

How to Prepare Notes-1

There are two important questions that come to mind of students when they start preparing for civil services. The first question is how to write answers in the exam and the second one is how to make notes. Though these appear as two separate questions but if you think about it deeply they are essentially connected. The root, from where these questions arise, is the same.

It is obvious that as the exam becomes more competitive, the students also become more anxious. To get rid of this anxiety they are finding ways to write answers with flair and include more substance in them. I appreciate these efforts because if the exam is tough then the path to success should also be solid and determined. Students have to study important material and then present it to the examiner in the best possible way. This is why notes for preparation of civil services are selling a dime a dozen.

In our time, notes were not available for sale. We did get some guide-type books which included frequently asked questions but they were very few in number and were very thin. Today, many types of notes are available in thick books. They are quite expensive and are much in demand.

Usually, these belong to students who have succeeded in civil services examinations. Their success lends credibility. The student purchasing the notes thinks that he will also succeed after reading notes by a successful student. This is why he does not hesitate to shell out money to buy these even though it's not easy to read them as they are handwritten. In fact it is quite difficult to understand them. Photocopying them only makes things more difficult. But trust is very important so the student does not care about this.

He thinks that since these notes have been prepared by a successful student there will be no better study material than this. It is not wrong of him to think that one has to read good material to write good answers. This thinking is correct to some extent but not completely.

Friends, before I tell you how to make notes, is it not important to explain to you what notes actually are? You have the right to decide whether you should make notes, for which subjects you should make notes, what alternative do you have if you do not make notes, and how will you actually make them? I will leave this for you to decide. But I will try to give you a broad description about preparing notes that will help you arrive at these decisions.

Meaning of notes

I am not saying that you do not understand what notes are. Notes do not refer to anything handwritten by a person. The written word is not referred to as notes. It would be better to read a book because it is well bound and neat. And you also have the option of writing there. When students buy notes it seems that they do not understand what notes mean.

The practical definition of notes says - whatever has been made by you and belongs to you. If it has been prepared by someone else they are notes but they are not your notes. Just like his shirt is his shirt and his shoes at his shoes. Yes his pen can be your pen. But his spectacles cannot be yours. This is because those are personal. This personal bit is most important. When I'm making notes there is a personal aspect involved. I am making them according to my need. I'm making them according to my capabilities. When you prepare your notes, you will do them according to your capabilities and need. This will be most beneficial to you.

I know that you may find it difficult to agree with me. This is because when you were in school and college your teachers and professors would make you write notes in class. They would speak and you would write. This means that the notes were prepared by one person but by writing them they would become yours. They were called notes because they were handwritten. If the same professor made a book of his notes and gave it to you, it wouldn't be called notes but a book. This means that the difference between books and notes is not in their essence but the structure. This is the most common myth about notes.

Like I mentioned above that notes are your own creation. You prepare them according to your need. If you are just copying from someone else's notes do not consider them as notes. I want to tell you that the meaning of notes is not anything handwritten but it actually denotes the process of preparing notes. Unless you are involved in the process of making notes you do not have the right to call them notes. Why am I saying this? I am saying this because it is not easy to prepare notes. It takes a lot of time and struggle. It is this struggle that makes these notes precious and useful. If we are not involved in that process and are simply paying to get them they will never hold the same importance for us.

Now, let me take you to the process that you will undergo while making notes. I will highlight the points that you face at different stages in this process until they finally take you to your destination. It is this journey that is the most useful thing about making notes. If this journey does not exist, the same benefits will not exist. I am not under the impression that I am going to tell you something new or unique. I am assuming that you have at some point prepared notes. If I am right in what I'm thinking then you will understand my reasoning even though it may not sound new to you.

In any case reading this article would not be a waste of your time because you will still learn a systematic and scientific way of preparing notes. If you have been missing something in this process you will be able to use that missing link to improve. So if you do not find anything extraordinary do not lose heart.

1) Another definition of notes defines them as putting all facts in one place. When we read a book on any topic it is written by an expert on that topic. The author is writing and sharing from his limited knowledge base. The book, as exhaustive as it may be, is not complete in itself. There are many facts the writer may not think as important or he may as you that the reader would know this. This is why no one book is a complete book. If a topic is analytical and requires the writer's perspective then the chances of that book being unique are higher. For example, we can read Romila Thapar, Ramsharan Sharma, Bipin Chandra etc for topics on history. Writing a book as an expert is completely different from a student writing a book. A book written by an expert is representative of the thoughts of that intellectual. So it is not necessary that it may be giving you complete information on the topic. In fact, it is this challenge that the notes overcome. The student preparing notes reads a few important books on the topic. After reading, he highlights the important parts and then decides which extracts he wants to take from the book and how. The student then gathers all facts from all books in one place which we refer to as notes. This means that gathering information and noting it in one place is making notes.

You can see two very clear benefits for a student making notes. First is that he must have read a lot of books on the topic that he has made notes on. He must have also seen different perspectives and views. It is obvious that he has a good hold on the topic. You can even say that he has become a master on the topic. He has spent time on it and it has made him a master of the topic.

To be continued..

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