

What UPSC actually looks for in you-2

My dear friends, in the last article I decoded the nature of civil services' preliminary exam for you while telling you what UPSC expects from you. This is the second and also the last part of the article. This part will highlight things you need to know about the main paper and the interview. I just want to clear something before we begin. I do not want you to think that I'm exaggerating things. The things I have to tell you have been mentioned in the syllabus, even though they may be brief and mostly indicative. I have tried to explain these things in detail here so that you can do your IAS preparation systematically and scientifically. So let us start then.

I have no hesitation in saying this and I want to convince you too that the correct test of your IAS potential is judged by the main exam. It is true that you would not reach this level without clearing the preliminary exam but the true assessment of your knowledge, understanding, wit etc is at this level only. It has been observed that sometimes students who clear the preliminary exam cannot even score 25 percent in the main exam.

On the other hand there are students who fear the preliminary exam but are well-prepared for the main exam. I'm discussing this fact here so that you can understand the difference between the two exams. This will help you approach your studies in a scientific manner and you can mould your brain and personality accordingly. Now we shall see what expectations UPSC has from you in the main paper.

We can perhaps conclude that while the preliminary exam tests for qualified minds, the main paper tests for qualified thoughts. To find the correct option in the given amount of time is the most difficult challenge posed by the preliminary exam. This requires a clear and stable mind. In the main paper there are no multiple-choice questions, whatever you write here is the content of your own mind. There are no ready-made answers. You have to write your own answers. When you write your answers some of your qualities and thoughts will subconsciously enter your answer sheet and will represent you in front of the examiner to see.

The nature of the main exam is as follows –

- There are four question papers on general studies. There is also a paper on ethics, integrity and aptitude. There are two optional papers too.
- There is a paper on essay-writing.
- There is a paper on English language and Hindi language.
- All the questions are descriptive.
- There are hardly any straight-forward questions.
- The questions are such that they allow you to express your thoughts on the matter.
- There is a word limit on questions on general studies.

Now based on the nature and structure of these questions we will highlight the qualities UPSC expects you to possess.

Analytical ability

Your ability to memorise will not work here. The questions asked in the exam are such that you can't write a memorised answer. The facts you have memorised will be useful so far as to provide content for your analysis. Whatever you have studied will be the raw material to feed your answer just like you need potatoes, cabbage, chillies, salt and spices to make vegetable curry. You cannot make a curry simply by mixing the vegetables; you also have to cook them. This applies to the main paper too.

I would again insist that before you read any further, you should go through the unsolved papers of the main exam. When you see the questions, you will realise that every question requires an analysis. The questions will test how well you understood the things you have studied and how well you can analyse them.

The hallmark of a good mind is that it can better analyse things, such a mind is more productive. Your mind is exercising when it is analysing things. Just like exercise can make your body fit and healthy, analysis can make your mind healthy and useful. We need administrators with such minds.

Originality

An analytical ability is not enough. You read the questions in the unsolved papers again. You will notice that most questions end with 'give a critical analysis' or 'what steps should be taken' etc. You have read the subject and you have the general knowledge. You can also analyse the topics. Whatever you have studied and understood indicates the awareness of your mind. You can analyse what you have studied that hints at the brightness and productivity of your mind. But when you express your thoughts about the subject it reveals what exactly your productive mind has produced. This tests the originality of your mind. This shows what and how your mind thinks on a certain subject. Do not forget that when we think of something which is original and present our thoughts, it unveils our entire personality.

Many students dismiss the part of the question which says 'you'. They think it is just a small part of the question so it is not important. Also, they discover that it is not an easy thing to answer this. They do not want to spend time brainstorming over it. Since they had formed no opinions on the topic, they find it difficult to write anything here and they lose. Consequently, UPSC is not able to find the minds it was searching for.

Society continues to exist like it always has and things keep repeating themselves. But a change is brought about when someone inspired by thoughts decides to do something new. Doing something new is the contribution of an administrator to the society and the country. If he is unable to do so, he is simply confined to the role of the manager who only keeps on organising things. Originality is an important thing in every aspect of life.

Language proficiency

Civil services included an essay-writing paper before 1979. It was discontinued for a decade. It was then re-introduced for various reasons. First was to test a student's thoughts on any given topic. Secondly, it tested the language proficiency and style of the candidate. Essay-writing is a paper that you can't really prepare for. It is sort of a self-writing exercise and there is no student who does not attempt the essay. They may choose their topics and write differently, but all students write the essay.

