

The Power of Compiling Facts in Analytical Ability

Friends, if you look closely at whatever I have told you till now you will find that all of it is related to two important things. First is how your brain absorbs facts. Second is what you should do to ensure that the facts stay in your brain for a long time. If you have ever read my books or heard my lectures you would know that I talk of how to convert information into intelligence and to turn intelligence into understanding.

Here whatever I'm talking about it is related in a way to gathering information. However, when I ask you to raise questions on this information; pay attention to opposing views; gather your thoughts; or if I talk about teaching, it all points to a process that can turn this information into intelligence. This can happen. The incredible thing is that once this starts happening everything else will happen on its own. Then you will have to do nothing except keep an open mind and be vigilant so your brain can accept whatever is happening. This will be a great achievement.

The facts are already in your brain. The facts that you have collected have been gathered in a very scientific way. You have discussed, debated and thought about the facts that you have collected, meaning you have treated them in the same way like cotton is mashed before filling up a quilt with it. Or you have treated them in the same way like a milkmaid churns the milk or the way potter mashes clay with his hands to give it a very smooth texture.

You have also reached the second stage and made sure that the facts stay fresh in your mind. You have changed the environment of your mind. The field is ready, you have planted the seeds. The seed now has to germinate.

Remember you can only provide the seed with a favourable environment so it can germinate. You cannot germinate it. If you do not provide a sound environment the seed will not germinate, no matter if the seed is of good quality. This means that even if you have read many books, which are present like a seed in your mind, if you do not provide the right psychological ambience to the facts you have studied, the seed will never prosper and produce flowers or fruits. This is what I have referred to as the power of compilation. Now, whatever happens will happen on its own. You don't have to do anything now. You have done what you had to do.

I will tell you what will happen now. And whatever happens, is exactly what should happen. Whatever you have worked towards till now has been to make these things happen and it is these things that will make you a civil servant.

Firstly, imagination also has the power to give birth to thoughts like our philosophers have been doing. However, the thoughts required for civil services are almost impossible to give shape based on imagination alone. Many students have this confidence that they would be able to write during the exam. They are also able to write. However, this writing is not the kind of writing that is required. These students do earn marks but do not score the marks that are needed. What you need to think about is that there must be a reason why UPSC has given clear instructions that the answers should be argumentative and essential. What does this mean? This means that your answer should not be based on imagination but on actual facts. This is correct because UPSC is looking for administrators who can get results, not actors and authors, where imagination is the biggest strength.

I'm warning you about this deliberately. I'm doing so because when you study the four papers of General Studies in your main exam, check the essay paper, or even if you go through question papers of some subjects in humanities, you will feel that this is possible. This is the biggest fraud you can do to yourself. This fraud multiplies because there is a word limit. You think that you would be able to write that much. You have to

protect yourself from this false popular belief. Till the time you are preparing for civil services, you have to believe that no thought is born out of zilch.

There is another thing I want to mention here which is different from this discussion. It is this that your thoughts must be dependent on your imagination. But because they are your fundamental thoughts, they are new, I would like to say a few things on that. First, you should understand the difference between imagination and practicality. Your thoughts can be imaginary but they should also be practical. By being practical I mean they should be able to be put to practical use. Second, it would be great if you could add to your answer that such and such approach has already been implemented successfully in such and such place. If you keep the two things in mind, or even remember one of these, your thoughts will not be imaginary - even if their origin is.

You read about the new methods to compile facts and strategies to keep the facts fresh in your mind. The biggest benefit of these is to provide your thoughts solid ground. In fact it is correct to say that it is this ground where thoughts originate. This leaves no space for the imaginary world. Just think whether you have gone through this experience. This will not only make it easy for you to understand this truth, but also make it invaluable.

What will happen after this?

