



Society & the Individual

Final Exam

Due Date: December 12

Throughout the semester, we've walked through a lot of competing, compelling, and complementary theories and thoughts that make up the world of sociology. We've talked about what it means to have a specific sociological vision and to approach the world with a sociological imagination. Rather than treating this as the end point in which you regurgitate the course's general themes and ideas based on my questions, I am leaving it up to you to come up with the questions yourselves, as a way both to look back and look forward, as a way to engage with the ideas you found interesting, important, compelling.

This exam is divided into **3** parts (**DO ALL 3!!!!!!**):

1. Writing exams can fun and educational! For this first part of the assignment, please write an **8-question** exam for this class. Exams come in all shapes and sizes; I expect yours will as well. However, to write an effective exam, please consider the following general guidelines:
 - a. exams should cover the big themes and ideas from the class (however identified);
 - b. exams should synthesize different readings, exploring/drawing connections between them;
 - c. exams should address the relevance of the ideas to the "real world";
 - d. exams should be interesting and creative. the same old questions generate the same old answers;
 - e. exams should be neither too easy nor too hard – they should challenge, but not be impossible;
 - f. exams should, most importantly be written with the expected answers already in mind. But not so specific that there is only one "right answer."

This section of the exam will be evaluated on 2 criteria: the quality of your individual questions and the quality of your overall exam. I will evaluate questions primarily by how clearly they highlight important ideas, how well they point to connections within or across readings, and how well they direct the answerer to the correct answer – not to mention the accuracy of interpretation. The exam you write will be evaluated on how well it works as a whole to cover primary themes and readings of the class while avoiding redundancy.

Please don't answer the questions, simply ask them.

2. Write a 9th question – but the last one is *different*: for the final question, ask a question you *wish* you could have answered after taking this course, but cannot [e.g., on a subject/issue/topic that we did not cover. what did we miss that you think we should have discussed in the class?]
3. Write a paragraph or two explaining why **your** exam is a good one for this class. Explain how well it conforms to the above principles. Give insight into your process of writing your exam. For example, why did you pick/exclude the concepts you did? Or, describe how this really captures the “big picture” for the course, etc.



Here are some examples to help you with this exam.

Weak question:

What are Marx's three forms of alienation?

This question is weak, first, because Marx describes four forms of alienation, Second, and more importantly, it reveals nothing interesting about the topic. Instead, it merely shows that you know we read something about this topic – maybe it's in your notes from class - and you think it was probably important, although you have no idea why. Moreover, this question asks only for a factual answer, requiring no interpretation. Good questions will require not just regurgitation but some sort of application of the course ideas.

Slightly, but only slightly, better question:

Compare and contrast Marx's concept of alienation with Weber's idea of disenchantment.

This is a marginal improvement over the first question. But, it has problems. First, it's not a question. While it does ask for interpretation and give some structure to the way the question should be answered, it still does not give any sense of what the theories are, why they matter, what is at stake in these theories. Importantly, too, this is the type of structure that is formulaic and tells me nothing about your grasp of sociology except that you know Marx talked about this thing called alienation and Weber talked about disenchantment.

Very good question:

According to Marx, work represents people's alienation from their species being, Yet, Freud says that civilization is only possible when our instincts are sublimated through work. Can we reconcile these seemingly contradictory viewpoints on the role of work in modern society? Please provide concrete examples to illustrate your answer. Also, make sure that you define the theoretical terms you use in your answer.

This question shows some level of basic understanding of the concepts, as well as how they relate to each other. Second, it specifies the area of interest: not some broad compare/contrast, it engages both a concrete point and a higher level of abstraction, asking for a synthetic treatment of the ideas. Last, it reveals the expected end point of the answer.

Excellent question:

Lindsay Lohan and Charlie Sheen have both been vilified in the media for various forms of deviance. Both are under criminal justice supervision. While Lindsay Lohan has spent several days in jail and months in coerced rehabilitation, has met repeatedly with a probation officer, is regularly drug tested and must wear an alcohol monitoring device, Charlie Sheen is now touring the country with relative freedom. Using at least two theorists we've read, can you explain the different institutional response to the rule breaking of Lindsay Lohan and Charlie Sheen?

Excellent question! This question engages a topical issue. It makes some reference to ideas we've discussed in class but offers a chance to interpret the example broadly. Importantly, it provides an opportunity for a "second act" in the answer. One can both address the similarities between Lohan's and Sheen's deviance construction but have a "second act" where theories are used to explain their differences.