It is the simplest paper but also full of challenges. The challenge is that this paper is more of a science and less art. It is clear that when a subject comes under the category of art, its boundaries get blurred and the outcome depends on the person. When you need to answer a general knowledge question, the facts are clear and in front of you and to answer questions on optional subjects, you have books. But these things are not available for the essay-writing paper. Here the role of a writer is that of a bee which has to suck nectar from many flowers to create honey. Similarly, to write an essay the writer collects his wisdom from many sources. This reveals how deep the writer's analysis is, how well is his understanding of facts and how he uses the facts to his advantage.

The most important of all is the presentation and expression. Remember, essays are not written for intellectuals, they are for average readers. So the challenge while writing an essay is how to write a piece that the common

reader can understand, even if the topic of the essay is tough or related to science. If the essay is too intellectual, it will come across as an article and not an essay. If it is too loosely written, instead of an essay it will come across as general talk. So the question is how should the essay be presented? If the strings of a sitar are pulled too tight, it will break and if they are left loose there would not be good music.

Now let us address the question of language. As an administrator, you will deal with all kinds of people. Some of them will be illiterate. They will come from different backgrounds. Whichever department you belong to, your role will be that of a leader who guides others. If your language is not simple, if it lacks sympathy, it will fail to make an impression and you will not be able to govern people effectively. The essay you write reveals whether you have this quality.

Brevity

I feel that if the word limit is removed from the questions asked in general studies paper, it would become much easier for students to answer it. But something which is easy for one person would become easy for everyone else too. It will then become difficult to select the best. The purpose of word limit is to test which brain has the ability to control and express its thoughts within the limits that it has been asked to. This ability can prove how efficiently we can control our thoughts.

To follow the word limit and give the best possible answer is not easy unless the person has thoroughly imbibed the subject. This strategy helps eliminate those who just memorise everything. It also proves that you have understood the topic you are writing on.

Your ability to say what you need to within the word limit reveals your unique style of expression. It is like the ability to drive safely in the narrow, winding roads in the hills. You are in total control of the steering of your car because you know that one mistake will cause the car to fall in the gorge.

When you actually get into civil services, you will have to orally inform your superiors about many things every day. You will also have to submit files with your comments. Too much talk and long comments are the products of a weak and disillusioned mind. A man who can say what he intends to in brief is considered to be an able administrator. This is what the word limit on questions tries to test.

Test of Integrity

Whether we talk about an administrator, a politician, a common man, a farmer, a labourer or an average citizen, whatever they do in their lives it depends on their 'integrity'. Keeping this in mind, a voluntary paper on ethics, integrity and aptitude was introduced in 2013. If you have seen the unsolved papers, you must have felt that the paper was based on case studies.

In the paper, you are given a situation and your viewpoint towards it is judged. There are many ways to tackle a situation and your approach is revealed in your answer and you get marked accordingly. Consequently, there is a greater chance of selection of candidates who potentially possess more integrity and a positive attitude.

Interview

This is a selection criterion that is used in most services and employed worldwide. It is possible that there would be no written test for entry into some services but it is not possible that there would be no interview. Mostly,

candidates for top posts are selected just on the basis of interviews. You can understand the importance of interviews from this.

In the first two stages of civil services your assessment is sort of oblique. In the written exam, many people get eliminated so only the best minds get to the interview stage. It is a proven fact that it is not necessary that a person who possesses a stable and clear mind, lucid and prudent thoughts, and whose integrity is beyond doubt, would also have a dynamic personality. A dynamic personality means someone who has leadership qualities. Such a personality can inspire people, and one who harbours a desire to change himself and displays polite and exemplary behaviour. You can categorise these as behavioural qualities as they are revealed from how you behave with other people.

An interview tests you for these qualities. Even though an interview lasts only for half an hour, the time is enough for the experienced and alert interviewers to see through you as if they are X-raying you. Your body language, the way you talk, the way you stand and sit, your debating skills, the liveliness of your replies to questions asked, how you put forth your views and opinions can reveal whether you should be made an administrator. If your personality fails to make an impression, it does not matter how intelligent you are, you will not be successful.

My friends, in this chapter I have discussed with you the qualities UPSC is searching for in a candidate. This has not just been my experience but many other candidates have gone through this. These experiences have helped me lead many students to success. It is my belief that IAS preparation is not such that only books would suffice. Books are required but they are not sufficient. This is a psychological journey; you need to be mentally prepared. So when you understand these psychological facts, your style of writing answers and the way you study will change for the better.

I know that the last two articles you read on this topic have not made you very happy because they contained no information about what could be asked in the exam. Maybe, you are accusing me of rambling and are angry with me. But honestly, it is not my fault, this is how the preparation is suppose to be done and I can do nothing about it. But know this that after a year when you consider these articles, you will not think the way you are thinking right now. Your style of studying and thinking would have changed gradually. This is what I want for you, don't you want the same?

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