

Common sense in Civil Services-3

Continued from the last article –

Some questions in the first paper of preliminary exams are direct and can be answered straightaway. The problem arises if we fall into the trap of analysis here, it will confuse us. Let us see a few examples of these questions: To uphold and protect India's sovereignty, unity and integrity, a provision has been made in the

- a) Preamble to the Constitution
- b) Directive Principles of State Policy
- c) Fundamental Rights
- d) Fundamental Duties

Since every student studies in detail about Fundamental Rights he would reject option 'c'. A student who has studied carefully will also reject option 'b'. Now you are left with option 'a' and 'd'. The interesting bit here is that the above statement has been mentioned in Preamble to the Constitution and Fundamental Duties as well. The dilemma is that you can only choose one option. How would you settle upon the correct answer? I would depend not on knowledge but on comprehension to answer this question. Read the statement again. Notice the words 'to uphold' and 'protect'. These words are commanding i.e. you are being asked to do something. This is not a request. So then obviously after comprehending the language and tone of the statement you will choose the option 'd'.

Let us take another example:

Who releases the Global Economic Prospects report periodically?

- a) Asian Development Bank
- b) European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
- c) US Federal Reserve Bank

d) World Bank

Students usually believe that they should be familiar with the working of all four organizations to be able to answer the question correctly. While the question mentions only four organizations, the number of such organizations is at least 40. It is impractical to think that one could know about the working of each one of these. Then why would such a question be asked? It is to test your common sense. How is your common sense being tested with this question?

e) Let us look at the keywords here. First, the report is about the economy of the world. Another clue is periodically, meaning that the report is published after a certain time period. This suggests that it is one of the important works done by the concerned organization. Now look at the options you have been given. If we assume that all organizations release reports periodically on the economy it would seem that the Asian Development Bank would publish the report on Asia, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development about Europe and the Federal Reserve Bank for America. Since the last option is World Bank it is possible that

it is the World Bank that releases the report on global economy. The option is given so you can use your common sense to arrive at the correct answer.

Friends, there are many such questions that cannot be memorized or studied. To answer these you need a certain understanding and that is what is referred to as “common sense” here. It is to be noted that analysis is important to hone this understanding, especially in the case of civil services.

Preliminary Exam: Second Question paper

You are aware that this paper was started in 2011. The purpose of this paper is to analyse language comprehension and reasoning ability. It would not be wrong to say that the paper is based on comprehension, even the mathematical questions. I have talked about math here because barring two or three questions you can solve the others mentally. In any case, you do not have the leisure to solve all the questions in writing while using formulae.

It is important to understand the following things about this paper:

- There are a total of 80 questions which need to be solved in 120 minutes. On an average 25 questions are related to language, known as language comprehension. You will be given a 200-500 word passage and questions will be asked based on that. The questions asked are objective type questions.
- The two main challenges of these questions are: to remove the distractions from general studies and to scrutinise the questions.

How well you solve these questions depends on how sincerely you have studied the passage and how sound your understanding is. The questions asked are not straightforward. You have to comprehend the passage and then answer. Let me give you an example.

Passage

The richer states have a responsibility to cut down carbon emissions and promote clean energy investments. These are the states that got electricity, grew faster and now have high per capita income, making them capable of sharing India’s burden of becoming eco-friendly. Delhi, for example, can help by generating its own clean electricity using solar rooftop panels or even help poor states finance their clean energy projects. It is no secret that state electricity boards, which control 95% of the distribution network, are neck-deep in losses. These losses further discourage state utilities from adopting renewable energy as it is more expensive than fossil fuels.

1. Which among the following is the most logical and rational assumption that can be made from the above passage?

- a) The richer states must lead in the production and adoption of renewable energy.
- b) The poor states always have to depend on rich states for electricity.
- c) The state electricity boards can improve their finances by undertaking clean energy projects.
- d) The high economic disparity between the rich and poor states is the major cause of high carbon emissions in India.

I don't feel the need for analysis here. After reading the passage when you read the options analyse the thoughts and ideas in your brain. You will realize that comprehension is what matters here, not facts.

Many questions in this paper are those relating to reasoning ability. Comprehension ability does not play a major role here. But if you read the questions and try to choose the correct answers, comprehension might be of help.

Main Paper

Except the optional subjects, to score well in all the other compulsory papers in the mains a student has to develop the ability to comprehend. The following points explain how this ability helps in the most important stage of the exams: the mains.