It is obvious that if there is a collection of facts in your brain, then it is not starting from scratch. It is different that right now you must feel that your brain is a barren field where there is no sign of greenery. But believe me this won't last. A time will come when this field will prosper with vegetation. However, when this would happen, how long it would take depends on what you are doing for it. What you should do has already been discussed in detail. Now you just need to remember those things. If you treat the thoughts in your mind in the way that you have been told, your brain could experience one of three things mentioned below. Your brain could even experience two of these things or just one. The three things, though different from each other, are also somewhat similar. Let us see what the three experiences could be –

- **Doubting your conclusions -**

Our mind is full of prejudices and biases, even about stuff that we have no interest in. It has solid beliefs that it vocalises from time to time. Politics, corruption, fundamental rights, media, bureaucracy, capitalism, secularism, crime, administration, elections and religion etc is there any topic on which you do not have an opinion? This list can expand to include many things. I have just given you a glimpse.

To test this you can choose any one topic and note down your main thoughts about it. These thoughts are your opinions and your conclusions.

Now you can start collecting facts on this topic. You have to ensure that your likes and dislikes should not creep in while you are assembling the thoughts in your brain. Keep an open mind and welcome all the facts. Note down all of them.

Once you have compiled the facts bring them into use like you have been told in the previous issue. This is a kind of churning process. This will help your mind absorb these thoughts just like food gets digested in your body. Only then will this be of some use to you.

After this you should write your important thoughts on the topic again. It is better if you touch upon the same points that you did when you first wrote about your thoughts on the topic.

Now you compare your current thoughts with your previous ones. You will find that your conclusions are not the same. They may not have changed drastically but you might not be as sure of them as you were before. It is even possible that your previous conclusions have been strengthened. However, this is not a common occurrence because you are at an age where you have seen little of the world. Your brain has not matured to a point where none of your beliefs can be shaken. I believe you should accept this life truth at a psychological level. To not accept this fact would be stubborn and obdurate.

Eventually even a great philosopher like Shankaracharya had to overturn his fundamental belief after an incident in Varanasi. This also proves that your mind is flexible enough to choose between right and wrong. This also shows that you are moving forward, you are growing. The country needs administrators with such minds, not those who are rigid and think that they are correct and do everything according to that. God save us from these people!

For dry soil to support vegetation it is crucial that the surface is moist so that the quiet seeds beneath can raise their heads. When you doubt your conclusions it means the firm surface of your mind is softening.

- **Seeing new possibilities –**

So what after these doubts have crept in? Will this process turn you suspicious of your own thoughts and leave you in the lurch? This would then be a negative situation. It would have been better if you had never adopted this method. But, no, this is not going to happen. The beginning of this process may be negative and saddening but the end is always positive and satisfactory. You won't be left hanging in the middle; it may take some time though.

After suspicions, the next stage is to see the possibilities. You have a collection of facts on a topic in your head. These facts will now clash with your suspicions. This will unleash a barrage of thoughts in your mind. I will discuss this process with you under a sub-heading separately, so that you can understand the complete process in one place.

For now, I only want to say that at this level these facts will produce glimpses of many new possibilities. You will think that 'oh. Not just this, but even this is possible.'

It is obvious that when you feel this way you will jump at the possibility. Seeing the possibility you will be tempted to turn it into truth. This will lead you to a new way of thinking. Now you can sort out the facts in your mind. Your mind will now choose the most suitable possibility and test it based on the facts in your brain. It will check if something is possible. If there is no outcome, or the outcome is not satisfactory, then the mind will pick another option and test it. This will continue till your brain reaches a satisfactory conclusion.

- **Greeting the new conclusion**

Finally, you will arrive at a conclusion which may be completely opposite to your previous beliefs or it may be exactly the same. It could also be slightly different but somewhat similar to your previous conclusions. But do not forget that even if the conclusion is the same it will be new in the sense that it would be polished.

It would be solid now, and thus more impressive. It is this element of an impressive answer that will help you score better than other students and make you a civil servant. Is this not true?

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