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# A-LEVEL

# ANTHROPOLOGY

ANTH4 Practising Anthropology: Methods and Investigations  
Report on the Examination

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2110  
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## ANTH 4

### General

The 2015 series has witnessed a marked improvement in students' performance across the demands of this paper. Most centres are preparing students well for both sections and for some questions students have appeared confident in their responses. It is a shame to see the subject being withdrawn as students are demonstrating a clear enthusiasm for anthropology within their answers.

It is clear that many students have invested a great deal of effort into their personal investigations, and having the opportunity to clarify the title of their investigation and its main aims on the examination paper has brought clarity to the focus of the students' studies.

There are still some ways in which a few students are not making full use of their anthropological knowledge in their responses to questions, which would help them to attain higher marks still.

The following guidance should be borne in mind:

- It is important that the student's project is clearly anthropological. There were one or two instances where the student's work appeared as though it might have been designed with another discipline in mind and then applied to anthropology thereafter. This should be avoided, as the methodology and methods of analysis will not be the same.
- Questions that are about fieldwork methods or problems faced should ideally feature ethnographic examples and/or detailed information from the personal investigation in order to demonstrate the skills required for marks at the higher end of the marking scheme (as should all responses). Where examples of the particular method in question are not known, comparisons may be drawn. Students should be encouraged to see anthropology as a comparative discipline and to demonstrate awareness through cross cultural, and indeed cross methodological, comparison. For example, some students who did not know an example of the use of questionnaires capably demonstrated an awareness of examples of the use of participant observation. Through a comparison of the use of the two methods they were able to attain higher marks. This is because a consideration of the advantages of participant observation brought the limitations of questionnaires to light.
- The importance of using evidence when writing about the personal investigation cannot be overstated. Some students are relying far too much on giving an overview of what they have done rather than proving what they have found out by presenting evidence.
- Centres have a responsibility to ensure that their students do not face any foreseeable harm as consequence of the topic of their personal investigation. For this reason, students should not be carrying out investigations about illegal activities or ones that pose any predictable risk to the student.
- Stronger examples of personal investigations this year made use of a mixture of research methods, particularly semi-structured or unstructured interviews and a period of (ideally participant) observation. Weaker examples relied solely on highly structured interviews or even questionnaires. Some of the strongest projects had a specific theory they wanted to test or particular ethnographies in mind with which they wished to draw comparisons.

## Positive features

### Section A

- Answers revealed a good understanding of the methodological issues related to anthropological fieldwork.
- The vast majority of students were able to make some relevant points for all of the questions.
- Some answers were very detailed and showed sound anthropological knowledge by making explicit connections to examples taken from ethnographic studies.

### Section B

- Almost all students identified their research question and the main aims of their personal investigation in the space provided.
- The best answers realised that comparisons to ethnographic studies remain important for this section of the paper and also made use of specific evidence from their personal investigation to support their responses.
- Students chose field sites that were realistic from the point of view of access and adapted their research methods as was necessary to meet the demands of their research.
- Students remained flexible and were willing to adapt the aims of their personal investigations as they went along in light of the data they encountered or their experiences of conducting the research.

## Key issues

### Section A

- There were variations in how well prepared students from different centres appeared in relation to this section, although many were very well prepared.
- Some students are not bringing ethnographic studies into their answers, which is desirable even for methodological questions.
- A handful of students are spending disproportionate amounts of time on questions compared to the quantity of marks allocated to those questions.

### Section B

- Some students forgot to draw comparisons with other ethnographic studies in addition to describing their own research findings.
- Some students made general statements about their research rather than providing detailed evidence from their personal investigation.

## **Principal Examiner's comments on responses to specific questions**

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

Most students were able to identify a number of ways in which anthropologists can affect the communities they study. Similarly, the vast majority of students realised that these could be both positive and negative and gave detailed examples of each. The weakest responses did not bring in ethnographic studies to support their answers, and some focused on just the negative or just the positive impacts. Some students were able to link their responses to anthropological concepts, such as reflexivity. Many centres had prepared their students very well for this question.

#### **Question 2**

Many students listed a number of limitations to questionnaires, explaining them but not giving examples to illustrate their explanations. This tended to mean that there was little difference in the quality of responses between students identifying two or more limitations. In this instance, simply identifying many more limitations than two would not result in the necessary improvement in the quality of the response to access the higher end of marks within the marking scheme. The answers attaining the highest marks were able to bring in examples from ethnographic studies to illustrate such issues as informants lying in response to research questions (eg Chagnon on the Yanomami about kinship ties) and the inability to build up rapport over a prolonged period of time when using questionnaires (contrasted with participant observation carried out by Malinowski amongst the Trobriand Islanders). Analysis was then demonstrated through such remarks as the inability to follow up on questionnaires and the inability to monitor body language meaning that dishonesty might be harder to identify when using questionnaires.

#### **Question 3**

A small number of students did not attempt this question. This was disappointing, as it addresses a key methodological debate within the specification and gave students the opportunity to discuss the nature of anthropological fieldwork. Some students produced excellent responses, revealing a fine and subtle awareness of the distinction between positivism and interpretivism in anthropological approaches. For some students, the distinction between these two perspectives became blurred, as they attempted to tie the perspectives exclusively to methods, rather than recognising them as approaches to methods and research. This led to mistakes such as identifying Malinowski as an interpretivist because he used participant observation, which discards Malinowski's own views about the nature of his research. At the very least, there is a debate here. The strongest responses brought in ethnographic studies, linking them to theoretical and methodological perspectives, and drew subtle conclusions about the nature of anthropological fieldwork based on a range of examples of the application of anthropology. Weaker responses made overall remarks about the nature of anthropological fieldwork without supporting the points made with evidence or examples.

## **Section B**

### **Question 4**

Students were able to justify their choice of research methods well overall, realising the different advantages brought by the methods they chose, however some students limited themselves by only providing descriptive responses, without relating this information to their personal investigation in any detail, or to other ethnographic studies. As with question two, this had an impact on the quality of some responses and the students' ability to achieve the highest marks. The strongest answers revealed the importance of the research methods chosen to the specific nature of their own personal investigation, showing how it helped their research, whilst drawing ethnographic comparisons where possible.

### **Question 5**

There were many strong responses to this essay question and some students shone in their demonstration of their knowledge of theories and ethnographic studies that had influenced their personal investigation. Once again, some students suffered from writing generally and not calling upon specific examples. For example, to say that globalization or feminism related to their study would not in itself access the higher range of marks. The students who achieved in the highest mark band were able to show how the terms used related to their personal investigation and also identified specific examples of the deployment or description of the concepts they were applying to or contrasting with their own work.

### **Question 6**

To some extent the expectations of this question were underestimated. It is important to note the significance in the marking scheme of evidence from the personal investigation for responses to questions in Section B of the paper. Too many students relied on the authority of their own declaration that they had achieved a certain aim or concluded a certain thing rather than presenting evidence of their findings in the form of detail from their personal investigation and explaining how this helped them achieve, or otherwise, their initial aim(s). Some students, however, did this very well, and strong students were able to explain how their aims changed as their study progressed, detailing the influences leading to this. Stronger answers remembered that reference to ethnographic studies remains important in response to all of the paper's questions, and thus mentioned ethnographies relevant to their personal investigation too.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

## **Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)