

Developing Analytical Ability

There is no doubt that you must have heard what candidates who have recently qualified the civil services examinations have to say. Many videos of the candidates speaking on the topic are available on You tube. If you have not seen them you should do so without wasting more time. You will notice certain similarities in what they say -

- Do not get bogged down by books and materials
- Know your subject
- Know the practical aspect of the subject
- Analysis is necessary
- Practice writing answers

You will find one thing at the centre of the success mantras that the students have talked about – the ability to analyse. The one who develops this ability can make do with studying less because he can use the power of analysis. This analysis is not complete until you have knowledge about the practical aspect of the subject or common sense. It is not a coincidence that in the previous issues of this magazine I have been discussing this in detail.

In 2013, the structure of the civil services examination changed. If you see the changes that have been made, even in the questions asked in the optional subjects, it is clear that analytical ability is absolutely important. I wish our school education followed this pattern. Anyway, now we have reached the end of this topic. I want to discuss the practical aspect of this which will help provide you with an ideology and insight into how to write your answer.

So firstly I would like to fulfil a promise I made to you by explaining how one analyses something at a psychological level.

Psychological Process

I would like to use the language of chemistry to explain this to you. Element is a single entity. When two elements meet they turn into a compound. When they turn into a compound their properties also change. But for elements to turn into a compound they have to react with each other on their own or through the help of a catalyst. This is what is called a chemical reaction. Let us see how it works at a psychological level.

Before you read this article any further, it would be better that you go through the previous articles where I have explained in detail how to achieve the elements you would require to conduct the analysis. Whatever you study or whatever your brain absorbs it stays in your mind in the form of information and we often mistake it for 'knowledge'. These bits of information are the elements required for the psychological reaction. If these elements are not there then there would be no reaction.

To be honest, the only contribution that memorised facts make in the civil services examination is to provide content for analysis. But that does not mean that it is less important. This is the beginning of everything. You just have to understand that though it is important it is not everything. In this context, I would like to remind you of an admission made by Ira Singhal, the topper of the recent IAS exam, while answering questions from students in Sardar Patel Administration Institute in Ahmedabad. This was Ira's fourth attempt and she topped the exam, although she had been selected prior to this attempt. While revealing the secret of her success, she

said, "I had the same content before as well. But this time I focused on my presentation." This art of presentation made her the national topper of her batch.

Obviously this was not a painting or interior decoration competition. It was a writing competition and your presentation depends on what you write, not how you write it. Although if you have a hold on both what you write and how you write then that is great for you.

Your brain has the elements and the information. This information reaches its final destination of analysis after undergoing the four stages mentioned below and assumes a new form. Let us take a look at the four stages –

First stage –

This stage converts solid substances to liquid. But can this happen on its own? If not, then how would this happen? This requires a medium and in the psychological process the heat of 'thinking' acts as the medium. Information generally stays in the mind of the student. But only few students are able to provide them with the heat of thinking. Some students sit on the heap of information and consider themselves very intelligent just like a man sitting atop a pile of potatoes thinks of himself as a chef.

The situation changes when you start playing with the information. You pull it upside down. You team up one kind of information with another. The situation changes when you come up with an idea and then you try to prove it to be true by using the information you have collected. You do this in the same way that an experienced lawyer presents his arguments, even if they are incorrect, in front of the judge. Your mind has to brainstorm to be able to achieve all this. The brain is troubled. Saint Kabir once said, "The world eats and sleeps, it is happy. Kabir is awake and cries, he is unhappy." The one who is awake will think and get troubled. Why would someone want to deliberately bother themselves? This is the reason most people do not want to get involved in the process of thinking. As a result, success, prestige and comfort elude them. I tell every student who is preparing for civil services that they should practice writing answers. But I do not get upset that they do not listen to me because I have decided not to get upset over it. They do not write answers because they will have to think to write answers and thinking is a difficult activity.

The information turns soft and then liquid from the heat of your thinking. It creates a restlessness that causes the information to be excited to start flowing. This would happen because liquid cannot stay in one place. It is in its nature to flow and wherever it sees a descent, it goes there.

You might think here that I'm trying to charm you through a useless web of words. But that is not the case. Not even 0.001 percent. Students who have been through the process of thinking know what happens. They might not know how or why this happens but they know that it does. I know and I'm telling you so that you can also benefit from it.

