

How to get maximum marks from your examiner?

How well you score in the written i.e. the main civil services exam depends not just on your preparation but also on how much you have been able to impress the examiner. This doesn't mean that impressing the examiner is everything. It just means that this is another important factor which cannot be overlooked. At least, my experience has been such as a student and as an examiner. And the figures on my marksheet from standard 12th to BA narrate a strange tale about my capabilities. My marks have always fluctuated between 58 and 59%.

I tried touching the magic figure of 60 but could not do so. It is not that I made less efforts during the exam preparation. I increased the hours of study but they failed to increase my score. But during MA suddenly I started scoring well. Why? Did I increase the number of hours spent studying? No, there was no scope to do that. Then what was it? What happened was that for the first time during my MA semester I came in close contact with a professor. I tried to understand him and it changed everything. When I became an examiner myself, I praised my understanding of that time because now I was doing the exact same things that I had understood the professor to be doing.

This article is an attempt to make you aware of an examination-related truth by extending my knowledge and understanding to you. Let us begin. Let us look at a scientific principle. You can call it the saturation point principle. Every person reaches a saturation point after which he cannot do more. Just like dry air can only absorb humidity up to a point similarly we can also gain knowledge up to a limit. If you're still trying hard, even when your hard work has reached its saturation point, then you will get very little benefit compared to the effort we put in or none at all. But you cannot let go because whatever you are striving for, you need it at any cost. So what will you do in this situation?

The most important thing to understand here is that there is only one aspect to studying and that is 'studying'. Thinking and memorising are part of this. But there are two aspects to an exam: studying and presenting what you have studied. Obviously, the studying part is more important than presentation. However, the presentation cannot be taken so lightly that it can be ignored. If you want average or better than average results in an exam you can consider studying as the be all and end all of your preparation. You will succeed as well. But if you are aiming at exceptional results then studying and only studying will not be able to give you the desired results. Actually, friends, this is where presentation comes in. It is the presentation that will allow your analysis to not reach the saturation point and still be very impressive. In support of this truth I would like to remind you of the confession made by civil services topper Ira Singhal. She had earlier made it to the Indian Revenue Service and it was her fourth attempt. She said that she did not study anything different. The only thing she focused on was how to present what she had studied and that had made all the difference.

Here, I would like to use another word in place of presentation which is used in the business world. I think you will be able to understand the meaning better if I use this word. The word I would like to use is 'packaging'. If the product is fine, it is a good thing. The product has to be good to begin with but if you want optimum returns then the packaging also has to be solid.

We cannot forget that the packaging is not meant to replace the goodness of the product but complement it. What does packaging mean here? You can call it a fashion legislation. It is natural to get attracted to something beautiful. This attraction makes it exciting to be around the beautiful product. We cannot ignore it. We may find trash after unwrapping it but the beauty of the packaging compels us to unwrap it once. This is a psychological truth.

Another psychological truth is that one tends to think that if the packaging is so good the product must also be good. You can call it a good first impression. This means we tend to think positively about the product. Is this not what happens to you? You should consider packaging to be the answer you wrote and the examiner to be the one unwrapping the product. This will help you understand what I have to say. It is clear that in this battle of examination there are two people: you and the examiner. When it comes to a match of wrestling, your preparation is not limited to what you do. You also have to understand the strategy of your opponent and prepare accordingly. You must have read in newspapers how a team prepares according to the performance of their opposing team. For instance, you should recall a scene from Aamir Khan-starrer Dangal. Right before the movie ends, the father asks his daughter to adopt two contradictory strategies against two separate opponents during an international tournament.

But the thing that works in your favour is that your opponent does not have too many facets to his personality which would be the case in other fields. The examiner is more likely to be stable and unwavering which is why he is trustworthy. So you do not have to worry too much about the examiner. But knowing a few things about him will give you an edge. You will be able to match your wavelength to his. The results will be directly proportional to this cooperation. This works like a TV channel.

Such a situation arises even though the examiner checking your copy is like an umpire or a judge who is supposed to be completely neutral. This is how it should be. This is how it is. But think about it practically, a judge may be neutral, but he is not so completely. He may be struggling for complete neutrality. This applies to the examiner as well. We should understand that he considers certain factors to arrive at his neutral view and instead of considering it as a biased approach we should think of it as the natural state of a human being.

In the next article, we will try to decode the character of the examiner.

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

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