

Tools to Develop Analytical Ability-1

Friends, in the previous issue of this magazine I discussed the tools one can use to develop analytical ability under the headline ‘Analytical ability is the basis of main exam in civil services’. Now I want to tell you how you can use what you see, hear and observe to develop your analytical power. I’m not focused on gaining knowledge here. It is one thing to gain knowledge and quite another to develop analytical ability. These two are not completely different but they are somewhat different from each other. We can gain knowledge if we read books, memorise some facts, and keep repeating them. We can use this to impress other people. They will think we are very intelligent. However, this knowledge acts as raw material for your analytical ability. If you don’t have the knowledge about something how will you analyse it?

In an earlier article on the same issue I had written that there are two types of analytical abilities – creative and critical. As far as creative review is concerned, it can be done even without substantial knowledge. We can use our own experiences, our thoughts and imagination and comprehension to do a creative analysis. For eg, anyone can discuss a movie for a short while even if they do not understand the process of film-making. This is a creative analysis or creative review. However, take someone who understands all the aspects of the film - comprehends the process of film-making; knows what goes into making a film; knows the background and history of the film and knows about acting, singing, dialogue and video editing. When such a person says something it will matter more, it will be more impressive and in-depth.

When it comes to civil services, you have to take the second approach. This is why I have explained to you the difference between the two. Now we will study what our behaviour should be with things we can use as tools of analytical ability such as what we study, what we hear, what we see, any important incident or any thought which has entered our mind. This is what I’m going to discuss in this chapter. The first point is to remember the facts.

Remember the facts

Instead of repeating words such as seeing, hearing, pondering, it is better if I speak in the context of studying and you can expand your knowledge to include all the other things. When we read a book or article, two things happen. First is that we understand it. We comprehend the entire book or article. The second thing that can happen is that we memorize it. In the first case, we are done after we have understood what we have read. What we understand, how we understand and how much we understand depends on why we are reading the book. You might be reading a book for pleasure. Some may be reading the book to gather information. Some may be reading it to prepare for civil services. Although it is the same book, the intention behind reading it is different and that influences how you understand the text.

It is obvious that if you are reading the book, you are reading it to prepare for civil services and since the subject of the article is also how to prepare for IAS, I will now speak in this context only. What you understand after you finish reading the book and how much you understand, and what portions you understand, we will go into the details of this later. Here I want to focus on remembering facts. I want to focus on this point because many students are terrorised by the idea that they should try to remember as much as possible from the book. They want to memorise the entire book or article. I want to warn you that if you actually remember the entire book, it will be of no use to you because it will then become challenging for you to filter things that are relevant. What will you do then? You should understand the science behind this that you only have to remember few things which are important. I can provide you with some ways to do so. You can follow these to read any book or article and I assure you, it will not be harmful.

- As I mentioned that you should remember things that you need to. The challenge in front of you now is how to determine what is important. Let us assume that you are reading the book 'India after Independence' or 'India, after Gandhi'. These are both thick books. Now you will have to decide what to remember from the books. The best solution to this problem is the unsolved paper that you have. You can see what kinds of questions are asked on the subject that you are studying. It is possible that initially you might find it difficult to grasp those things and understand them. But you will be able to overcome this pretty soon and understand what you need to study. I think it is essential that any student preparing for civil services needs to inculcate this ability that he can understand which topics he has to study, how much and what he can leave out completely. Unsolved papers will definitely help you with this.
- Let us assume that you are reading the book by Gurucharan Das. After finishing the book you have to decide what the thought that the author is proposing here is. You should have a basic understanding of what the book is all about. I'm saying this because it is very easy to learn other things once you have basic knowledge. This fundamental understanding of the book provides you with a special ability that attracts everything else to it to give you a deeper understanding.
- While reading any book or article you will come across material that you can use as reference. These references can be in the form of facts, thoughts and events. You will understand yourself whether they are of use to you. You can note down the references separately and remember them.

Figures

Figures play an important role in keeping your argument forward in an impressive manner, and to come to logical and scientific conclusions. When we use figures to complement what we are saying it makes many things clearer. Firstly, it makes it obvious that the student has studied extensively. Second, it reveals that the student is aware of his times. Third, it shows that the student knows how to use facts and figures to say something effectively.

However, there should not be too many figures or references. You may get confused. So it is better to use only few figures. You have to keep in mind that figures are not important in themselves, what is important is to use them aptly.