Second stage –

Liquid is not stable. Its nature is to flow. When it flows it will reach somewhere and halt when it encounters another element, even if it is a solid. It does not matter whether one is solid and another is liquid. The process of change starts when the two meet. However, it is true that if both are liquids then the reaction will be simpler, especially in the context of psychological chemistry.

In this way the bits of information in our minds flow and connect with each other. After two pieces of information meet they come into contact with another. This is how the compounds are formed. At this stage, bits of information start getting a structure. You will start noticing things about which you earlier had no clue. This is the proof that elements have started turning into compounds.

Third Stage –

This is the stage where compounds are organised. You can call it the making of equations. In this stage, there is increased activity in your brain which also means that you might be troubled. The mind may be restless. There may be loss of appetite and even sleep problems.

But this won't happen with you. So you don't have to worry. This situation arises when the thinking process is very difficult and deep. You don't need to go into such depths for civil services. It is anyway not expected from you at this age. But it is expected that at a senior level you would be able to do such in-depth thinking. For now, you just have to convince the examiner that you would be able to do it.

Believe me that the mental difficulties you face in this stage are not permanent. Whatever is in the pan is cooking. Everything will be fine in a while. You will notice that your thoughts are more stable. The thoughts will seek similar companions and even form new ones. Once the thoughts and information assimilate you will have enough 'space' to come to your own conclusions.

Fourth stage –

This is the last stage of the mental process of analysis. Your thoughts are very mature by now. This maturity leads you to become very insightful. This insight helps you explore the 'space' you have gained in the third stage. You can see the shape of your conclusions, you can hear their echoes. This is how the mental process of analysis is completed.

Friends, I know that many things which I have told you about this topic might sound like a riddle, or strange and invisible. But do not feel upset or dejected. To help you understand this principle I will analyse some questions from the main exam of civil services. However, this will only be possible in the next issue.

For now, I would like to discuss two relevant things which are extremely important. These two things will answer the queries you might have after what you have read above. These two are – a) automatic system and b) the magic of practice.

1. **Automatic system** – Even when we are not vigilant most of our mental activities are working on their own. These are the activities that are essential to protect our lives and keep us safe. We don't think and breathe. Our heart pumps blood on its own and we don't need to kick-start our kidney. This is one aspect of this system.

But this is not all. This happens with everyone. It is happening with you as well. But if you want to strengthen their function, enhance them and keep them working it will not happen on its own. For this, you will have to be vigilant and aware. This will make not just your activities but you unique as well. *Pranayam* (meditation) is also based on the principle of inhaling and exhaling. The only difference is that you have to control this mechanism through a scientific process.

The analysis power is also a natural activity of the mind. We have to take many decisions in life. Is analysis not the basis of our decisions? We come to a decision after analysing all the information we have, our needs and our situation.

We just have to mould this ability of our mind to suit the requirements of civil services. You just give it a little nudge; it will set things in motion. You don't have to actively participate in the stages of this process that we have discussed above. Although you may get burned a little from the heat of thinking, this is the solution that will turn the natural thinking process of your mind into something special: like *pranayam*

2. Practise – The civil services exam poses a major challenge because of the time crunch. This happens in both preliminary as well as the main exam. This challenge depends on how your brain can sort through loads of information to collect relevant facts about one particular subject. It also depends on how fast your brain can organise the information into a comprehensive answer for the examiner. The challenge is for the brain to be able to do so.

Think about the cricketer who has to hit the ball approaching him at the speed of 115 kilometres per hour while the ball only needs to cover a few metres to reach him. Think about badminton and tennis players. Their brain gets very little time to decide how to hit the shuttle which is approaching them very fast, almost like an illusion, in such a way that the opposite player is unable to hit it back.

This is nothing extraordinary. Our brain has the power to think quickly in many directions and it comes naturally to it. Practise can help keep our mind sharp which is why it is important to practise. Players, singers, orators, dancers and painters are always practising to achieve perfection.

If you want you can refer to this as the training of the mind. It is thanks to training that even animals such as monkeys, whales, eagles and parrots are able to do tricks that leave spectators amazed. It is obvious then that you would be able to practise analysing topics and be able to overcome the challenge posed by civil services.

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