

Work and Occupations Comprehensive
Exam Question Bank
Revised March 1, 2016

1. How and why has the changing nature of work affected patterns of inequality, and responses to it, in advanced capitalist societies
2. Discuss the role that networks play in supply-side and demand-side explanations of gender segregation and gender inequality in the workplace. Do network accounts of these phenomena only provide examples and mechanisms of supply-side and demand side explanations or do they additionally suggest explanations that are theoretically distinct from these two approaches
3. To what extent do you agree that gender inequality is resistant to change? What types of data, analyses and/or theoretical approaches are most useful for evaluating this claim? Do other forms of inequality contribute to the persistence of gender inequality?
4. What difference has empirical and theoretical attention to the significance of gender, migration, race and ethnicity made to how sociologists study work and employment?
5. Why, and in what ways, might the sociological study of work inform the sociological study of race, ethnicity and immigration?
6. What, if anything has Marx and the Marxian tradition more generally, bequeathed to the sociology of work?
7. To what extent has 'precarious employment' changed the way work has been studied by sociologists?
8. Studies of inequality focus on individual workers, firms and labour markets. What are the implications for our understanding inequality and how it is studied across these various levels of analysis? What does one gain and/or lose? Be sure to use exemplars from the reading list to demonstrate your point?
9. The nature of work and employment has profoundly changed since the 1970s. What are three transformations that have taken place and what accounts for these transformations? What are the implications of the transformations on the regulation of work and employment as well as worker collective organizations and collective action practices?

10. Workplace policies and employer practices are frequently used to explain –or proposed to minimize – ascription-based inequality (e.g. gender inequality, ethnic/racial inequality and the intergenerational transmission of privilege or disadvantage). Discuss how factors outside of the workplace interact with employers' practices to maintain or redress ascription-based inequality.
11. What do you understand to be the major contributions, and shortcomings of labour process theory for understanding workplace behavior?
12. Control, consent and agency are central concepts in the sociology of work. Pick one of these concepts and 1) discuss its theoretical origins and development and 2) critically evaluate the usefulness of this concept for understanding the labor process of manufacturing and service sector workplaces. Be sure to discuss the relevancy of the concept you choose for understanding non-standard work.
13. Discuss and evaluate the prominent perspectives on inequality in pay and promotions across occupations, professions and organizations. What are the major theoretical debates and empirical contributions of these perspectives?
14. Over the past few decades, sociologists have heralded the rise of the knowledge economy, growth of bad jobs, and other conflicting trends in the nature of work in Canada and other industrialized nations. Based on your understanding of the theoretical and empirical work in this area, how do you make sense of these debates and understanding the changing nature of work?
15. Despite their highly skilled professional background, many of the recent cohorts of immigrants to Canada are facing uphill challenges in landing well-paid "good" jobs in the mainstream labour market. Focusing on high skill immigrants, discuss why they are increasingly struggling in the host country labour market and how the Sociology of Profession literature helps us better understand this issue.
16. Discuss the labour market experiences of migrant workers in the Global North from the standpoint of inequalities along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, and citizenship. Why are migrant workers exploited in agricultural and service industries in particular? Are there variations in the degree of labour market disadvantages by the migrant workers' gender, race/ethnicity, and citizenship?
17. Does the decline of unions exacerbate precarity of work in the Global North? Will the union renewal make work less precarious? If yes/no, why? Support your argument using the examples from the reading list.

18. Compatibilities between work and family can be discussed from micro, meso, and macro perspectives. Discuss the work-family literature with respect to each of these lenses. Pay particular attention to differential experiences across social statuses. Draw upon relevant examples from the reading list to support your answer.
19. How has the meaning of work changed with the changing economy? Discuss how the sociology of work literature on job meaning and alienation has captured these transforming relations.
20. Discuss recent theory and empirical research on the causes and consequences of gender segregation in the labour market. In your discussion of causes: pay explicit attention of the distinction between “supply side” factors causes that are exogenous to the labour market such as gender differences in socialization, skill sets, and preferences. For “demand side” factors that are endogenous to the labour market such as stereotyping, employer “tastes,” labour market characteristics, unions, etc. Identify research strategies adopted by research to measure and distinguish between the “effects” of the main causal factors; highlight key findings from recent studies of gender segregation and briefly discuss promising research avenues for future work. In your discussion of consequences, briefly summarize recent research on the effects of gender segregation on the gender pay gap.
21. Some scholars equate nonstandard jobs with bad jobs others distinguish between types of nonstandard work while still others talk about processes of casualization or feminization. Critically assess this body of scholarship. Identify theoretical and methodological strengths and weaknesses.