



### Compulsory question 1c: 20 marks

Your answers to these questions will include all three skills:

**AO1** – Knowledge and understanding

**AO2** – Applying and interpreting knowledge and understanding

**AO3** – Evaluating and analysing

**Tip:** Essays are always a debate. Make sure you include argument here with lots of evaluation all the way through your answer. Start with a plan of the strengths and weaknesses of the method.

**Tip:** It's useful to think of AO1 as 'knowing it', which will refer to the method(s) in the question. AO2 refers to 'using' the item and a range of studies. AO3 refers judging the strengths and weaknesses of the method.

**Tip:** The question will ask you to refer to the item. There are often opportunities to refer to the item throughout your essay.

**Tip:** Refer to studies that have used the method.

**Tip:** Define concepts related to the method, for example, the difference between overt and covert participant observation.

**Also,** refer to key concepts such as qualitative/quantitative data and validity/reliability where relevant to the strengths and weaknesses of the method. If you refer to representativeness and generalisability, make sure your discussion links to the item or a study.

**Tip:** Have a good spread of strengths and weaknesses throughout your essay. Use your chosen studies to highlight these strengths and weaknesses.

In your **conclusion**, make a judgement based on the debate in the essay, for example, do the strengths of the method outweigh the weaknesses?

**Do:**

- focus on the method in the question
- refer to concepts, the item and studies
- evaluate as you go along.

**Don't:**

- list all the strengths and then all the weaknesses
- forget to make a judgement in your conclusion based on evidence.

### Revision idea

Using different coloured cards, summarise the main strengths and weaknesses for each method.

Put studies that use the method on matching coloured cards. Practice explaining how each study could be used to support or criticise the method.

### Organising ideas and evidence: research methods

These are a few examples, there are a lot more.

Method	Main strengths	Main weaknesses	Three studies
<b>Questionnaires</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quantitative data</li> <li>• More reliable</li> <li>• Can gather data from a large number of people</li> <li>• Easy to analyse using a computer</li> <li>• Can use data to (i) spot patterns and trends, (ii) make comparisons over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few qualitative insights</li> <li>• Postal questionnaires: often low response rate</li> <li>• Closed questions limit what respondents want to say</li> <li>• No one to explain the questions, potential misunderstandings</li> <li>• Cannot be 100% sure who filled in the questionnaire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Eileen Barker:</b> <i>The Making of a Moonie</i></li> <li>• <b>The Crime Survey for England and Wales</b></li> <li>• <b>Haines and Case:</b> <i>Youth Crime and Justice in Swansea</i></li> </ul>
<b>Unstructured interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative data</li> <li>• More valid</li> <li>• Opportunities for detailed discussions and in-depth insights</li> <li>• Ideal for gathering data on opinions, values and attitudes</li> <li>• Can pick up on non-verbal cues e.g. body language, tone of voice</li> <li>• Useful for researching sensitive groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliability</li> <li>• Time-consuming and costly</li> <li>• Interviewer bias</li> <li>• Social desirability</li> <li>• If interview not recorded – relies on researcher's memory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ann Oakley:</b> <i>Women's experience of motherhood</i></li> <li>• <b>Hodkinson:</b> <i>Ageing and youth culture</i></li> <li>• <b>Winlow and Hall:</b> <i>Working class masculinity</i></li> </ul>
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative data</li> <li>• More valid</li> <li>• Can discuss topics in detail, gaining depth of insight</li> <li>• Can prompt respondent to expand upon their answers</li> <li>• Non-verbal cues e.g. body language, tone of voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less reliable</li> <li>• Little quantitative data</li> <li>• Time-consuming and costly</li> <li>• Interviewer bias</li> <li>• Social desirability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Eileen Barker:</b> <i>The Making of a Moonie</i></li> <li>• <b>Louise Archer:</b> <i>Working class girls' engagement with education</i></li> <li>• <b>Zoe James:</b> <i>New Age Travellers</i></li> </ul>
<b>Participant observation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative data</li> <li>• More valid</li> <li>• Researcher sees social life from the same perspective as the group</li> <li>• Ideal for studying hard-to-reach groups</li> <li>• Insight into how members of the group interact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliability an issue</li> <li>• Time-consuming and costly</li> <li>• Hawthorne effect – overt research</li> <li>• Deception – covert research</li> <li>• The researcher can get drawn into the group and lose objectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Eileen Barker:</b> <i>The Making of a Moonie</i></li> <li>• <b>James Patrick:</b> <i>A Glasgow Gang Observed</i></li> <li>• <b>William Foote-Whyte:</b> used a mixture of overt and covert participant observation in his research into Street Corner Society</li> </ul>

**You can apply this approach to other methods.**