

## Time management for Civil Services-1

Most of the emails that I get from civil services aspirants focus on two problems. The first is: 'Sir, I do not get time to prepare'. Second is: 'How to write an answer?' Many people ask me how to manage time. The other query I have already addressed in detail in my book 'How to become an IAS officer?' I have not discussed about lack of time in the book because I did not know that time could pose a problem for so many people. Though I still believe that it should not be a problem but since this issue keeps cropping up again and again, it doesn't matter what I think.

Friends, please forgive me for saying that when you think you do not have enough time, it is a mere illusion. This is a defence mechanism. This is the bitter truth, even if you disagree with me. My first advice about time is that you should acknowledge its truth. Leave the walls of your house and look at other people. Compare them with yourself. How come other people are able to multitask and do so many things at once? Do they have more than 24 hours in a day? If this is not the case then how come they are undertaking so many tasks when you can barely finish two? When you think about this you will realise that the problem here is not that of lack of time. Let us find out what the problem really is.

You have heard about experiences of students who have qualified this exam. If you have not done so, you should do it now. You will be surprised that at least 3/4th of the candidates who get selected in the exam are those who have jobs. How did they manage? Are they lying that they were working? Or the sun rises from a different direction for them? The answer is no. So, again how were they able to accomplish the feat?

Friends, I don't know how they managed to do this, but I do know that it is possible. In fact, this is how it should be done. Now let us discuss the intricacies of this. There are three types of students who pose these questions. In the first category are those who have a job or are self-employed. This category is of people who are already working but now want better jobs. The challenge here is that they need to fit in their IAS preparation in their current work schedule. They say that their day is spent in the job where they have no time to relax. When they reach home, they are so tired that they don't feel like studying.

The second category is made up of students. Their problem is that they are studying for college as well as IAS. We can include those preparing for other competitive exams also in this category. They face a peculiar challenge. According to them, it takes them two to three hours to read the newspaper then they have to go to college. They have to study for college exams too. So how will they be able to take out time?

The third category includes people who are doing nothing other than preparing for IAS. The funny thing is they are unable to find adequate time for this single thing that they are doing. They say that the course is too vast. They have to read many newspapers, make notes, read books on general studies and prepare for optional subjects. Even for optional papers one has to read many authors for a single topic. News on radio, TV also cannot be missed. Magazines such as 'Yojna' and 'Kurukshetra' also have to be read besides watching informative TV shows. People have to engage in group discussions, practice writing answers etc. Are we humans or time machines? I have a question for you now. If an employee quits his job to focus on just IAS preparation or a college student focuses on the exam and not on college studies, will the problem of time management be solved? Before you answer this think that the third category of students is doing exactly this. But are they free from the problem of time management? Don't you think that this issue is very complicated? Someone who does not have time, has no time, But even those who have time, feel that they have none. If you got 42 hours a day you would still suffer from lack of time. This is because the problem is that of our mind and not of time. To solve this problem, we also have to understand it.

## Take the right decision

I don't have doubts that if you are preparing, you would want to be a civil servant. But if you say that you want to do this, and add that you are facing time crisis, you are giving me reasons to doubt you. Do not take this lightly. I need you to think sincerely whether you actually want to be an IAS officer or are you attracted to the glamour? You want the glamour but are you ready to lose the glow of your face in order to achieve that? It is also possible that you wanting to be an IAS is just a strong reaction to difficulties you may be facing in the job. As often happens, we soon lose interest in what we enjoy right now and get dissatisfied. The easiest way to get out of that discontentment is to look for a new job. Is this the reason you want to be a civil servant? You should be very clear about certain things. First is that you do need time to prepare for civil services. Securing entry into civil services is not going to be easy and you are no magician that you will twirl in the air and get the appointment letter in your hand. I can assure you this much - there are no miracles in civil services. If you are hoping for a miracle then it would be better for you to junk the idea of civil services.

Secondly, you would require time for your preparation. If you do not have time then there is no other way to do this. Do you know of a way that you can prepare for civil services without giving it any time? I know you don't know else there would be no problem. It is simple then, if you don't have time you should stop thinking about IAS. Why should you waste your energy on something that has no chance of happening? It is wiser to continue doing what you are doing so you can build a strong career and stay happy.

## Myth of Time

There are two major myths related to time that students harbour. The first is that you need a lot of time to prepare for civil services. You are not responsible for this myth, the ones who have qualified for civil services and ones who have not are. Those who qualify are telling the truth when they say that you have to study a lot. You have to study at least 10-12 hours every day for about two years. Then maybe you would succeed. This is what we did. Those who do not qualify say the same thing in a different manner. Firstly, they could not work as hard as they should have. The average hours they studied per day were 7 to 8 and they gave up after 4 years. They will be seen arguing, "I studied a lot. For 15 hours every day I studied and left everything else. But I could not make it." They are basically saying the same thing that people from the first category are.

This is how the rumours start and therefore you think that one needs a lot of time to prepare for civil services. You may not have believed the rumours but you know that civil services is considered one of the toughest exams not just in the country but also in the world. So if you have to get through you have to prepare well. This is why your brain links hard work to time - studying 15 hours every day for years. This is not a rumour but a truth carved by your brain. When you think of General Studies, which is the most challenging subject in the exam, you don't understand much except that 'anything can be asked in this.' Then obviously if anything can be asked that means everything has to be studied. Everything that is available to study. And you need time to study all this. This is why the needle in your brain points to studying 15 hours a day.

