

What UPSC actually looks for in you-1

Friends, you study, and you study with all your heart. You study and memorise everything that you possibly can, until there is nothing left to study. But unfortunately, you are still not able to achieve success. Why does this happen?

It is to provide an answer to this and to solve your queries that I have decided to write this long article on ‘What UPSC actually looks for in you?’ If you are aware of what are the expectations of the institution that has to select you, then you can ensure your success. You will continue to study what you were studying before, it is just that you will change the way in which you were studying. This is exactly what is required. Since this important article is a long one, I have divided it into two parts. You will study the second and the last part of the article in the next issue of this magazine.

So let me tell you the secrets to being successful in IAS by revealing what UPSC is looking for in the candidates. There has to be some criteria to choose. It is not just UPSC but all countries have come up with their own methods to select candidates for administrative services. Nearly all of these methods include exams and interviews. UPSC has also modified the selection criteria according to its needs and settled upon a three-stage selection process. You already know about this. You must ask this question now - how will UPSC assess you for everything that is required in an administrative officer through this exam? If this question is occurring to you then it is a good sign that you have the potential to be an IAS officer.

It is obvious that if you opt for history and become a district collector you will not be asked to write a history of the district. If you take geography, you will not have to produce a map of the district when you are the District Magistrate. Your vast reserves of general knowledge will not be of much use once you start working. So if all this is not required later, why does UPSC make us toil over it?

The answer is simple – it is through these methods only that UPSC tests your mind, thoughts and character. This is similar to how before buying a new pot; you move it with your fingers to check it. If you do not like the UPSC pattern, then I would like you to suggest another improved pattern which is fool-proof with no errors. This is not just difficult but almost impossible. You may hold any opinion about the UPSC selection process but as of now you have to say that whatever it is, howsoever it is, you have to tackle the current scenario and prove that you are IAS material. It is good for you to learn what exactly UPSC is expecting from you in this three-stage exam. It will help you better understand what is expected of you in the preliminary exam, in the mains and in the interview. This will also help you prepare better, do not doubt me.

Preliminary exam

Let us take a look at the qualities that UPSC tests you for in this entrance exam for civil services. Let us study its structure as mentioned below –

- a) It includes a general knowledge paper.
- b) It includes a CSAT paper.
- c) It asks objective-type questions.
- d) The given options are complex, long and difficult.

e) You have to solve almost 80 to 100 questions in 120 minutes.

Clarity of mind

If you have ever taken the UPSC exam (if you haven't, I strongly suggest you go through the unsolved papers of the preliminary exam before reading any further) you must have felt 'I have read about this somewhere' while attempting the questions. 'I know the question, I'm familiar with it' this is what you think but still answer incorrectly. This is the biggest challenge posed by the preliminary exam. You read a question and you feel you have read this somewhere. But when you read the options you have to choose from to answer, you get confused. In most cases, all the options contain some truth in them, they all seem correct. The options evaluate how clear you are about your subject. They are written in such a manner so as to confuse you.

So what do you do in this situation? Here, I would just like to mention that if your hold on the subject is not strong enough, then you will have great difficulty in choosing the correct answer from the given options. It is obvious then that if your mind is clear about the subject, you will be able to choose the answer faster and accurately. Do you not think that someone who the government is entrusting with the responsibility of the society should have a mind which is very clear on its thoughts? If the administrator has a muddled mind how will he take a just and lucid decision?

A related issue here is the 'solidity' of the mind. When you start solving CSAT or general knowledge questions, you will be fine initially, but after solving half the questions you will feel like your mind is wandering and stumbling. The given options start messing in your mind in the same way that woollen balls get entangled with each other. The time limit is fixed at two hours which pressurises the mind. Half the questions remain unsolved, but time is running out. These thoughts also stress your mind. If your mind is not strong and solid, you will panic. If this happens then your chances of answering incorrectly will increase and you will have to exit in the first stage of the competition. To answer the questions in a balanced manner, it is necessary that you have a strong and solid mind.

Speed of mind

As you are well aware, you get 120 minutes to solve around 100 questions of general reasoning and another 80 of CSAT. This means you have from a quarter to half a minute for each question. I have a theory that may not be applicable to general reasoning but it is definitely valid for CSAT. The theory is that students can increase their scores by one and a half percent compared to their previous scores if instead of two hours they were given three to four hours to write the exam. If they get more time to think and calculate they will be able to get more correct answers.

But if such a thing is done how would a good mind be selected? If there is ample time then it will bring all minds to the same level. A mind that answers fast and calculates with speed is considered great. The question asked for entry in 'Kaun Banega Maha Crorepati' is so easy that nine out of 10 people can answer it correctly. They choose the one who answers before all others. An administrator has to take big decisions. In some situations, they have to take important decisions immediately. There is no time to think and evaluate. If a weak mind is appointed in this position, he will take slow decisions. You must have heard the adage, 'what's the use of rain after the crops have dried.'

