

Why do couples cohabit?

AQA A Level Sociology 7192 • Families & Households • L019 • v1.0

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

Connect & Check → Share → Present → Apply → Recall & Review. Explain different cohabitation pathways, interpret an estimate with uncertainty and evaluate choice within constraints. Use fictional examples; no personal family disclosure is required.

Recall and connect

Missed the preparation? Why can marriage postponement coexist with commitment? The timing of a ceremony and the value placed on a relationship are different questions. How can material conditions shape a relationship decision? Housing, work and income can change what options are feasible. What cannot be inferred from an annual count? Individual motives, lifetime pathways or a causal explanation without further evidence.

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

R1

Why can marriage postponement coexist with commitment?

R2

How can material conditions shape a relationship decision?

R3

Starting judgement: “Cohabitation means the same thing to every couple.” Explain your view.

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.

D1

Give two possible meanings of the same cohabiting arrangement.

D2

Why should childbearing and marriage not be treated as one fixed sequence?

Read estimates with care

ONS estimates that cohabiting-couple families were 17.6% of all UK families in 2025, compared with 17.0% in 2015. The difference is 0.6 percentage points, but ONS reports that this change was not statistically significant. Do not present it as conclusive evidence of growth over that interval. A cross-section also does not reveal whether the same people remain cohabiting, marry or separate. The denominator is families, not all adults, all households or all children.

D3

Calculate the change from 17.0% to 17.6% and state the denominator.

D4

Why must the significance qualification accompany that comparison?

Choice and constraint together

Individualisation suggests partners increasingly negotiate their relationships, but available choices remain unequal. Acceptance, religious expectations, employment, care and housing can affect the pathways people consider. Giddens's negotiated-intimacy argument concerns the terms on which relationships are sustained; it does not mean every cohabiting couple is equally powerful or freely choosing. Compare stated preferences with resources and later transitions. If outcomes differ between married and cohabiting groups, selection and prior circumstances must be considered before attributing the difference to legal status.

D5

How could the same stated preference be easier for one couple to act on?

D6

What design helps distinguish a stage from a continuing alternative?

Apply the evidence

Fictional life histories: Alex and Remy cohabit while planning a marriage after a training course. Sana and Kit cohabit, share parenting and say a wedding is not part of their current plans. Drew and Pat moved in together when two rents became unaffordable, while disagreeing about future marriage. Two years later their plans could change. A researcher records all three under one cohabiting category and assumes they share the same motives and future. These invented accounts are not a representative sample.



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 life histories: Alex and Remy cohabit while planning a marriage after a training course. Sana and Kit cohabit, share parenting and say a wedding is not part of their current plans. Drew and Pat moved in together when two rents became unaffordable, while disagreeing about future marriage. Two years later their plans could change. A researcher records all three under one cohabiting category and assumes they share the same motives and future. These invented accounts are not a representative sample.

A2

Use two cases to show why cohabitation is not one uniform pathway.

A3

Explain why Drew and Pat's case needs both agency and constraint.

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

How far does individualisation explain the cases?

C2

Improve: Cohabitation proves people reject family responsibilities.

Prove and improve

Complete retrieval, then write independently for eight minutes.

P1

Explain two reasons why cohabiting couples may have different future pathways. [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 20

Read the three short passages and answer the preparation questions.

Measure the event correctly

Separation is a relationship transition; divorce is a legal event and can occur later. ONS records 105,002 divorces and 959 civil partnership dissolutions in England and Wales in 2025. Its opposite-sex divorce rate was 8.4 per 1,000 opposite-sex married people, below the 1993 peak of 14.2. The rate denominator changed from age 16+ in earlier years to 18+ in 2025, limiting exact comparison. These figures do not measure all relationship breakdown, including cohabiting separations. Court processing and legal change affect when events appear, so a count is not a direct measure of when dissatisfaction began.

Two connected concepts

Separation: Partners ending their relationship or shared life; this need not involve a legal divorce.
Divorce: The legal ending of a marriage.

A question to bring

Why is separation not identical to divorce? A relationship can end without marriage having existed, or before a legal divorce occurs. The social transition and legal event are distinct.

F1

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

F2

Define separation 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 cohabitation?

A An intention or practice of maintaining a relationship or responsibility. B Living together as a couple without being married or civil partnered to each other. C Working through meanings, expectations or arrangements with others.

Q2

Which meaning best fits stage?

A Working through meanings, expectations or arrangements with others. B An assessment of whether an estimated difference is unlikely to reflect sampling variation alone. C A phase within a sequence; later phases are not guaranteed.

Q3

Which meaning best fits stigma?

A Social discredit attached to a characteristic or practice. B Having children, which need not follow one partnership sequence. C Living together as a couple without being married or civil partnered to each other.

Q4

Which meaning best fits cross-section?

A A position recognised by law, distinct from personal meanings or daily practices. B Information describing a population at one point in time. C An arrangement used instead of another available option.

Q5

Does a higher sample estimate necessarily establish a real population increase?

A Yes: any numerical difference proves a trend. B No: uncertainty and statistical significance also matter. 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 establishes a causal law without further evidence. C It illustrates a mechanism to examine with further evidence.

Self marking key

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