

GAC028 Social Science III: Research Skills and Global Issues

GAC Social Science

What this module is, and how it is marked

GAC028 is the Level III social science module: global issues, and the research methods used to investigate them. Three units only, so each is covered in depth.

Assessment is a **research project** on a global issue, a **presentation** where you lead a discussion, a **report** written to academic conventions, and coursework.

- The report is marked on **method and evidence**, not on the strength of your feelings about the issue.
- △ Keep to issues with good data and low political temperature — urbanisation, public health, education access, water, food systems, energy. The method is the assessment.

Introduction to global issues

- A **global issue** 全球性议题 crosses borders and cannot be solved by one country alone.
- Most have the same structure: a **shared resource** 共有资源, an **externality** 外部性 where the cost falls on someone other than the decision-maker, and a **collective action problem** 集体行动问题 where everyone benefits from a solution nobody wants to pay for.
- **Development** 发展 is measured by more than income: health, education and inequality all appear in composite indicators.
- Naming the structure is worth more than listing examples, because it transfers to an issue you have not studied.

Social research methodology

- **Quantitative** methods measure how much and how many; **qualitative** methods explain how and why.
- **Mixed methods** 混合方法 use both, and most good projects at this level do.
- **Sampling** 抽样 decides what your result describes. A convenience sample describes the people who were convenient.
- **Validity** and **reliability** apply here exactly as in GAC014: measuring the right thing, and measuring it consistently.

- **Research ethics** 研究伦理 are marked: informed consent, anonymity, the right to withdraw, and no harm.

Worked example. A project on food waste in a school canteen.

Quantitative: weigh what is thrown away, by day and by dish, for two weeks.

Qualitative: interview ten students about why they left food.

Mixed: the weights say which dishes and which days; the interviews say why — portion size, a short lunch break, a dish nobody chose. Neither alone supports a recommendation; together they do, and the recommendation is what the report is for.

Report writing skills

- The structure is fixed and marked: **abstract** 摘要, introduction, method, findings, discussion, conclusion, references.
- The **method** section must let a reader repeat your study. Vagueness there is not a style problem, it is a validity problem.
- **Findings** report what you found; the **discussion** says what it means and what it cannot show. Mixing the two is the commonest structural error.
- State **limitations** explicitly. A report that names its own weaknesses is trusted more, not less — and examiners reward it because it shows you understand your own method.
- **Reference** everything, in one consistent style, as in GAC015.