

**huish** **HEADSTART**



**Sociology**

# A LEVEL SOCIOLOGY: HEADSTART PROJECT



Sociology is about **questioning the world around you**. It goes beyond common sense to explore *why society is organised the way it is*. In this project, you will: Learn **key sociological theories**, use **evidence and examples**, develop your **extended writing skills and** begin thinking like a **real sociologist**.

To get the most out of this project, make sure you **read every instruction carefully** and **complete the tasks in the order they are set**. Each activity has been designed to help you build **strong foundational skills** for A Level Sociology, gradually developing your confidence and understanding. By following the sequence and taking your time, you'll be setting yourself up for success—not just in this project, but in the course as a whole. Stay focused, trust the process, and give each task your best effort.

## TIME GUIDE 🕒

Stage	Task	Time
1	Building Theory Knowledge	1.5 hours
2	Using Evidence	1 hour
3	Planning Your Argument	30 minutes
4	Extended Writing	1 hour
5	Folder	N/A
Extension	“Be the Sociologist” Video Task	As much as you like

# TO WHAT EXTENT IS INEQUALITY INEVITABLE IN SOCIETY?

Inequality refers to the uneven distribution of resources, opportunities and power in society. This means that some people have: more money, better education, safer housing, more power and influence ...while others have much less.

## Examples of inequality

- Some people earn millions of pounds a year, while others struggle to afford food
- Some groups face discrimination based on gender, ethnicity or background

## Why do sociologists study inequality?

Sociologists are interested in inequality because it raises important questions:

- Is inequality fair or unfair?
- Is inequality necessary for society to function?
- Do people succeed because of hard work, or because of their background?



## Two key debates in sociology

### 1. Is inequality inevitable?

Some sociologists argue: Inequality is necessary (e.g. to reward hard work or important jobs)

Others argue: Inequality is created by power and could be reduced or eliminated

### 2. Is inequality caused by structure or choice?

Structural explanations → society shapes our opportunities (e.g. class, gender, race)

Individual explanations → people are responsible for their own success

## Thinking like a sociologist

To do well in this project, you need to move beyond “common sense” ideas like:

✗ “People are poor because they don’t work hard”

Instead, ask:  What factors might influence someone’s opportunities?  How might society shape outcomes?  How can we use specific sociologists/evidence to support our ideas?

## STAGE 1: THEORY BUILDER

As part of this project, you will explore **4 key sociological perspectives**: Functionalism, Marxism, Feminism, Interactionism. Use the suggested sources below (or your own research – online/in books) to complete the table.

- [What is Functionalism? | Introduction to A-Level Sociology](#)
- [What is Marxism? | Introduction to A-Level Sociology](#)
- [What is Feminism? | Introduction to A-Level Sociology](#)
- [What is Interactionism? | Introduction to A-Level Sociology](#)



 **Top Tip:** Avoid copying. Instead, **summarise ideas in your own words**—this helps your understanding.

Theory	Key Ideas about Society	Key Thinker(s)	Key concepts	View on inequality	Evaluation (what is good/bad about this theory?)
Functionalism					
Marxism					
Feminism					
Interactionism					

Make a bigger version of this table on paper & fill in with your answers.

## STAGE 2: EVIDENCE FINDER

Find statistics (e.g. income, gender pay gap, education). Explain what they show & why they are important to the question of: “To what extent is inequality inevitable in society?”. There are some suggested sources under the table to help you, if required.

	<b>Statistic 1 (example)</b>	<b>Statistic 2:</b>	<b>Statistic 3:</b>	<b>Statistic 4:</b>	<b>Statistic 5:</b>
Details	43% of disadvantaged pupils achieve passes in English & Maths compared to 72% of more advantaged pupils.	In the UK, women earn around 6.9% less than men in full-time work and 12.8% less overall, showing persistent inequality in earnings.			
What does it show?	Success is not purely based on effort but also on opportunity.				
Why is it important for the debate of if inequality is inevitable in society?	Inequality may not be entirely inevitable but is socially created and maintained.	<b>Make a bigger version of this table on paper &amp; fill in with your answers.</b>			

Suggested sources: *You can use your own, these suggestions are for extra support, if required.*

- [Income and wealth inequality - Nature of social and economic inequality - National 5 Modern Studies Revision - BBC Bitesize](#)
- [Inequality – Bridging the Divide | United Nations](#)
- [The gender pay gap | ActionAid UK](#)
- [Inequalities in GCSE results stubbornly persistent - here's what the data tells us | UK News | Sky News](#)
- [Opportunity Index Interactive Map - The Sutton Trust](#)
- [Statistics on Ethnicity and Crime | Reference Library | Sociology | tutor2u](#)
- [Disabled people remain underrepresented across broadcasting workforce](#)



