

## Concepts

Knowledge and understanding of the following key concepts is essential for success at AS and A2. Students' ability to apply them accurately and evaluate their own research design at A2 and the research of others at AS, is also required by the specification.

### Key concepts

Accurate knowledge and understanding of the four key concepts of reliability, validity, representativeness and generalisability is essential to accessing the top mark bands.

Use the digital resource: **Key Concepts** – Students are asked to write a definition of each of the four main concepts. They can then check their definitions with those suggested.

Students may want to develop the suggestions provided in order to ensure that they are confident of what each one actually means.

### Application of the key concepts

Students often lose marks by discussing these four important concepts in one sentence as if they were almost interchangeable. This occurs at AS and A2. The use of the key concepts in this way demonstrates confusion and will invariably prevent responses being placed in the top mark bands.

Use the digital resource – **Application of the key concepts**. Ask the students to read the extract which describes some research on the London riots of 2011 and then write an extended paragraph explaining how the key concepts can be used in relation to the research.

The hints button is provided to support the student.

The researchers interviewed 270 people directly involved in the riots in the cities of London, Manchester, Salford, Birmingham, Liverpool and Nottingham. Of these, four fifths were male and the other fifth were female.

The unstructured interviews were 'in-depth and free flowing' with the aim of collecting qualitative data about the meanings and motives the rioters attached to their actions. They were confidential interviews, conducted within three months of the riots taking place.

Almost one third of the interviewees were between 10 and 17 years of age and of the remaining two thirds, half were between 18 and 25. They were contacted via gatekeepers who lived and/or worked in the communities and some were known personally to the researchers. These gatekeepers were able to give the researchers access to the interviewees.

Approximately half of the rioters were students, just over a quarter were unemployed and half were black.

The researchers said that the interviewees came from a cross-section of the local communities involved, although only seven came from Salford and three from Nottingham. Prior to the interviews, 2.5 million tweets were analysed. An analysis of the rioters appearing in court revealed that 59% came from the poorest 20% of areas.

Interviews were conducted in places convenient to the interviewees – their homes, fast food restaurants, cafés and youth clubs. A few took place in prison, with confidentiality guaranteed to prisoners.

The second phase of the research involved unstructured interviews with 300 people who were affected by the rioters. These included 130 police officers, who were either selected by the police forces, concerned or volunteered. They were guaranteed anonymity and in the case of the Metropolitan police, a press officer from the police force was present at all of the interviews.

#### Hints

1. Did you consider ways in which the various samples were obtained and how they might affect representativeness?
2. The initial interviews were carried out in the first three months after the riots – to what extent would the same or other researchers be able to repeat those interviews and obtain the same or similar results?
3. What type of data is obtained from ‘in-depth and free flowing’ interviews? Which concept describes this type of data?
4. What difference might the guarantee of anonymity make in relation to validity?
5. What difference might the presence of a press officer make to the interviews with the officers from the metropolitan police?
6. How reliable are tweets?
7. Finally make sure that they have discussed the key concepts separately and not grouped them together.

## Other useful concepts

In addition to the key concepts, the following are useful concepts which should be learned and used appropriately.

### Use the digital resource – Other useful concepts

#### Access

The ability to get in touch with the group to be researched.

#### Attrition

The number of the sample who drop out before the research is completed.  
Particularly problematic with longitudinal research.

<b>Ethics</b>	The obligation on the part of the researcher to assure participants of confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the research at any time.
<b>Gatekeeper</b>	The person or persons who are able to give the researcher access to the individuals or groups they want to study.
<b>Hawthorne effect</b>	The extent to which those being studied may change their behaviour whilst they are being studied.
<b>Hypothesis</b>	A statement which sets out what the research will test.
<b>Interviewer effect</b>	The way/s in which those being researched will be affected by the interviewer.
<b>Objectivity</b>	An approach taken by positivists. A scientific approach which claims to be free from the values and bias of the researcher/s.
<b>Pilot study</b>	A study done before the main study in order to test the effectiveness of the research and to check for potential problems.
<b>Rapport</b>	Where the interviewer and interviewee develop an understanding, thereby ensuring the interviewee is likely to open up in response to the questions being asked.
<b>Reflexivity</b>	A strategy often used by feminists to consider the extent to which the research is working, whether they are allowing their own values and bias to affect the research and the effect the research may be having on those being researched.
<b>Researcher imposition</b>	A potential issue for all researchers. Positivists may influence the research by asking particular questions, interpretivists may influence the research by the decisions they make at the end of their research and the data they select and analyse.
<b>Sampling frame</b>	A list of the people to be researched.
<b>Target population</b>	The group to be studied.
<b>Typicality</b>	The extent to which a sampling unit is the same as or similar to the members of the target population.
<b>Value freedom</b>	The extent to which the research is objective and the researcher/s have not influenced the research.
<b>Verstehen</b>	The ability to empathise with the person/group being researched. The ability to be able to walk in their shoes.

*The above is not a definitive list.*