The CSAT exam includes questions related to mathematics, some questions are about relationships, and some are about locations and directions. These questions are written in a way that after reading them your mind is in a state of chaos. You wonder what you have read, what the question is asking and how you should begin answering it. The time limit also looms large like a threat. There are brains that are fast enough to catch the

answer immediately. They know the tricks and the formulas. They apply the required trick and formula to the question and come to the answer. It is believed that faster a mind can calculate, the greater it is. Therefore, this was one reason to start CSAT exam.

Memory

A country's memory is etched in its history and a person's memory of the past is stored in his brain. How well you know your subject is very important, especially when it comes to the general reasoning paper. You have to go deeper than the information and knowledge of the subject and understand its very essence. Your memory plays an important role here. Around one-third of questions are those that you won't be able to solve if you do not have a strong memory. This is especially true of current events.

The memory required here is far beyond the average memory. The kind of memory required here should be as strong as a footballer who is surrounded by five rivals but still manages to score a goal. So the memory that you need should be able to sort out what it requires even in the foggiest situations.

Focus

CSAT paper includes comprehension questions. Truly speaking, looking at the level of civil services exam, these questions seem sort of amusing. I have seen many students take these questions lightly. But if you take it seriously, you will realise what a challenge these comprehensions pose to your mind. The biggest challenge is that of focus.

You read the comprehension and you are asked three to four multiple choice questions based on it. When you read the options, you face two major issues. The first is that all the options you have to choose from seem to be correct. They are correct. But the question is which option is related to what you have studied in the comprehension. You will only be able to choose the correct answer if you have remained focused while reading the comprehension.

The second problem is how much of your mind could you control. You will notice that most of the answers that are given are correct if viewed from the perspective of general knowledge. In fact if it is not compulsory to answer keeping the comprehension in mind, the option you decided on the basis of general knowledge is probably a better match. So when you are deciding upon an answer based on the comprehension, your general knowledge will invade your mind. So you face the challenge of ignoring this invasion and keep your mind from drifting.

Concentration is the speciality of a high-ranking officer's mind. If he reads something and understands something else, then such a mind will also do something completely different. Just imagine as a collector, you read a two-page note in a file. You have to inform your senior, a commissioner or a minister about it. You may have to sum up the two-page information in just a paragraph. Do you think a mind which is not focused can do so?

Decision-making power

The challenge of choosing the correct answer from so many confusing ones is linked to your decision-making power. An administrator's success depends on how many correct decisions he could take in his life. Although every person's success depends on the decisions he took, in the case of an administrator this becomes even more important. This is because a common man's decision will only affect him personally but an

administrator's decision can affect the country and its people. Keeping this in mind, the CSAT paper has questions related to decision-making.

In such questions, none of the answers you have to choose from is wrong. This does not mean all the options are correct. It means that there is one option which is more apt than others. Obviously, only the best answer can generate best results.

The questions associated with decision-making that are asked in civil services also have to do with a person's character, his moral values, his life-values, his understanding and his personality. Any decision that a candidate takes will be influenced by all these factors. In this scenario, your answer is representative of your whole personality.

Awareness

The questions asked in the general knowledge paper in the preliminary exam are related to current events which may have happened in the previous year or up to a month ago. What is the need for knowing about these current events as they are not directly related to the administrator? Actually this is a wrong belief. It is very important that an administrator be aware of all the current events. If an administrator is not aware of the times, the requirements of the times, and the technology and means available, he will not be able to make a good decision. If you need to make a financial decision, you should be aware of the current economic scenario. If you have to make a developmental decision, you should know about the wants and needs of the society. You also need to know how all this would be possible.

This is the reason that not just preliminary exams but even mains have four question papers related to general knowledge. It would not be wrong to say that general knowledge is the backbone of IAS preparation. It is not just the responsibility of an administrator but also that of a citizen to be well-informed of his times. If someone is not doing so, he does not deserve to be an IAS. He also does not have a right to be called a responsible and educated citizen.

There is another thing here, a good knowledge of current events shows that your mind is sharp and stable. It shows that you absorb things that happen around you and retain them. Undoubtedly, such a mind would have a store of information and knowledge that he could use as raw material while taking a decision. Such a mind would definitely have power and a unique viewpoint.

An awareness of your times signifies that your mind is continuously working and it is progressive. It is a psychological fact that a mind which is progressive can better interpret and analyse situations and incidents. Such a mind is rational and being rational it is also prudent. For an administrator it is not just necessary to possess such a mind, but it is also his greatest asset.

To be continued...