

## Tools to Develop Analytical Ability-2

Friends, in the previous issue I explored in detail how you can get the tools required for analysis in the tool-box of your brain. You need these tools just as a mechanic needs his tools to fix a car. But is it enough just to possess this tool-box? Can I also operate upon people if I have all the tools that a surgeon uses? The answer is, of course, no. It is essential in this scenario that you know how to use the tools. This can only be learned through practice.

In this issue we will discuss the various ways you can use the tools.

- **Teaching** – I understand that it is not easy for everyone to teach. For you to be able to teach, you need students who want to study or at least listen to you. So if you get the opportunity to teach anywhere, even if it is not a paid one, take it. I always advise my students that while studying for civil services if they get the opportunity to teach or talk to school or college students they should do so.

Teaching sounds like an easy job but you will notice that once you start teaching it will change the way you study. This is because you would feel like you are going on stage. This is akin to participating in a play, not like shooting for a movie. There is no scope for mistakes while performing in front of an audience in a play. So you would strive for perfection. While shooting for a movie, this is not the case. You can always shoot another scene if something goes wrong. You can give takes and re-takes. So when it comes to teaching, it changes the way you study, making you seek perfection. This can do wonders.

- I believe that every student who is preparing for civil services is part of a group, even if the group comprises just two people. You should debate and discuss with them. But this is only possible when all the students discussing a topic have studied it thoroughly. This can help us revise what we have studied. You must have observed that sometimes while talking we end up saying things we have not thought about and were not consciously aware of. But while debating it just slipped out of our mouth. This follows a basic principle of nature: Fire is in the stone but you can only produce it after rubbing two stones together. The thoughts in our mind light up while we are discussing something.
- I know that it very difficult for students to do this but if they can they should definitely adopt this method. Students should write something about whatever they have studied. They should write, even if it is just for practice. This method should definitely be followed by someone who is unable to teach or discuss with fellow civil services aspirants. If not other people, you can at least talk to yourself. If you write on something carefully it is somewhat like talking to yourself.
- A similar method is to question your conclusions. After reading something we form certain opinions about it. You will either agree with the article or disagree with it. If you disagree with what is written you would hold some other opinion. You need to question your opinions and conclusions.

This is good practice. You can call it self-debating. You say something, and then question it. Then you question all your conclusions till you reach a point where you are left with nothing more to say. This would be the end of the debate. This is very interesting. It would make your mind and thoughts very flexible. This means that your mind will be open to all ideas. You won't be narrow-minded. Your brain would think but also leave space for others to argue from their perspective. Is this not a quality that a civil servant should have?

### **Ponder over opposing arguments**

Friends, we are all victims of our mentality. We like those who agree with us. If someone opposes your viewpoint, at a subconscious level, you don't like them; sometimes they even become your enemies. I think to

succumb to this is the most dangerous thing for an educated and analytical man. How can only we be correct? How can the other person be completely wrong? If a third person was to meet with two people holding opposite views he might think that both are correct in their own way. You should never forget that the possibility of your opponent being right is the same as that of you being wrong. You need to develop this psychological state so that when someone argues against your opinion, you accept their argument with an open mind.

Here you need to think specially about what you don't agree with or what has been said that goes against your viewpoint. Generally, we don't think about things we don't agree with. But if we ignore what we don't agree with, we will be losing an opportunity to hone our skills. I know that you will definitely face some problems while doing this. You may experience some frustration as well. But if you really want to be sharp and analytical you will have to do this.

I would also like to tell you that if you start doing all this, your horizons will broaden. Initially the mind stands up against something that it doesn't agree with and then ignores it but when it receives instructions that it is not supposed to do this anymore, it will look at them eye to eye. You will soon reach a stage where you work out a compromise with your opponent and either you will agree with their opinion or make them agree to yours without any ill feeling. Another situation could be that both of you agree with each other a little bit and healthy discussions can continue.

Forget about whatever has been said to support your argument. Just assume that it has been underlined. Now focus on what is being said to oppose your viewpoint and what you don't agree with.

