

Practical Aspect of Analytical Ability

Friends, I'm following up on the promise I made to you in the last issue by presenting this article to you. This article will provide you the practical aspect of all the previous articles I wrote about developing analytical ability. I believe that you will definitely see two benefits immediately after reading this article. Firstly, you will be able to understand all the previous articles even better because now you will get to see the behavioral aspect of these. If you really do want to experience this you should follow my suggestion of reading all the articles once again. Another benefit that you will observe is that you will get a new perspective on how to answer the questions asked in the civil service exam. Do not forget that the biggest challenge of the exam is to write precise, impressive and concise answers. If you are not well-versed with the art of writing answers then it does not matter if you are the 'reserve bank' of knowledge, it won't help you here.

In order to eliminate any confusion, I am giving you a real-world example. This question was asked in the third paper of general studies in the 2014 civil services main exam. Although this question is from economics but it is a general question and you don't need to be an economist to answer it. In fact, every graduate should know the answer. The question is: Capitalism has guided the world economy to unprecedented prosperity. However, it often encourages short-sightedness and contributes to wide disparities between the rich and the poor. In this light, would it be correct to believe and adopt capitalism driving inclusive growth in India? Discuss. (Word limit: 200 words. Time: Maximum 9 minutes)

Now let us focus on this question and approach the topic further.

The most important 'mantra' of analysis is to raise questions, get answers and then raise more questions. So let us start with this.

Some fundamental questions –

- Which topic is the question based on?
- Which part of the topic is it based on?
- What is the most important point of this part?

The answer to the above questions –

- This topic is capitalism. You have to keep in mind here that although the idea of capitalism is at the centre of liberalisation they both are not synonymous.
- It is based on the economic disparity produced by capitalist economy. Thus, it is not about the entire affect of capitalism but only on its disproportionate economic effects.
- The question is concerned about economic disparity in India, not the entire world.

These three answers present the boundaries within which we have to look for facts. This is the path our thoughts have to travel. The best part about establishing these boundaries is that it keeps the mind from wandering. Since our brain will now only focus on things that we need, the chances of an in-depth analysis are higher. It saves our brain from bearing the burden of unwanted information. Once it indulges in an in-depth analysis it comes out with thoughts that are original, unique or more precious than those from other candidates. This is what puts you far ahead of your competitors in the race.

Basic information:

Undoubtedly, analysis is a creative process that leads to the creation of something new. Where does this novel information come from? Is it completely new or is it just old wine in a new bottle? To get an answer you should analyse the editorial commentary in a good national newspaper. When you read it for the first time you would definitely think of it as something completely new and original. But when you start dealing with the facts one by one then you will find –

- The write-up contains a collection of facts about the main topic as well as facts about related topics.
- All the facts have been presented in such a way that even though they are separate they gel in well.
- The facts have been used to support the argument that has been presented.
- All the facts have been used to by the writer to establish his perspective or thought.

Honestly speaking, even this thought cannot lay claim to being completely original. Thoughts like these have been presented before and various angles on the topic have been explored. The only difference is that some facts have changed in relation to the recent events and so has their language and presentation.

I'm telling you this so that you don't fall into the trap of trying to produce 100 percent original criticism. It is, anyway, nearly impossible for you to do so right now. It is not needed either. But yes, once you become a civil servant and you have the administrative experience at the grassroots level then this experience will lead you to form new thoughts. So leave this process for now. I want to ask you a question. Do you think that people who present beautifully-written critical analyses are very knowledgeable intellectuals? That is not the case. Obviously, these people are sincere and deep and have a good grasp of the basics of their subjects. This is what allows them to present their analysis on any topic.

Let us take the capitalism question mentioned above and see what basics would be required to provide an accurate analysis.

- You need to know about capitalism –
- What is capitalism?
- Growth of capitalism
- Capitalism and other economic models
- Views of Karl Marx
- Effects of capitalism on all sectors
- Positive effects
- Negative effects
- Current state of the Indian economy
- Creation of Indian society
- Capitalism and Indian economy
- India after liberalization, etc

These points may seem too many and difficult but is that the case? Think about this for a while. As far as my thoughts are concerned, I assume that any student – especially one preparing for civil services – would have all this information because this information is not just fundamental in nature but important as well. If you read the capitalism question in the examination hall you might start sweating and panicking thinking that you have never read about capitalism. But if you are patient and stable with a calm mind (not a stressed mind) and focus on the fundamental topics of this question, you will find points you can use to write your answer. This is not a miracle. This is just basic science - science of the mind, science of the heart, science of analysis and science of knowledge.