I think you do have time to prepare for civil services. This is not a problem. The problem is that you don't have the time you think you need. This is reflected when you say, 'I don't have time.' Am I wrong here? I don't think so. At least not when it comes to most people. So before we dive into the practicality of things let us test these myths.

## Busting Myths

Friends, it is human nature to exaggerate when one has been successful. People do this because it gives them satisfaction. They develop a 'heroic image'. It is an ego boost to think that they are special. It is not

debatable that after qualifying civil services exam they do acquire a special status in society. The problem arises when they fall prey to the psychological trap of exaggerating the process that let them achieve this status. Since we are told these things directly by the person who has achieved this success, we have no reason to doubt them. We have to believe it is the truth.

Another situation could be that he is telling the truth. But can one person's truth be the universal truth to qualify civil services? No. It would be a lucky coincidence if you meet someone who says he has qualified civil services without spending too much of their time preparing for it. There is no dearth of such people. But most successful candidates you meet, you don't meet them in person but through newspapers and magazines.

When it comes to those who are unsuccessful, it is wrong to blame time. There are many other causes of failure such as one's ability to analyse, their method of study, way of writing answers, fluency and whether they have a balanced personality. They don't work on this. Instead their focus is learning by rote. This is what they call preparation. Is this the image your brain has of preparing for civil services?

Civil services is considered difficult, but it has little to do with time. Time plays a minute role in turning the exam from difficult to easy. The key point is to understand the nature of the exam and adapt to it. This is what is called 'smart work' and not 'hard work' in today's age.

The preparation for civil services is not like the preparation to become a pilot which requires one to undergo a certain amount of hours of training. In civil services you do not have to fill a column revealing how many hours you have spent on the preparation. If the hours you spent studying were important the easiest thing to do would be to enrol candidates in an institute and see how many hours they can devote to a task. I know many candidates who qualified for civil services and they had such a busy schedule that one could not even guess when they found time to study. I have tried to bust all the myths associated with time even though I know it is not easy for you to believe me. I know you are so terrorised with the 'time conundrum' that in spite of wanting to believe me you are not able to. Now it is up to you to decide.

### Principles of Time

Until now I have presented all the things I wanted to tell you about time on a canvas. Without discussing these I would not have been able to explain to you the things I am now going to tell you. I understand that there is some truth to the challenge of time that you are facing, but it is not the entire truth. It is also correct to say that until you address the problem of time you would not be able to study in peace.

Now I will tell you some practical things that will help you get ride of this problem. This is a very practical approach. It might be difficult for you to accommodate some of these things, but I would advise you to try your best. Do not give up thinking 'I would not be able to do this.' If you have the potential to qualify civil services then you definitely can overcome these challenges.

Let us discuss this further -

- I have often seen that instead of preparing for civil services students are preparing for the civil services exam. They decide that they have to take the exam this year and then they start preparing keeping that in mind. This is a major mistake when it comes to time management. If you really do not have time then you need to overturn your strategy. You need to devote an entire year to just knowing that you have to prepare for civil services. This way you will be free from the burden of lack of time. Some people believe that fixing a deadline helps them study harder and inspires them to stay focused. I don't believe this. I think the motivation for civil services should be internal, it should not have a source that is

external. The glamor of this service is motivation enough. If you can't locate the source of inspiration internally then I doubt some external source such as setting a 'time target' is going to motivate you. In fact, I believe that pressure created by a deadline could adversely impact your preparation. If your brain is stressed how would you store knowledge, which requires stability.

- It is obvious that if you are short on time you should have a long-term plan for your study. I mean that instead of giving a year or two to your preparation, plan it out over 3 to 4 years. But you should fall under the age limit. This will help destress you about lack of time. You can study patiently and in an organised manner. Your pattern of study will then be exhaustive. I actually suggest this even to aspirants who have ample time that they should prepare a long-term plan. You must be wondering how many hours one should devote to the preparation. This is a valid question and the answer to this is - 3 to 4 hours. Do not take the 3 to 4 hours a day to be an average of sorts. What I mean here is that suppose you work for 8 to 10 hours a day, similarly you will have to take out 3 to 4 hours every day for this purpose. It has to be included in your daily schedule. I am stressing on every day because there is some part of the study that you can not procrastinate. For example, reading the newspaper, listening to the news, panel discussions etc cannot be postponed for the next day. The knowledge that you need from books, you can keep for another day. But if you do this with news it means you are delaying your success.

Now the question is: Do you need to give 3 to 4 hours every day to news? Is this important? No. Let me explain how you should allot your time.

- Daily news on radio: 15 minutes
- Daily audio guidance: 35 minutes (if you wish to)
- Two newspapers: 45 minutes
- Press clipping on the daily audio: 25 minutes (if you wish)
- Discussions on TV, radio: 30 minutes (if any)

It would take you about two and a half hours to do all the above mentioned things. You still have an hour and a half to spare. You can use this time to prepare for other subjects. You can read NCERT books, magazines, and topics in the optional papers. You can also practice how to write your answers.

I want to emphasise this that the two and a half hours you need for the above mentioned things are not required in continuity. Look closely at the time allotment. You can do these things at time intervals throughout the day. You can do these things when you have enough time. I don't think anyone is so busy that they cannot even spare 15 to 20 minutes during various parts of the day. The most important thing is that you do not have to do it at one go. It is better if you do everything in intervals. But you can only do this if you have a long-term plan for your preparation.

To be continued...

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