### **Using facts**

Many students face a problem. When they study something they feel as if they have learnt it very well. They remember it for a few days. But then it gets difficult to recall it. For some people it gets completely erased from their memory, so much so that they feel as if they have never studied it. Some students cannot recall the information when required, but remember it later.

There is only one cause for all these problems and it lies in Nature. Observe Nature. It is not that a season would come once and then not occur for a long time. It is the same cycle every year. So can we say that even Nature repeats itself once every year so that it does not forget? You will observe this everywhere in Nature and this applies to our lives as well. There are so many things happening in our lives, so much information that our brain is receiving. If it remembers everything what would become of us?

To be honest our mind does not have the capacity to remember everything. However, it has the ability to remember things that are important to us. Whether it is about civil services or life, we don't need to remember everything. Don't we keep our trash outside the house? We remove old, worn-out useless stuff from our house and fill it with things that we need. After a while, they also get old and we replace them. When this is the order of things why should we regret that it is the case with our brain as well. So first of all friends eliminate the frustration that you cannot remember everything from your mind.

Like I said even nature repeats itself. Similarly, you also need to repeat things that are important. Some students feel that if they repeat what they have already studied they won't have time to learn something new. This is a very immature and laughable argument. I understand what is going on in the minds of the students, who give this reasoning. They think that it will now take them as much time to revise something as it took to learn it in the first place. They do not remember that it takes very little time to revise a topic. The background of the topic is already in the mind and our brain has the incredible ability that once it realises it has read something before it will remember lots of information within a second and your job is finished.

Revising is also important for you because you need to have a firm grasp on facts. They should be easily available to you. For example, if I have to write an article, and I have all the time at my disposal and a library, then I should be very comfortable with the task. First, I know the topic which I have to write on. I also know the study material I have. I can prepare for it from the study material. I can jot down important points. I can create a rough draft of the article in my mind. I can pause in between. I can also go through the study material when I want. But do you have all these facilities at the civil services examination hall? Of course, not. This is the biggest challenge as well as the exam's strength and its speciality. This is how our country will be able to hand itself over to people who have an able mind. I'm sure you agree with me.

Now I will highlight some ways that can help you revise what you have studied. Friends, I consider revising a part of your daily routine just like taking a bath, polishing your shoes, dusting or cleaning your house etc. But the 'revision' I'm talking about here is one that you can perform not just while sitting, standing, moving or in your mind but also while writing or talking. If you look for opportunities to revise subjects in general studies, you will find them. This is possible because general studies are related to everyday life. Is there a day when you don't talk about politics, share market or the country's economy? Don't you discuss national and international events daily? We are constantly talking about science, history and geography. Civil servants, ethics, politicians, citizens, society, weather, agriculture all fall under general studies and we talk about this every day. Now the challenge you face is to use the knowledge that you have gained in your daily conversation. I will give you some practical points to help you with this –

- Let's assume that you are discussing politics with someone. Usually when students are discussing politics they tend to focus on the constitution or limit their argument to recent incidents they have read about in the newspapers. I believe you should extend this. Go further back in time and think whether you had read about a similar incident in the past. Try to remember events and incidents by asking yourself this – Did something similar happen in the past? If yes what was the result of the incident? What were the debates that the incident stirred? Did a court pass judgement on it? What were the consequences of the incident and how did it affect things? Can you remember any facts, figures or constitutional provisions related to the incident? If you prepare this before you start talking, you will notice that your argument has become solid. If you are discussing from the perspective of civil services then there is no point discussing something without preparation. In this way you will be exploring the past of a topic and this will help you lay a secure foundation for your future. This will also boost your brain's ability to recall previous incidents.
- I know that the students will not like it and may not even follow the piece of advice I'm about to give now. My advice is – develop the habit of writing. But no one follows this. I have even seen that when I tell students that they should write and I will examine it and point out mistakes they fail to give me this opportunity and oblige me. I don't know whether you find my advice suitable but I can't stop myself from advising you to develop the habit of writing. You should develop the habit of writing and before you start writing you should be clear about what you are going to write and what would the content be. Think of questions and ponder over them for a while. You can even take a day to think about it and then you should start writing. If you want to write something, think about it today and write it tomorrow and if you want to write something today, write about what you have thought over yesterday. You can write down important points and when you have all of them you can give them shape. This is the true art of writing. You don't have to write just for the sake of writing. You thought, you wrote and you are done. Friends, if you do this you are just self-hypnotising. You are satisfying yourself with wrong measures. You should be careful. You are not being true to yourself. You have to write after careful preparation and preparation can be done only after carefully thinking about the topic.
- I have mentioned that you can also revise in your mind. I have used this technique the most. The reason for this was that I never had enough time at my disposal so that I could do what I wanted. So what

