

Why has marriage changed?

AQA A Level Sociology 7192 • Families & Households • L018 • v1.0

CONNECT & CHECK | SHARE | PRESENT | APPLY | RECALL & REVIEW

Connect & Check → Share → Present → Apply → Recall & Review. Interpret marriage measures, explain two possible causes of change and distinguish postponement from non-marriage. Use fictional examples; no personal family disclosure is required.

Recall and connect

Missed the preparation? What is the difference between prevalence and acceptance? Prevalence measures how common a category is; acceptance concerns judgements and treatment. Why does a household snapshot miss a life course? It records a current arrangement rather than all earlier and later transitions. What must you check before interpreting a rate? The events counted, the denominator, the place, the period and any changes in definition.

Retrieve the previous lesson, then record a view you can revisit.

R1

What is the difference between prevalence and acceptance?

R2

Why does a household snapshot miss a life course?

R3

Starting judgement: “Fewer weddings must mean that people no longer value commitment.”
Explain your view.

Patterns need a denominator

Marriage counts and rates answer different questions. ONS records 231,949 marriages and civil partnerships combined in England and Wales in 2023, compared with 253,776 in 2022. These are events, not the number of married people. The opposite-sex marriage rate for men was 18.1 per 1,000 unmarried men in 2023, compared with 20.3 in 2022. A rate allows for the relevant population, but one annual comparison cannot explain motives or show whether an individual postpones marriage or never marries.

D1

Why is 231,949 not a count of marriages alone?

D2

Explain why a rate adds information to a count.

Choice within social conditions

Several mechanisms may affect marriage timing and form. Declining religious influence may weaken expectations to marry before living together. Longer education, insecure employment or housing costs may delay a desired wedding or shared home. Giddens's account of negotiated intimacy directs attention to how partners assess a relationship's value. These are explanations to test, not findings about every couple. Cohabitation and civil partnership may offer alternatives; a change in legal form does not establish the absence of commitment.

D3

How might housing costs delay a desired marriage?

D4

How could secularisation affect marriage expectations?

Test explanations fairly

Historical context matters. Pandemic disruption and delayed weddings complicate comparisons around 2020–2023, while changes in law alter who can marry. Separate those conditions from longer-term shifts in values or resources. Interviews can investigate meanings; repeated surveys can compare groups; life histories can distinguish delayed marriage from a continuing alternative. Compare people in similar circumstances and consider rival causes. No single count establishes that secularisation, individualisation or cost caused a particular person's decision.

D5

Why does an unmarried person at age 25 not demonstrate lifetime non-marriage?

D6

Propose evidence that could distinguish a cost explanation from a values explanation.

Apply the evidence

Fictional comparison: Rowan and Jules live together and hope to marry after saving for housing. Priya and Ellis regard their continuing cohabitation as a committed arrangement and do not currently plan a wedding. Morgan and Lee married in 2023 after delaying their ceremony during the pandemic. A commentator treats all three as evidence that marriage has become meaningless. The accounts are invented and illustrate distinct processes; they do not establish how common any motive is.



Observe the visible activity and identify what further evidence is needed. This photograph also appears on slide 19.

A1

Describe what is visible in the photograph. What further evidence would be needed to apply this lesson's concepts?

Apply the case evidence

Fictional comparison: Rowan and Jules live together and hope to marry after saving for housing. Priya and Ellis regard their continuing cohabitation as a committed arrangement and do not currently plan a wedding. Morgan and Lee married in 2023 after delaying their ceremony during the pandemic. A commentator treats all three as evidence that marriage has become meaningless. The accounts are invented and illustrate distinct processes; they do not establish how common any motive is.

A2

Compare the processes in Rowan and Jules's and Priya and Ellis's decisions.

A3

Why does Morgan and Lee's case complicate an annual trend?

Optional scaffold: Name the concept → select a precise case detail → explain the connection → state what the detail cannot establish. Rehearse aloud, then write independently.

Challenge and judge

Make a precise claim, connect it to evidence and state its limits.

C1

Which combination of explanations best fits the three cases, and what remains unknown?

C2

Improve: Fewer weddings prove that commitment has disappeared.

Prove and improve

Complete retrieval, then write independently for eight minutes.

P1

Explain two limitations of using annual marriage counts to understand relationship change. [6 marks]

P2

Identify the two points in your response. Improve one missing explanation or example.

P3

Return to R3. Give a qualified judgement and identify one piece of evidence still needed.

Prepare for Lesson 19

Read the three short passages and answer the preparation questions.

One form, different meanings

Cohabiting couples share an address without being married or civil partnered to each other. The same form may be understood as preparation for marriage, a preferred continuing arrangement or a practical response to housing and work. It may also follow an earlier relationship. Children may arrive before or after marriage, or within continuing cohabitation. A sociological explanation therefore asks about meanings, resources and transitions rather than treating one sequence as natural or every cohabiting relationship as temporary.

Two connected concepts

Cohabitation: Living together as a couple without being married or civil partnered to each other.
Trajectory: The path of experiences and transitions across time.

A question to bring

Give two possible meanings of the same cohabiting arrangement. It may be a stage before marriage or a preferred continuing alternative. Other accurate meanings include a practical response to current circumstances.

F1

Summarise the main idea in the first passage in one or two sentences.

F2

Define cohabitation and give an original fictional example.

F3

What evidence would you need to test the opening claim? Retrieve two current-lesson concepts tomorrow and next week.

Retrieval check for self study

Complete before the extended response. Cover the key while answering. One mark per correct answer; total 6. Correct insecure ideas and retry tomorrow. Extended writing needs teacher review.

Q1

Which meaning best fits marriage?

A A legally recognised partnership with socially defined expectations. B Not entering marriage; a current unmarried status alone cannot establish a lifetime pattern. C A rule or organisation that limits available choices.

Q2

Which meaning best fits postponement?

A A rule or organisation that limits available choices. B Moving an event to a later point in the life course. C Marriage after an earlier marriage has ended.

Q3

Which meaning best fits individualisation?

A A legally registered partnership distinct from marriage. B A legally recognised partnership with socially defined expectations. C Greater expectation that people construct their own life choices, within unequal conditions.

Q4

Which meaning best fits cohort?

A People sharing a starting event or historical period, such as birth years. B The process through which a proposed cause could produce an outcome. C Events expressed relative to a specified population and period.

Q5

A couple postpones a wedding to save for housing. What follows?

A They have rejected commitment permanently. B Their stated reason concerns timing and resources; lifetime intentions remain open. C The question can be answered from a person's appearance alone.

Q6

What can the supplied fictional case establish?

A It proves what all UK families do. B It illustrates a mechanism to examine with further evidence. C It establishes a causal law without further evidence.

Self marking key

Q1: A. Q2: B. Q3: C. Q4: A. Q5: B. Q6: B.