

TOEFL iBT® Online Prep Course | Activity 3

Reading > Lesson 1: Factual/Negative Factual Questions > Exercise 1.2

DIRECTIONS: Read the following passage and the questions about it. Decide which of the choices best answers the question, and mark the answer.

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Developing a Research Question in Sociology

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Reading

Reading > Lesson 1: Factual/Negative Factual Questions > Exercise 1.2

DIRECTIONS: Read the following passage and the questions about it. Decide which of the choices best answers the question, and mark the answer.

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As a discipline, sociology is characterized by a wealth of diverse approaches to research. Alternative theoretical frameworks and traditions reveal different aspects of a particular subject, and sociologists acknowledge that starting from a different set of assumptions might change how different social phenomena are interpreted. Given this understanding, approaches include inductive and deductive and do not follow a single pattern. Nonetheless, much of sociological research can be described roughly in a series of steps.

The first step in sociological research is to develop a research question. One source of questions is past theory or past research. This can help define a research question or guide a researcher toward an original path. A sociologist might disagree with a finding and carry out further research or develop a detailed criticism of prior research or existing theory. Criticism of past research has been an important inspiration for many investigations. Likewise, the research of other workers can often simply be refined. Questions may arise from a colleague's research that suggests an idea or seems incomplete. Similarly, the best research frequently inspires other sociologists to study a question further.

A second source is questions that derive from mass media. In this case, a researcher would work to debunk a theory about an idea or image portrayed in mass media, or to challenge typical assumptions and commonsense thinking about society and social issues.

A third source of research questions consists of past research questions. Here, the sociologist uses the same question and repeats an experiment or study but on a different group of people or in a different time or place. This is called a replication study. As an example, suppose the findings from earlier research concluded that women were more adept at learning languages than men. The sociologist might want to know if this finding is still true several years later. He or she would then replicate the original study, probably using a different group of male and female language students but asking the same questions that were presented earlier.

Last, developing a research question typically involves reviewing the existing literature on the subject. This can help the researcher shape his or her investigation. Digital technology has vastly simplified the research methods for reviewing literature such as past studies and reports. Researchers who once had to burrow through paper indexes and card catalogs to find material relevant to their studies can now scan much larger swaths of literature in far less time by using online databases. The catalogs of most major libraries in the world are accessible via the Internet, as are specialized indexes, discussion groups, and other research tools developed to assist sociological researchers. Increasingly, many journals that report new sociological research are now available online and can often be read electronically by computerized databases that allow full-text viewing on-screen. By contrast, however, although some books are now available online, most actual research is still done with paper books.









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