

Finding the right way to prepare-3

By Dr. Vijay Agrawal

- As far as resources for the preparation are concerned, I feel that this is very low-maintenance and does not require many things. It requires fewer things but hard work. The diligence here does not refer to the hours spent studying but the way one studies. What do you need for this
- Two newspapers daily.
- A set of NCERT books.
- Yojana and Kurukshetra magazines which are very cheap.

Some books for the optional subject and a few more books. I don't think that there is any student who will be unable to gather these resources. Is it not true?

What is necessary?

The success in civil services does not depend on your hard work. It depends more on how you work hard. The purpose of my article is not to discuss those ways. My purpose is only to hand you a mirror which can reveal your truth. Here I would like to hint at the three important points that will be the criteria for your truth. These three points include -

- You will have to give up your old ways of studying that included learning by rote. This is the biggest challenge of civil services.
- What do you have to do then? You will have to understand the smallest topic just the way you understand science. There is no alternative to this. It is only after getting this understanding that you will be able to analyse a topic which is the sanjeevni booti (miracle herb) of civil services. If you find yourself unable to do so, you should think again about preparing for civil services.
- You have to maintain continuity in your studies because current affairs has become the blood circulation of civil services preparation. At least 80% of the questions are related to current affairs.

Some bizarre questions

I call these questions bizarre because these are questions asked often by students which are general but should not even be asked in the first place. For example if I ask you, "Do I feel hungry?" what would you think about my question? You will think how you would be able to answer it. Will you not think that my question is weird and bizarre? My young friends who are preparing for civil services often ask such questions. The extreme is when they continue to do this even after being asked not to do so. Let us take a look at such questions -

- Sir, which optional subject should I take?
- Sir, should I opt for English medium or Hindi. Or will Marathi be best?
- Sir, should I study for IAS during the day or at night? Sir, how many hours should I study to become an IAS officer?
- Sir, should I take coaching or not?

Please do not get angry at me or discard my worry as something foolish. Just think deeply about the bizarre questions. And while thinking keep my hunger question in mind. Then you will feel that if anybody has the

capability to answer these questions correctly it is you. However, if you want a working answer then you'll find many people, including me, who will give you that.

Proof of weak personality

Please forgive me for saying that students who ask such questions I take it as proof of their weak personality. There are reasons for it. First is that these are private decisions. Yes, they are important. I wonder what students who are unable to take their decisions will do when they become civil servants and have to decide the fate of others. They will have to take decisions about society. This reflects our fear of rolling the dice wrong.

Another thing is this student has started civil services preparation but he does not know the path. The preparation for civil services is not so mechanic. Of course, there is a procedure but it does not follow topics and hours. There is a separate system. You need to fulfil that system keeping your circumstances in mind. That is all. This is why when you hear successful candidates each will tell you a different story.

It is true that you can collect facts from people to arrive at a decision. But do not ask them what your final decision should be. They will tell you, with facts and figures. But it is not necessary that what they tell you is correct. By doing this you are giving control over yourself to others which will not be right in future. If it appears to be true, it will just be a coincidence.

It is a very generous and open sort of exam in the sense that there are no fixed questions or answers. There is the syllabus but even that is open ended. You must have felt that the syllabus does not pinpoint various topics rather it underlines a certain language. This makes it difficult for you to understand the syllabus and complete it. But it is this vagueness that is its biggest strength and your biggest challenge. If you have been employing this openness then this challenge will become your strength and speciality. This is where you will have an edge over others. This is the space, the gap, which allows students to find their own way to prepare for the exam.

Friends, you just have one job left which is that you have three things now. First, you know now what is your background. Second, you know what civil services requires and third you have the tips given by successful candidates on YouTube. Now you need to combine all three and whisk them to get the butter of truth. Now you decide what is important to you. I think this will be the hat that will fit your head and this will be the way that will put you in a position to tell others “this is how I prepared”.

My well wishes are with you.

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