the earlier sections of the book it must be borne in mind that while it is necessary to subdivide the book into syllabus headings in order to present the subject coherently, the areas of sociological study are interdependent. A particular question may require information drawn from a number of sections (e.g. family, class and education). When you have finished the book, try working through some of your earlier efforts, drawing this time on all the knowledge that you have acquired during the course.
2. The GCSE is designed to give you credit for what you do know and can do, the examiner is not trying to 'catch you out'. Different levels of achievement have to be rewarded and this 'differentiation' is achieved in the written papers by:
 - (a) The use of a series of questions of increasing difficulty, those at the end showing most need for evaluation by the candidate. (These may be described as 'on an incline of difficulty' or 'stepped questions' or 'structured questions'.)
 - (b) Longer questions in which the depth of the candidate's response can be measured.
 - (c) Differentiation is also achieved in the Course Work Assessment or Projects in which skills in planning, research and weighing up the evidence can be tested. A great deal of freedom is permitted in this Course Work in order to ensure that candidates follow programmes which are of particular interest to them [Gerard O'Donnell, *Work Out Sociology* (London: Macmillan) gives more direction on Course Work/Projects.]
3. If the question is broken into sections look for the number of marks awarded to each part. It is a waste of time to devote several lines to an answer that can gain only 1 mark; the examiner will only expect a few words. A common (and disastrous) error is to write almost all you know about a particular topic in answer to a section attracting few marks and then fail to repeat relevant information in the major section which is intended to attract that information.

4. In longer answers write in essay form – do not write notes as your answer, although you may wish to make a few notes on your paper before commencing your real answer. (Put a neat line through these and the examiner will ignore them.) Remember the examiner will have hundreds of papers to mark in two or three weeks – he or she will not spend a lot of time trying to work out what you mean or in deciphering your handwriting; the repetition of points to try and make a scrappy answer look longer will not impress and flowery description is a waste of time.
5. A mere recital of the names of sociologists gains no marks at any level. GCSE candidates are not expected to know detailed sociological theory (ethnomethodology, etc.) – you *should* know the different approaches to sociological enquiry and it is useful to be able to give examples of specific research.
6. Do not try to learn a mass of statistics off by heart – the examiner is mainly interested in your *understanding* of sociology rather than your ability to remember lists of facts. You should be able to make balanced judgements about the structure and institutions of society but mere unsubstantiated opinion is worthless. You should know something of the various methods of research used by sociologists and be able to interpret and analyse evidence presented in a variety of ways – that is one reason why graphs, tables and extracts are included in the book.
7. Sheer length gains no marks. Time will limit your length in any case – aim to produce well-constructed answers with all the relevant points.
8. Work out how much time you can afford to spend on each question; when the time is up move on to the next question – you can return to complete unfinished answers if you have time. Three good answers will almost certainly gain less marks than five average ones.
9. Spend some time reading through the paper carefully and choose those questions you know most about (not those that sound easy). Some people find it best to write up their second best answer first – so that they become more confident as they progress.
10. Do not answer more questions than you need – some boards exclude all surplus answers written after the required answers, others mark them all and take the best answers up to the required number – you are always wasting valuable time.
11. Answer the question asked, not the one you hoped would be asked. If you have read ‘model’ or ‘specimen’ answers, do not be tempted to regurgitate them verbatim; extract from them the material relevant to the question asked.
12. A reading list is not included in this book because experience indicates that few GCSE candidates have the time (or inclination?) to read more widely than the textbook.

However you will enjoy and appreciate sociology more if you *do* extend your reading – dipping into *New Society*, a weekly magazine, and in particular its pull-out supplement ‘Society Today’ which appears about once a month (some sample extracts are included in this book) and is directed at GCSE and GCE A-Level candidates; and read more of some of the books from which extracts are taken.

13. The 1950s and 1960s in Britain saw the first major invasion of Britain by Sociology. In these years many standard, popular sociology texts were introduced which gave (and still give) valuable insights into sociological concepts. *Coal is Our Life*; *Family and Kinship in East London*; *The Fishermen* remain useful books but students do need to be aware of how dated some of these studies now are and compare them critically with the realities of the 1980s.

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