should I have done? I started using whatever little time I had to study and my mind for me was my study room, my table and chair and my study lamp. Whenever I had an opportunity I would select a topic and revise it in my mind. I would do this many times a day and in this way I would end up revising many topics in a single day without taking out any extra time. This provided me two benefits.

First, I stopped complaining about forgetting things. I would not say that the problem was completely eliminated but it was reduced to a certain extent. The second benefit was that my brain became an obedient servant. Whenever I would sit in an examination hall or think about a topic it would provide me with all the information quickly just like a private secretary. It knew what information I required. Friends, this is just about inculcating the habit. It is not magic or a miracle. It is an ability that anyone can achieve. Yes, even you.

Think about how many tiny portions of time you waste in a day. You may be travelling in a bus, or going from one destination to another, going on a morning walk, exercising in the gym or drinking tea. If you start thinking about some topic during these times wouldn't you save a lot of time? Your brain will also be able to revise the topics. This will clear the dust that is embedded in the table of your memory. The facts will shine.

### **Giving a cursory look**

Our mind has a special ability that amazes me. It is the ability of the mind to see one end of something and then travel to the other end. I believe that we should use this ability of our mind to prepare for civil services. You may be making notes or you may not be. You may be reading books or just important points. I don't know and this is not important for me to know. No matter which way you study it would be very beneficial for you to give a cursory glance to all that you have studied. By cursory glance I don't mean that you should take two minutes to glance through a 300-page book. Cursory glance means look at every page in the book. Take half a minute to look through a page top to bottom and think about what is written there. Go to the next page then and think about what is written there. Turn over to the next page and so forth. Keep thinking what has been said in them. Do this until you finish reading the book. I'm not saying you should finish the entire book in one go. You can read one chapter from the book. Refer to your notes. If you have collected figures and statistics or other facts you can go through them. You can do this according to the time you have. Give a cursory look to all this material. You will notice that you are able to revise a lot of syllabus and facts in less time and this will act like a miracle drug.

Why have I called this a miracle drug? I have done so because in the civil services examination you will get many questions where you will think what you should write since you have never studied anything on the topic. But I can assure you that if you have studied with this cursory glance method the small facts and figures you have collected would still be fresh in your mind. You will be able to draw conclusions from them which would help you write an answer to the questions. In this way, a question which was dead to you would come alive. I know you may find it difficult to believe me. How can you even believe me? But if you start practising this method you will have no option but to trust me. A day will come when you will be telling others to do it.

You will see the benefit of this method in the exam hall. When you give a cursory look to something to revise it you end up revising a lot of material. If I have to use this practice to go through a 200-page book then I can do this easily in one-and-a-half hour or maximum two hours. This would happen even if I must have spent around two months finishing the book. I may have taken more time to finish the book if I was studying it in parts. Now when I am perusing through the book its essence, material is falling chronologically into place. This is similar to how I'm watching a three-hour film which I have already watched in parts over 13 days. But now all the frames of the movie have joined to give a better picture. When all pieces of knowledge have joined together you cannot even imagine what they could be capable of. This capability occurs because when you pick one piece of knowledge you know it brings with it the pieces preceding it and even the next piece is somehow connected to

it. This way you are mentioning one point but end up talking about three. This gives your answer a unique perspective. This is the biggest strength of following the method of giving the course material a cursory glance. You will only be able to experience this when you start practising it.

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

