

- In this task, there are more headings than sections, so read the sections first. (If there were the same number of sections as headings, it would be a good idea to read the headings first.)
- For each section of the passage, read the beginning and the end. Some of the sentences are long so there is no need to read the whole sentence. Underline some key words.
- Read the headings next. If they are long, underline some key words.
- You may now already be able to match some of the headings to the sections.
- Look at the remaining sections in more detail to help you match them to the headings.

Section a

The family has often been regarded as the cornerstone of society. In premodern and modern societies alike it has been seen as the most basic unit of social organization and one which carries out vital tasks, such as socializing children.

Section b

Until the 1960s few sociologists questioned the importance or the benefits of family life. Most sociologists assumed that family life was evolving as modernity progressed, and that the changes involved made the family better suited to meeting the needs of society and of family members. A particular type of family, the nuclear family (based around a two-generation household of parents and their children), was seen as well adapted to the demands of modern societies.

Section c

From the 1960s, an increasing number of critical thinkers began to question the assumption that the family was necessarily a beneficial institution. Feminists, Marxists and critical psychologists began to highlight what they saw as some of the negative effects and the 'dark side' of family life.

In the following decades the family was not just under attack from academic writers. Social changes also seemed to be undermining traditional families. Rising divorce rates, cohabitation before marriage, increasing numbers of single-parent families and single-person households, and other trends all suggested that individuals were basing their lives less and less around conventional families.

List of headings

- i New families: beneficial or harmful?
- ii The government reaction
- iii The typical western family
- iv Political families
- v The disappearance of the traditional model

- vi Families: then and now
- vii The first criticisms of 'family'
- viii The 'happy family' model
- ix The function of families

Section d

Some have seen these changes as a symptom of greater individualism within modern societies. They have welcomed what appears to be an increasing range of choice for individuals. People no longer have to base their lives around what may be outmoded and, for many, unsuitable conventional family structures. Others, however, have complained about the changes and worried about their effect on society. Such changes are seen as both a symptom and a cause of instability and insecurity in people's lives and in society as a whole. This view has been held by traditionalists who want a return to the ideal of the nuclear family. For them, many of society's problems are a result of increased family instability.

Section e

Alongside these developments in society and sociology, family life has become a topic of political debate. Politicians have become somewhat more willing to comment on families. Sometimes they have devised policies to try to deal with perceived problems surrounding the family. In short, the family has come to be seen as more problematic than it was in the past. The controversies that have come to surround families and households are the subject of this chapter.

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Section a _____

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