After being in touch with students for a long time and being a sort of student myself I have come to the conclusion that if a student is given some points on a topic that he has a basic idea about, he will be able to form a picture. Now it is a different matter how clear, beautiful, attractive and impressive this picture is. This decides how much marks the examiner will give to the student. Obviously, the practice that you have indulged in to create this picture will decide how good your picture is and how fast you are able to make it. This is what we call the art of writing, and this principle is universal and timeless.

Important points from the basics –

The strength and character of basics is primarily like the combined process of the roots of a tree and the soil. If you have the land (meaning curiosity) and roots (meaning fundamental knowledge of the subject) then you have everything that is required. Now is the time for action. You have to do what needs to be done. You should have full faith in the science of nature that it will be able to make you do the needful. Nature will make you write the answers that you should write. This process works like the natural process of writing. When we talk to someone or if we have to speak on a topic for half an hour we don't read a script like movie actors. We remember the important points. We know what we have to talk about. If you jot down everything you need to say in points, three to four lines would suffice. But when you start speaking based on these lines, you will end up speaking for a long time and might even run out of time.

So now we will find some points to answer the above mentioned question based on your knowledge –

- The contribution of the philosophy of capitalism in the economic progress of Japan, US, and Germany etc.
- Present economic problems of capitalist nations.
- Adoption of this theory by India, in the form of liberalization.
- State of the Indian economy in the last two decades:
- Rapid Industrialization
- Unemployment
- Income inequality
- Slow growth rate of agriculture
- Some important figures
- Some important reports

It is obvious that the figures and reports should be new and you can only get these from news reports on TV and newspapers.

Answer-writing

For this, you need to read the question again. You need to catch even the minute aspects of the question which we usually overlook as the brain tends to focus on the most important and obvious points. After you do this, two things will be clear to you –

- Firstly, you will get to know that the first two sentences of the question are mere statements. They are not associated with the answer you will be writing. The sentences are just to give context to the question. Some students can be tricked by this and they take these sentences to be the question and start answering.
- Secondly, this question is about the advisability of capitalism in an Indian context and this is what you have to answer.

However, you have to pay attention to the shades of the question as well. This shade lies in the words “inclusive growth”. If we talk about the economic development of the country, which is measured through some dry statistics such as annual rate of growth and per capita income, then definitely capitalism seems to be the best option. But here the question is that of “inclusive growth” i.e. growth for all. You know that one-fourth of the country’s population is below poverty line and the nation’s farmers are in a poor state. India is grappling with unemployment. We have an army of youngsters. They make up two-thirds of the total population. So whatever our answer is, it should also include the growth of this section of the population.

You need to raise some questions here. For eg:

- Is inclusive growth possible through capitalism that focuses on technology?
- Capitalism is a product of industrialization. So can industrialization lead the country to inclusive growth?
- If industry can provide employment, can those industries (medium, small and cottage) survive capitalism?
- Can free market competition, which is the ideology of capitalism, be useful to a developing country like India?
- How will income inequality affect our economy?

You must know few important points about these questions. Now you only need to do the following:

- To give a little context, discuss the statement of the question and begin your answer. Be wary of getting lost in this discussion. If you have been reading current affairs regularly, you must have some important report by an international organization which you can quote to prove the statement. But don’t go into details here.
- Change the paragraph and continue your answer. Since the question asks you to ‘discuss’, it would be good if your answer includes separate points. This will make it easier for the examiner to evaluate you. Also, each point will be highlighted.

Your answer will, thus, be ready. Now, I believe that you are no longer thinking –

- I should have prepared better.
- This question is very difficult and complex.

If this is exactly how you feel, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity for self-satisfaction. In the end I would like to say one more thing. The structure of answer-writing is not set in stone. You can give another form to your answer. You can discuss other facts. But the central focus should remain the same.

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