Born Into Change

How birth cohorts help researchers study social experience

SS24.S.5a "Explain the value of utilizing birth cohorts as a research device."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons birth cohorts are useful, and circle one limit of comparing them. Number the two groups interviewed at age 18 so you can find them again.

Two First Job Searches

1 Imagine that researchers in Harbor City want to study how young people find their first jobs. They interview people born in 2002 who turned 18 in 2020, then examine interviews with people born in 2006 who turned 18 in 2024. Each group is a birth cohort, people born during the same period. The researchers ask about online applications, help from family, and interviews with employers. The 2002 group faced a job market affected by the COVID-19 pandemic at age 18. Grouping people by birth year helps researchers connect their answers to the events they encountered while growing up.

2 Why compare the groups when each was 18? People at very different ages may search for work in different ways simply because they have different experience. Comparing both cohorts at the same age reduces that problem. Researchers might also interview members of the 2002 cohort again at age 22. Those later answers could show how job-search methods changed as that group grew older. Together, these comparisons help researchers ask whether a pattern is linked to age or to the circumstances a group encountered. A birth cohort gives them a way to organize those questions.

3 The comparison cannot prove that birth year caused any difference. A change between the age-18 interviews might reflect conditions in 2020 and 2024, not a lasting trait of either cohort. People within one cohort can also have very different resources, such as reliable internet access or family connections. Researchers should ask about those differences rather than treat everyone born in one year as alike. Even with these limits, birth cohorts are valuable: they let researchers compare people at similar life stages and investigate how shared historical conditions may shape social experiences.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why do the researchers group people by birth year instead of looking only at their interview answers?

2. What makes comparing the two groups at age 18 more useful than comparing them at different ages?

3. How could interviewing the 2002 cohort again at age 22 help the researchers?

4. Why would a difference between the two age-18 groups not prove that birth year caused it?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Choose a social habit or opportunity other than finding a job. Propose two birth cohorts to compare at the same age in different years, explain what the comparison could help you investigate, and name one limit of your plan.

ANSWER KEY

Born Into Change

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.S.5a

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons birth cohorts are useful, and circle one limit of comparing them. Number the two groups interviewed at age 18 so you can find them again. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why do the researchers group people by birth year instead of looking only at their interview answers?	**Grouping by birth year lets researchers connect answers to events people encountered while growing up.**
2	What makes comparing the two groups at age 18 more useful than comparing them at different ages?	**It reduces the chance that a difference in job-search methods is simply due to their different ages or levels of experience.**
3	How could interviewing the 2002 cohort again at age 22 help the researchers?	**It could show how job-search methods changed as members of that cohort grew older.**
4	Why would a difference between the two age-18 groups not prove that birth year caused it?	**Conditions in 2020 and 2024 differed, and people within each cohort had different resources. Either could help explain a difference.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would compare how people born in 1998 got local news at age 16 in 2014 with how people born in 2008 got local news at age 16 in 2024. The comparison could help me investigate whether teens growing up with different media options used different news sources. Any difference might reflect the news sources available in each year, not a lasting trait of either cohort.

Accept any feasible comparison of two birth cohorts at the same age in different years. The response should explain the value of the comparison and identify a plausible limit, such as changing conditions or differences within a cohort.