

Fundamentals of Main examination: Analytical ability-3

I believe that at least now you won't have any doubt regarding the requirement that "If I want to qualify in Civil service, so I have to, as its first and biggest challenge, develop analytical ability. I don't have an alternative." So come, let's discuss what needs to be done for this.

We need to understand that analytic ability is not an element in itself but a combination of various elements. In terms of chemistry you can refer to it as a compound which is made of two or more elements. Thus, it will be wrong to think that one can become an expert in this ability by following just one method. For this you have to work on different levels, corners and many directions. Then only you can gain expertise in it. And to be honest the most important feature of analytical ability, which also makes it more valuable, is that it is not so simple and easy like memorizing something and speaking it fluently when the need be. Thus, before discussing how to analyze something, we need to discuss how we can develop such analytical skills.

How to develop analytical ability

There is no doubt that this is basically a mental process. As children, we all have roughly the same mental abilities. However, it changes in adulthood because of education received, experience and observation. People of the same age group show such different levels of mental ability that can be quite hard to believe. But it is a fact. If we separate observation and experience, then definitely the difference behind the mental ability of two people is explained by the education they received. This link of mental ability and education is not just about earning a degree but also depends on- (1) The institute one studied from (2) how one received one's education and (3) how honestly one has studied. Here, honesty means sincerity, and not against fraud.

Previously, I divided our education till graduation into three stages and explained the objective of each. The third stage I mentioned is that of developing analytical ability. Now that we are talking about gaining expertise in this ability, we have to go back to those three stages. Yes, it is true that the level and method of studying in these three stages won't be the same, as they were when we started our education. The books and the subjects, however, may be the same. Hope you understand what I am trying to say. Here, I'm referring to the method of studying. So let's discuss what is to be studied and how.

Studying

The difficulty is that you have already studied, but you have not made what you learnt a part of your consciousness. The understanding of basics that one should develop after reading a subject does not exist. We know what tropic of cancer is and how many zones the Earth is divided into. But we are aware only of its definition. Whatever we learned about it in the books, we also remember that. But the problem is that we never understood the concept behind the Tropic of cancer and what is the basis of dividing Earth into different zones. This is what brings down our analytical ability to zero. We can write on the topic, but as soon as a twist is included in the question, we are left fumbling. We are not able to answer because our understanding about the subject was not good. The result is that whatever we have studied and memorized, we keep repeating that by changing a bit here and there. This effort of ours is just like a ridiculous effort of trying to fit your cap on someone else's head. The cap covers the other person's head but doesn't fit. It's clearly visible that it's not his cap. Someone has forced it on his head.

So friends, first of all I would like to tell you about subjects whose fundamentals should be clear in your head. It's possible that you already have this knowledge. If that is the case, you can skip this. But it would be still better if you quickly glance at the topics once more, and do it serial-wise. The more you read, the better you will

understand the topic. It doesn't matter whether you are an engineering student or from medical, science or commerce background. If you want to develop the analytical ability for civil services, you need to study all the subjects given below.

1. Geography

I believe it to be the mother of all subjects. All the visible and invisible things on this Earth are the gift of nature. I have full confidence that if a student understands the subject of geography properly, then his understanding of other subjects will be more detailed and deep. He can understand the fact "why is it so", and can predict "If this is it, then that's what will happen next". Actually geography is not just a science, but it is the science of all sciences. If you study this subject keeping this in mind, you will find new avenues opening up in your mind and that will change your thinking towards the things around you.

2. Philosophy

People take it as a joke. Some people are terrorized by it, while others assume it is extremely impractical and avoid it. The misunderstandings exist because of the vocabulary of the subject and its perception. But here you have to change your impression and be friends with the subject. The knowledge of this subject at a normal level can be the basis of this friendship. Don't get yourself stuck in the maze of this subject. Keep your knowledge limited to the very important ideas of the most prominent thinkers. You are not required to go into details. You only have to understand the important features of an ideology, which differentiate them from other ideologies and the ideas that have made it into history. That is sufficient for you. This knowledge of yours will give new angles to your analytical ability. Then you will be able to find some philosophy in a normal incident and may even come up with a new philosophy of your own. This will be your specialization.

I would also like to add that your knowledge about philosophy shouldn't be just limited to India. You should be aware of the world's biggest philosophers and the main philosophies. Along with it you need to be aware of the contemporary ideologies. You have to remember that philosophy is directly related to contemporary society. The subject evolves on the basis of prevalent customs and traditions in contemporary society, and also tells "what should happen".

3. Sociology

This is an easy and interesting subject. You will enjoy reading it because while reading it you will be able to observe it happening near you and even feel it. When you study everyday life and incidents in society as a formula, then you will be more excited to read about it. The subject has the living world as its laboratory and that is exactly how you need to view it. It will benefit you because you will get readymade sources to understand different customs across the world. These sources will work for you in the same manner, as formulas work in mathematics.

4. History

To learn everything in order to score marks in history terrorizes many people. It's possible that you are one of them. If that's the case then I am giving you a very simple suggestion. The suggestion is that don't try to learn history. Read history like you would read tales and stories. By doing so you will see, you have developed a sense of history. Such sense of history will equip you with a tremendous vision for the future. It has been found that the writers, thinkers and politicians who are most successful and capable have had a good understanding of history.

