

Evaluate the view that qualitative methods are unsuitable for sociological research because they lack reliability.

Below is my attempt at an answer to the above prompt. Yours may not look like mine. That's not a problem. That's why I'm including the Mark Scheme. You may have taken a different approach and drawn a different conclusion. That's fine. But these elements should be there.

<p>Interpretivism: Valid data Weber: Verstehen Lived experience of the variables we study Can get subject input in real time Understand motivations Qualitative methods are hard to reproduce, but not impossible.</p>	<p>Positivism Hard to replicate May be subject to the researcher's bias Subjects may be influenced by the presence of the researcher Unrepresentative</p>
<p>No</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>Realism Qualitative methods are necessary to control for the weaknesses in Positivist methods Gain details and motivations. Positivists can then build on and test the observations with larger scale studies</p>	<p>Ish Other Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • Expensive • Small Scale may not be representative or generalizable • Valid data • Real world application
<p>No</p>	<p>Ish</p>

When it comes to sociological research, there is a huge debate between the qualitative and quantitative researchers. Quantitative researchers approach the science of sociology by focusing on objective truth validated through statistical tools using deductive methods. Qualitative researchers emphasize the subjective nature of social life. They prefer to analyze the narratives that they see directly in the field using inductive methods. Quantitative researchers, however, contend that qualitative methods are unsuitable of sociological research because they lack reliability. In other words, qualitative research is very difficult to reproduce, and therefore, difficult to confirm. **Though this position has some merit, the benefits of qualitative research far outweigh its shortcomings, and can often be compensated through complementary quantitative studies.**

Here in the introduction I introduce my terms. I make sure to define quantitative and qualitative methods as well as reliability directly from the prompt. I also elaborate that this is an ongoing debate in sociology. All of your essays will be about an underlying debate in the field. Notice that my thesis statement is clear (highlighted)

Quantitative researchers come from a Positivist tradition in sociology. In other words, they emphasize the importance of scientific rigor. To control for bias, positivists believe that sociological research should focus on data that is quantifiable. Positivists use deductive methods and statistical analysis to test social theories. This is a great way to get reliable data because the results are relatively easy to reproduce. It is

In this case, the first paragraph of my body addresses the antithesis. I don't always do this, but it seemed appropriate for this prompt. Notice that I elaborate on both the strengths and limitations of quantitative research. I let the reader know that this is from a positivist tradition. I didn't have a real example of a quantitative study, so I offered a hypothetical one on divorce.

also a great way to get generalizable data from large, representative samples of the population. However, quantitative data often lacks the detail and nuance that comes from smaller, more intimate studies of individuals in the real world. Quantitative studies on divorce, for instance, can help us understand the most likely causes of divorce, but they

tell us very little about what it means to live through a divorce and how individuals, in real life, cope.

Qualitative researchers point out that understanding the real-life experience behind the quantitative data is just as important. Drawing from Max Weber's concept of Verstehen, or an emotional understanding of social life, qualitative researchers draw from an Interpretivist tradition. They use inductive methods to analyze the stories that people tell them and the interactions that they observe in real-time. For this reason, interpretivist methods are a great source of valid data that individuals can relate to and learn from. That being said, some criticism can be made about the validity of qualitative research. Researcher participation can become researcher imposition in which the observer or interviewer guides the interactions. It can also lead to the Hawthorne Effect in which subjects change their behaviors by virtue of being observed. This is why reliability is so important. Qualitative research, however, is notoriously difficult to reproduce.

Now I get into my argument. Notice that I name drop Max Weber. Always a good idea to name drop whenever you can. Again, I point out both the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative methods. I point out that this is an interpretivist approach. It's here I realize that I'm straying from the prompt's claim about reliability. I gotta get back on track.

It's always a good idea to use realism as the balance. Here I'm able to draw it back to discussing reliability. No reason to elaborate on weaknesses of Realism because the focus of the prompt is Qualitative/Quantitative. Here I throw in some stuff from box 4 on the magic box.

Realist researchers, those who believe that both Interpretivist and Positivist research is necessary to get a full picture of the social world, would argue that though qualitative research does have some problems concerning reliability, the benefits of well-structured observations and interviews outweigh the limits. Qualitative research may be difficult to reproduce, but it is not impossible. Furthermore, many of the shortcomings of qualitative research can be mitigated by using quantitative processes to assess the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Often,

qualitative researchers are the ones advancing and innovating the very theories that quantitative researchers test.

If there are shortcomings to qualitative research, especially methods like ethnographies and participant observation, it is that they are often very time-consuming and expensive to perform. They also focus on small samples, so they may not be as generalizable as larger quantitative studies. However, no knowledge produced by sociology is useful unless it relates to the lived experience of real-life human beings. Qualitative research is the bedrock of understanding the social world from the point

Now, the wrap-up. I pull it back to my thesis, and I make sure to bring the reader back to the reliability question.

of view of lived experience. For this reason, though qualitative research may not be the most reliable, it is still an invaluable resource for sociologists.

And there it is. An essay that grounds itself in sociological paradigms and addresses the prompt. When answering your research questions, it's important to show the reader that you understand the sociological traditions underlying the debates that they are prompting you to address.

Hope this helps.