- Look at the structure of questions asked in the first three papers of general studies. You can see two parts of the questions. The first part would be about knowledge while the second would be based on comprehension. Facts play an important role in answering most questions that need analysis, but this does not always happen. This question can be a good example – The penetration of Self Help Groups (SHGs) in rural areas in promoting participation in development programmes is facing socio-cultural hurdles. Examine.
- At first glance, the question seems to be easy and familiar. There are two ways that you would have prepared you to answer this question. Either you read about it somewhere or you may have some first-hand experience. The probability of you having read about it is low. The syllabus for general studies is exhaustive and there are numerous questions that can be asked. It is impractical to assume that students must have prepared for most questions while studying. A student thinks that if he gets even 50 percent questions from the topics that he has prepared, he would be in luck. Most of the questions we have to answer based on our understanding, including the questions on politics. But I agree that questions on geography, economics and international relations demand facts.
- You listen to the news daily. You read the newspaper as well. You read the editorial comments and articles on hot topics. Sometimes you overhear intelligent discussions. When you do all these activities, you are increasing two types of abilities. Firstly, the facts that you note enrich your brain and they help you analyse better. The second benefit is at the level of comprehension. You do not actively seek it and neither do you realize when this happens. It happens at a subconscious level and becomes part of your thinking. Reading about many different types of incidents and their analysis imparts you with an insight which you can equate with comprehension. This comprehending ability will help you answer many questions.
- You would have noticed that in many questions the examiner wants to know your opinion on the topic. You can answer this in two ways. Your opinion could be an opinion that you read somewhere. Or it could be your own opinion formed after reading a multitude of views and adding your own ideas to it. This opinion would be unique. It would be original. This originality is born from an amalgamation of comprehension and thinking.
- **The fourth paper of general studies:** I find it the most difficult, most easy and most fascinating paper of civil services. You must find it contradictory that I'm using both "most easy and most difficult" in the same sentence. The paper is the easiest because one does not have to specially prepare for it. It is the most difficult also because one does not have to specially prepare for it. It is the most fascinating also for the same reason. This paper was included in the main exams in 2013. An analysis of the marks scored in this paper until now prove that students secured more marks in this paper than in the other three papers of general studies for which they studied thoroughly. The truth is that most students prepare intensely for these three papers as they are considered to be the toughest to crack. But the fact is the average marks scored in these three papers is 85-90. The paper that we are discussing now has an

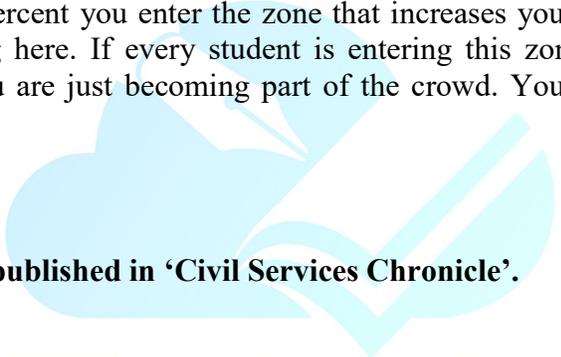
average score of around 100. It has been seen that students who have topped civil services exam have scored as much as 135 marks (54%) in this paper while their average in the other three papers has been 90 marks (47.5%). How is this happening? Obviously, it is a well thought strategy. This gives rise to two questions. Is it not possible to score more in the first three papers of general studies? If yes, then how? The second question is: If it is easy to score 100 marks (40%) in the fourth paper, should one be satisfied with this? If not, then how can one score more in this paper?

While the total number of questions might be four, there are only two answers. Yes, you can score more in the first three papers of general studies. It is not very difficult to increase the average marks scored to 110. How can you achieve this? Answer: Through comprehension. It is obvious that a student prepares as much as he can for these papers. Why is it then that the average marks scored even by toppers touch only 90 to 95. So should we believe that there is no scope to score better? It is true though that if everybody is scoring only these many marks you can also realise your dream of becoming an IAS officer by scoring the same number of marks. But if we find a way to firmly establish our chances and one that puts us ahead of others, we should adopt it. The best way to do this is to be aware about your subject and to develop common sense about it.

When it comes to the fourth paper, after scoring 40 percent you enter the zone that increases your chances of success. But you have to be careful about something here. If every student is entering this zone then your reaching it is no landmark, it is an ordinary feat. You are just becoming part of the crowd. You have to get ahead of the crowd and this paper can help you do that.

I will tell you how to achieve this in the next article.

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



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