In fact what is history? History is the record of past incidents. In sociology while you about society, in history along with the society you also read about political system, economy, art, culture etc. That is why I think of history as 'complete time'. History tells us what the results of certain circumstances and policies were. It also tells us why these circumstances and policies were created and which reasons were dominant and which were weak. It tells us the result of past examinations. I take it as an unsolved paper which can help you understand the future.

5. Political Science

It has three parts- general theory of politics, constitution and the third one is the actual political scenario based on both. All three are different, but also connected to each other. You need to study political science keeping this in mind. Whether you like politics or not, it still affects you. You are a part of politics even if you don't want to be. All policies, be it religious or cultural, are not beyond political influence. If you get to understand politics, then you will not only be able to detect the presence of politics in the events of your time, but also come up with solutions. The answer to every solution, from an administrative perspective, lies not in a country's constitution but in its political scenario. Constitution only serves as a regulatory authority for politics.

6. Economics

This subject seems not only tough and monotonous for many students but also confusing. Is it really like that? No not at all. Yes, if you want to be an economist, then of course this would be a challenging task. But as far as its contribution to building analytical ability is concerned, this is a very nice and practical subject. Are you untouched by economics? Economics enters your life as soon as you step outside your house. You need to have basic knowledge of economics, and understand the fundamental concepts that are present in a practical form in your life. You can see these concepts in market, factories and at your workplace. You can see them in your dad's business and in your housemaid's work. The inspirational force behind most activities in the world is economics. When you start studying the subject from this perspective, you will see it differently.

Political system and the economy have a very deep and unique relation. In some cases, they are clearly visible working hand in hand such as in America. In many countries they are friends, but it can't be seen. Like in India, where there is 'declared socialism' but 'undeclared capitalism'. Economics is at the heart of many human, inhuman and even social and cultural events that take place globally. It is, however, masked and can't be seen. Take for example the Miss Universe beauty pageant. It is simply a beauty contest. But this puppet is bound by threads of economics and it will dance the way these economic forces want it to dance. Understanding of economics and politics will help you recognize the finer threads tied to your fingers.

7. Psychology

I believe that knowledge of psychology is required not just for analytical ability, but also in life. How can we understand a person without understanding the science of his mind? Whether it is society or politics, history or economics, man is at the centre of it all and at the centre of man is his psychology. This psychological understanding gives a very new and unique perspective on the system. For example General Dyer and Hitler have been important people in history. We know the historical and political reasons behind their deeds. But do we know the personal reasons behind them? It is possible to understand those through psychology. Psychology can provide many facts to address the problems in society and ways to prevent them. This subject is enjoyable.

8. Physics

Don't be afraid. I am just talking about the fundamental principles of physics. And if you are trying to understand geography, it is not possible without understanding physics, because the principles of physics are established from the observation of nature.

The biggest benefit of this will be that you will get the ability to establish the relationship between cause and effect. Whatever happens in this physical world, there is sometimes more than a single reason behind it. We are unable to understand it due to our ignorance. Knowledge of physics eliminates our ignorance and makes us rich with scientific consciousness.

9. Contemporary Events

Apart from these subjects it is necessary that you keep an eye on contemporary events. Which events are taking place, and why, the reason behind them, what solutions can be given, what are its impact and what form will they take overtime, you should be alert about all these. After studying the fundamental subjects I have mentioned above you will find that your perception towards current affairs has changed. Now these events won't look to you as mere events but you will think of them as social trends. Maybe other people will be shocked after reading them, but the same events may be common for you, because you have the ability to establish the relationship between cause and effect. The knowledge of current affairs will keep you updated and after getting the information of the event, your mind will automatically start calculating. By this you would get into the practice of analyzing.

Interdisciplinary Approach

Now the question arises that what would you do with your knowledge after studying. I will tell you. In the first stage you will study these subjects individually. After completing the study of all the subjects, in the second stage, you will start studying them in relation to each other. When you study one subject, try to connect other subjects with it. For example when you are studying something about the political scenario then see if it is according to the constitution. Also see how it coordinates with the principles of politics. If there is a difference in the compatibility and coordination among all these, then think why is it happening? It's possible that the answer to it comes from economics. So you are studying one subject and other subjects are adding on to it. This is known as interdisciplinary approach.

You will get to see some beautiful and lively examples in editorials of important newspapers. Take out time to analyze these editorials. Think that you are reading an editorial about a social problem. Jot down the important points which are not only related to sociology but with other subjects like politics, economics, psychology, geography, history etc. You will find them and after looking at them you will clearly understand that (1) What is interdisciplinary approach and (2) how much and why is it necessary to study different subjects to develop analytical ability.

Friends, I could have expanded this lesson much but I didn't do it, because I feel this is sufficient. At the end I would just like to say that like chemistry has equations, similarly the society also has its own equations. One such equation of chemistry is: - $2\text{H}_2 + \text{O}_2 = 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$. This means two molecules of hydrogen and one molecules of oxygen when combined gives two molecules of water. Hydrogen is inflammable and oxygen boosts the process. But when these two are combined then the new substance which is created i.e. water helps douse the fire. It means that two different substances with normal properties when combined create a new substance whose properties are totally different from its base components. Just like this the society also has different equations. The subjects which I have discussed above, they are the alphabets and numerals of equations. After knowing

them once you can create thousands and lakhs of equations. When we are able to arrive at these equations by ourselves then we know that we have developed the ability to analyze.

NOTE: This article by Dr. Vijay Agrawal was first published in 'Civil Services Chronicle'.

To be continued...

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