## STAGE 3: PLANNING

Section of essay	What to do	Planning space
<b>Introduction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define inequality</li> <li>Why do sociologists study it?</li> <li>Outline the debate</li> </ul>	
<b>Paragraph 1 (Functionalism)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain one theory</li> <li>Apply it to inequality</li> <li>Use evidence</li> <li>Evaluate it</li> </ul>	
<b>Paragraph 2 (Marxism)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain one theory</li> <li>Apply it to inequality</li> <li>Use evidence</li> <li>Evaluate it</li> </ul>	
<b>Paragraph 3 (Feminism)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain one theory</li> <li>Apply it to inequality</li> <li>Use evidence</li> <li>Evaluate it</li> </ul>	
<b>Paragraph 4 (Interactionism)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain one theory</li> <li>Apply it to inequality</li> <li>Use evidence</li> <li>Evaluate it</li> </ul>	
<b>Conclusion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make a judgement Is inequality inevitable? Yes / No / To some extent</li> <li>Justify your decision making</li> </ul>	

### Strong answers will:

- Contain lots of key concepts (from stage 1) – e.g. *inequality, power, class, patriarchy, norms, conflict*
- Refer to specific evidence (from stage 2)
- Contain evaluation (from stage 1) – *strengths & limitations*
- Make a clear judgement



## ADDITIONAL HELP: MODEL ANSWER ★

We have written an example essay for a **different** debate to help guide you if you need additional support. In the introduction, we introduced you to two key debates in Sociology.

1. Is inequality inevitable? **You are answering this question.**
2. Is inequality caused by structure or choice? **We have answered this question to demonstrate what a good answer looks like (below).**

### IS INEQUALITY CAUSED BY STRUCTURE OR CHOICE?

Inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and power in society. This can be seen in differences in income, education and life chances between individuals and groups. Sociologists study inequality because it helps explain why some people are more successful than others and whether society is fair. A key debate is whether inequality is caused by social structures, such as class, gender and ethnicity, or by individual choice and effort. This essay will argue that inequality is largely caused by structural factors, although individual choice plays a limited role.

**Functionalists** argue that inequality is based on merit and individual effort. **Durkheim** suggests that society is meritocratic, meaning that individuals are rewarded based on their skills, talent and hard work. Inequality is seen as necessary to motivate people to fill important roles, such as doctors or engineers. From this perspective, inequality can be partly explained by individual choice, as people who work harder or gain more qualifications can access better opportunities. However, real-world evidence challenges this idea. For example, educational outcomes are strongly linked to social background. **Only 43% of disadvantaged pupils achieve passes in English and Maths compared to 72% of more advantaged pupils, suggesting that success is not purely based on effort but also on opportunity.** This shows that individuals do not all start from the same position, meaning choices are shaped by structural factors such as class. **Therefore, while functionalism emphasises personal responsibility, it fails to recognise the impact of unequal starting points.**

**Marxism** argues that inequality is caused by the economic structure of capitalism, where wealth and power are controlled by a small ruling class. **Marx** believed that the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat, leading to unequal life chances. From this perspective, inequality is clearly structural rather than based on individual choice. This is supported by evidence of wealth inequality in the UK. **The richest 20% of society own around 63% of the country's wealth, while the poorest 20% own just 0.5%. Additionally, the wealth gap has increased significantly, growing by around 50% in less than a decade.** These statistics suggest that inequality is deeply embedded in the economic system, meaning individuals are born into unequal positions. **However, Marxism can be criticised for being overly deterministic, as it may underestimate the role of individual agency, since some people are able to achieve upward social mobility.**

**Feminist** theory argues that inequality is caused by patriarchy, a social system in which men hold more power than women. This creates inequalities in areas such as employment, pay and status. Feminists therefore see inequality as a result of structural factors rather than individual choices. This can be seen in the gender pay gap. **In the UK, women earn around 6.9% less than men in full-time work and 12.8% less overall, showing persistent inequality in earnings.** Feminists argue that this is due to structural factors such as occupational segregation, discrimination and expectations

that women take on childcare roles. This evidence shows that inequality exists even when individuals may have similar qualifications, suggesting it cannot simply be explained by choice. However, some argue that opportunities for women have improved over time, meaning gender inequality is not fixed and can be reduced through social change.

Interactionists focus on how inequality is created and reinforced through everyday social interactions. Rather than focusing on large-scale structures, they examine how processes such as labelling affect individuals' life chances. For example, Becker argued that students labelled as "low ability" may internalise this label and achieve lower outcomes. This links to real-world inequality in education. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to succeed, partly because of how they are treated in schools. These processes show that inequality is shaped by social interactions, rather than simply by personal choice. However, a limitation of interactionism is that it focuses on small-scale interactions and may ignore wider structural factors such as class inequality or the economy. Therefore, while interactionism helps explain how inequality is reinforced, it does not fully explain its root causes.

Overall, inequality is mainly caused by social structures rather than individual choice. Evidence from wealth inequality, the gender pay gap and educational attainment all show that individuals do not have equal opportunities. While functionalists argue that inequality reflects merit and effort, this view ignores the impact of structural factors such as class, gender and social background. Therefore, inequality is best explained as being largely structural, although individual choice may have some influence within the limits set by society. This suggests that inequality is not simply the result of personal decisions but is shaped by the way society is organised.

#### Why this is a good example:

- Uses all 4 required theories & key thinkers (AO1)
- Includes real-world statistics (AO2)
- Shows clear evaluation in each paragraph (AO3)
- Ends with a clear judgement (AO3)