

# Schott's Almanac of Class

In the third of an occasional series exploring some of the more curious aspects of British life and society, **Ben Schott** has teamed up with Ipsos MORI to examine class, rank, and social mobility.

## CLASS IDENTIFICATION

Which of these best describes you, working class or middle class?

	Work	Mid	?
All	52	44	4
Men	54	43	3
Women	51	44	5
Age: 16-34	50	46	4
· 35-54	57	40	3
· 55+	50	46	4
Parents: wk/class	70	27	3
· middle class	16	82	2

Since 1981, the number identifying themselves as working class has fallen by 11%, while those calling themselves middle class has grown by 16%:

Date	% Working class	% Middle class†	% ?
May 1981	63	28	9
Aug 1991	61	30	9
Mar 2008	52	44	4

[† In 1991 and 1981, asked as "middle/upper class"]

## ROMANCE

Have you ever been in a romantic relationship with someone of a different class to yourself?

	Y	N	?
All	34	63	3
Age: 16-34	39	60	1
· 35-54	40	58	2
· 55+	25	70	5
Class: working	27	71	2
· middle	43	54	3
Radio 4 listener	39	58	3
· non-listener	30	68	2

Of those that said yes [=363]: Did you find the class difference to be...

How problematic	All	♂	♀
Very	5	6	4
Fairly	12	7	17
Not much	40	38	43
Not at all	42	48	35
Don't know	1	0	1

## ACTIVITIES & CLASS

Who is most likely to engage in each of these activities, a working-class person, a middle-class person, or an upper-class person?

Activity	%	Working	Middle	Upper	Any	d/k
Watch Coronation Street	45	11	<1/2	40	4	
Have an allotment	52	22	2	20	4	
Holiday in Spain	37	16	4	41	2	
Eat peas with a knife	35	6	13	25	21	
Recycle	9	38	2	48	3	
Watch a nature programme	6	34	4	53	3	
Be a vegetarian	3	39	6	49	3	
Go to a museum	4	46	8	39	2	
Eat in front of the television	48	9	1	40	2	
Take the bus	62	9	<1/2	26	3	
Go to university	3	40	12	44	1	
Watch the news regularly	8	33	4	53	2	
Own designer clothes	7	25	30	35	3	
Go to football matches	42	12	1	42	3	
Buy organic food	2	52	19	25	2	
Go to the opera	1	23	61	13	2	
Play rugby	9	39	14	37	1	
Play cricket	3	41	19	35	2	

## SUPERMARKETS

Waitrose is the poshest supermarket: 30% of us think the chain is most likely to be used by the upper class, and only 5% by the working class. In comparison, Tesco's success may be linked to its broad class appeal: 36% of us think any class would shop there. Jean Anth elme Brillat-Savarin's promise, "Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are", could be rephrased: "Tell me where you shop for food, and I will tell you your class".

Class most likely to use	% Working	Middle	Upper	Any	d/k
ASDA	50	18	1	28	3
Iceland	63	12	<1/2	18	7
LIDL	70	7	1	14	8
Morrisons/Safeway	40	26	1	29	4
Sainsbury's	8	53	10	27	2
Somerfield	45	22	1	24	8
Tesco	31	30	1	36	2
Waitrose	5	39	30	15	11

## LAVATORY vs TOILET

46% of us think that "toilet" is the more polite usage, compared to 36% who think "lavatory" more civil. Yet, 79% say the word they actually use most often is "toilet", and only 5% often use the word "lavatory", as below:

Which word do you think is the more polite usage?		Which word do you use more often?	
TOILET	LAVATORY	LAVATORY	TOILET
46	36	5	79
31	55	5	85
39	38	4	82
64	18	6	71
47	38	4	83
45	33	6	75
51	36	4	85
43	35	6	75
44	36	6	76
47	31	6	74
45	40	4	83
50	35	5	82
39	36	8	69

In 1954, the linguist Professor Alan Ross lanced his taxonomical pin through the thorax of class distinction in British speech. In his essay "Linguistic class-indicators in present-day English", Ross proposed that the line dividing the upper class from the rest could be drawn, among other things, by certain specific words which were either upper class ("U") or not ("non-U"). For example, *glass* was U whereas *mirror* was non-U; *What?* was U and *Pardon?* was non-U; and, when playing cards, *knave* was U and *jack* non-U. Many of these distinctions (which Nancy Mitford popularised) have since fallen away. Yet, perhaps the most lasting of these distinctions is between the U usage of *lavatory* and the non-U *toilet*. [Totals do not add to 100% because of options like "it depends", "both", "don't know", &c.]