You don't use a knife just to slice vegetables. You can use it to cut paper, sharpen a pencil, among other things. Similarly you can use figures in various ways at different places, if you know how to do that. So do not try to include too many figures and references in your answers, otherwise not only will you get confused, but you may also tire of it easily and get bored. When reading a book or article, you should try to figure out what is new in it. If you do find something new, write it down separately and remember it. This is of most use to you. The success of civil services could be determined by this. If you are also writing what everyone else is, you are not doing anything special. The examiner is looking for what novel things you can write. It has been observed that often students leave out whatever is new in an article. They are unable to grasp it. The psychological reasoning behind this is that they read, understand and grasp only what matches the facts and notions that pre-exist in their minds.

It is very important for analysis that we include facts and present our argument in a logical format. Now, the question is where will those facts come from? What are those facts, exactly? A report by a commission or an organisation, an analysis by a committee, court judgments or proposals can all act as facts. I would also like to tell you here that if you come across any report, analysis, judgments or proposals you should note them down. These will help you be more analytical.

In the end I would just like to tell you that try to understand the essence of the article after you are done reading it. For example, if I read a book on sociology which is about tribal society and culture I will try to figure out

what the book is trying to explain. This will help me get a strong hold over the book and I can use it for my analytical answers.

Ponder over what you read

Like I told you before, after reading a book or an article you should think over it. I'm not saying this only because it will help you to understand and remember facts, but also because this practice excites your mind and makes it more active. This boosts its ability to analyse, think and even its capacity to provide us with relevant information when required. So develop this habit: whenever you read a book, think about what you have read. It is not necessary that you do think over it only after you have finished reading it, even if you have read 15 pages from a book, you can think over those 15 pages. Do not hesitate to do this, as this is how you will train your brain.

Now I will highlight some points that will help you turn all you have learnt into tools of analysis.

- Categorize everything that you have studied. Classify it to see which study material falls under which category. This is something you should definitely do. After categorising everything create bullet points and tips for each part. For example, if one category is success, then you need to jot down points related to that category. To save time I would suggest that you do not write them down in detail. Only brief points would do.
- Why am I saying all this to you? I'm saying all this because anything that our brain receives is in the format that we provide it with. The brain stores information in the same format that it has received it in and will present it in the same format when required. You have very little time during the civil service exam so you have to analyse in few words and present your answer. This format is thus the most practical. This is in a way a formula for 'quick food'. You 'open a packet of noodles and boil the noodles in warm water. Your food is ready in two minutes. Don't you think that even in civil services we should try to cook the ingredients in a similar way? Friends, there is another thing I would like to say here. There are two methods to think about something. First, and the easiest one, is to think about something in an ordinary way and then move on to the next topic. The second method, which is the most difficult, is when you ask questions. You question everything that is being said. For example if the article is trying to establish that India is progressing towards development rapidly, you ask questions against it. You can say that the progress is slow, the nation is not developing in all the sectors, or that the country is not developing in any sector. You can say that the growth that is being witnessed is ordinary or that these are just inflated figures. You can even say that if we compare the growth rate to other countries it will not be significant. There are many other questions that can be asked. How can this help? Once you ask questions, you will see that your brain is also providing you with the answers. It might be possible that your brain finds it very difficult to answer these questions. Let your brain be confused, there is no need to show it any mercy. If you show any mercy, it will weaken your brain. You will see that it will come up with information after a while that will not only make you happy but also fill you with confidence because it is a creation of your own mind. The day that this starts happening you can pat your back and declare that now you are ready to take the civil service exam. This process will help you study every article as well as critically examine it. You do not have to be an observer but an investigation officer. You will find this very exciting and enjoyable. Studies will not be boring anymore and this is not a small thing.

Thinking and discussing

Until now I have only discussed methods of studying that can help provide you with tools of analysis. It is possible that you are now studying using the method I have explained. I am mentioning those here again so as to throw a new light on the topic. If you are not following those methods, maybe you will do so after reading

them here again and if you are already following them then you will be doubly assured of their efficacy. After you follow these methods, you will absorb whatever you have studied. Usually when we read something, we feel we have understood everything but after a few days we find it hard to recall what we have studied. This is the weakest point in our studies. But if you follow the methods that I have mentioned it will fill your brain's tool-box with such short, long and sharp weapons that you can use to examine and analyse any event or incident. Civil services examination expects you to have this ability. Next, I will discuss methods that will help you use these tools better.

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