## ATTITUDES TO CLASS OVER TIME

Despite some of the data on this page, a comparison of attitudes in 1991 and 2008 shows that we may increasingly be perceiving class as less ossified:

% agreeing with the statement	1991	2008	±%
<i>There will never be a "classless society" in Britain</i>	79	68	-11
<i>Britain has too many barriers based on social class</i>	76	55	-21
<i>You are much more likely to get to the top in this country if you've been to a private school</i>	69	63	-6
<i>If you want to get ahead it is important to talk with the right accent</i>	59	44	-15
<i>In this country the best people get to the top whatever start they've had in life</i>	49	49	0
<i>It is easy for people to move up from one social class to another</i>	37	35	-2
<i>I would be happier if I belonged to a different class</i>	9	4	-5

Ipsos MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,054 adults in Britain aged 16+. Interviews were conducted by telephone on March 7-9, 2008. Data are weighted to match the profile of the population. BEN SCHOTT is the author of *Schott's Almanac*. [www.benschott.com](http://www.benschott.com)

## CLASS SYSTEM?

Is there a class system in Britain?

	Y	N	?
All	88	10	2
Age: 16-34	85	12	3
· 35-54	89	8	3
· 55+	88	11	1
Parents: wk/class	89	8	3
· middle class	85	14	1
Own car &c.	81	15	4
· do not	89	9	2

## RIGIDITY

Below are the percentages of those who think that the class system has become more rigid...

Since World War Two	%	In the last 10 years
28	All	31
27	Men	30
29	Women	32
30	Vote: Labour	31
23	· Conservative	29
18	· Lib Dem	22
37	Read: tabloid	39
21	· broadsheet	30
37	Class: working	37
18	· middle	25
33	Parents: wk/class	34
19	· middle class	26
32	Region: North	35
25	· South	30
27	· Midlands	30

## RADIO 4

How often, if at all, do you ever listen to BBC Radio 4?

	all or some of the time	rarely or never
All	30	70
Male	33	67
Female	28	72
Age: 16-34	20	80
· 35-54	28	72
· 55+	41	59
Class: working	21	79
· middle	42	58
Read: tabloid	23	77
· broadsheet	54	46
Region: North	27	73
· South	34	66
· Midlands	30	70

Of all those who have ever listened [=529]: To what extent do you agree or disagree that Radio 4 is too middle class?

	All	♂	♀
AGREE	24	27	23
· strongly agree	4	7	2
· tend to agree	20	20	21
Neither	11	10	13
DISAGREE	53	55	50
· tend to disagree	33	30	35
· strongly disagree	20	25	15
Don't know	11	9	14

## DECEPTION

16% of us have changed the way we behave to appear to be from a different class; 4% have pretended to belong to a higher class; 2% to a lower class; and 10% have varied their pretence by circumstance.

Some people alter the way they behave in certain situations to make it appear as if they are in a different class. Have you ever done this?

	Y	N	?
All	16	84	<1/2
Men	17	83	<1/2
Women	14	85	1
Age: 16-34	20	79	1
· 35-54	19	81	1
· 55+	9	91	1
Class: working	14	86	<1/2
· middle	19	81	0

## DISCOMFORT

38% of us have felt discomfort at least once when dealing with people from another class.

How often, if at all, do you feel uncomfortable when dealing with people of a different class to you?

	all of the time	some of the time	rarely	never
All	2	12	24	62
Men	1	11	21	66
Women	2	12	27	59
Age: 16-34	3	16	22	58
· 35-54	1	7	27	65
· 55+	2	12	23	63
Radio 4 listener	1	11	28	60
· non-listener	2	12	20	64
Own car &c.	1	10	24	64
· do not	5	19	22	54

[Don't knows excluded for space]

## SPEECH

How often, if at all, do you think that other people can tell what class you are by the way you speak?

	all of the time	some of the time	rarely	never
All	27	39	13	12
Male	27	41	12	12
Female	26	38	15	13
Age: 16-34	25	45	14	10
· 35-54	25	44	13	12
· 55+	29	30	14	15

[Don't knows excluded for space]

times2

In times2 today: Is class a matter of taste or a matter of money?