

How to score Maximum Marks in Main Exam

The results of an exam are primarily based on two things. First is passing the exam and the second is getting selected. While passing an exam depends entirely on you, getting selected also depends on how other candidates have performed. The latter is kind of like a match. It is important that in exams, what we call competitive exams, you work according to a solid and practical method. This will help you stay focused and get better marks. I do not have to tell you that this becomes essential if the exam is that of civil services. Generally, students who take this exam have formed two incorrect assumptions. The first is that they have to score at least between 65% to 70%. The second is that they have to answer all questions asked in the best possible manner. While this is applicable to the optional subject, this can't be held true for General Studies. I am writing this article keeping these two in mind so that you can take a believable and practical approach.

Keep in mind that the purpose of this article is to help you develop a strategy to score maximum marks in the main paper and not how to prepare for it. Let us first address the misconception that you need to score 70%. The truth is not just different, but also far from this. I think you need to know the truth so that your brain can keep away unnecessary stress.

I have felt the pressure. I used to think like you do. How can a student who scores less than 70% become an IAS officer? But when I realised that 60% scorer tops the exam and even a 50% scorer get selected I felt for the first time that this target is achievable and I can do it. And I did it. I would like to tell you here that had I not known the truth about the score, I would not have thought about succeeding in the exam. But, yes, you have to understand that scoring even 50% in this exam is not easy. In fact it is very difficult. It is more difficult than scoring 75% at the university level.

This was the part about numbers, now let us come to the psychological part of this. A student who has scored 50% in his university exams and now faces the challenge of scoring 75% in civil services may find the target unachievable. But if someone were to tell him that he could crack the exam by scoring 50% he may think it possible. It is a separate matter whether he is able to achieve this or not. But he will at least be encouraged to try it out.

I am presenting before you a scorecard for the main exam. But before that here are some other important facts. You can expect to top the exam by scoring 55%. If not scoring the highest you will at least find space in the top 10 performers of the exam.

At least 40% students score between 45% to 50%.

Generally 50 to 60% of the successful candidates are the ones who have scored between 40% to 45%. The distribution of marks among the top hundred students is usually such that 4 to 5 students score the same. This number increases later. If you check the lower scorers among the selected candidates you will see that almost 10 students would have scored the same amount.

While this is not cast in stone generally this is the trend that is followed when it comes to awarding marks.

Let us discuss the concept of scoring in various subjects:

One can score 50% marks in essay writing. If you work hard you can even score 150 marks in this. This means a score of 60%. There are some students who have scored 160 in essay writing which comes down to 64% marks.

As far as four papers of general knowledge are concerned getting a good score in these is the biggest challenge. If you manage to score 45% in these four papers, the feat is akin to climbing Mount Everest. When it comes to optional subjects most students score 50% to 55% in this. The meritorious students have been seen to score 60% to 65%.

I am now going to present before you an imaginary scoreboard which should be your target. This score board is not just for your selection but also to find your name in the top hundred candidates. Just consider this scoreboard as your target. It is not the maximum score. It is not the least possible score either. You can consider it a little less than the maximum marks, a lot more than the least possible marks and a little over medium scores.

Topic	Total Marks	Targeted lowest score
Essay	250	150
General Knowledge -1	250	90
General Knowledge -2	250	90
General Knowledge -3	250	80
General Knowledge -4	250	100
Optional Paper – Paper 1	250	135
Optional Paper – Paper 2	250	135
Interview	250	160

I am now presenting another scoreboard in front of you. This scoreboard relates to what percentage of questions you will solve in the exams and how. This percentage of question-solving has come after speaking to many students. It cannot be accurate but it is very close to it.

The idea behind presenting this chart is to make sure that you can give your preparations a methodical and scientific structure. I have mentioned before that while preparing for the exam you do not have to treat the entire syllabus in the same way. You have to determine the usefulness and importance of a topic and then prepare accordingly. The chart will help in this. The biggest challenge of civil services is for us to not give in to pressure and terror despite the fact that you have to approach the exam as a challenge. This chart can help balance your mind.

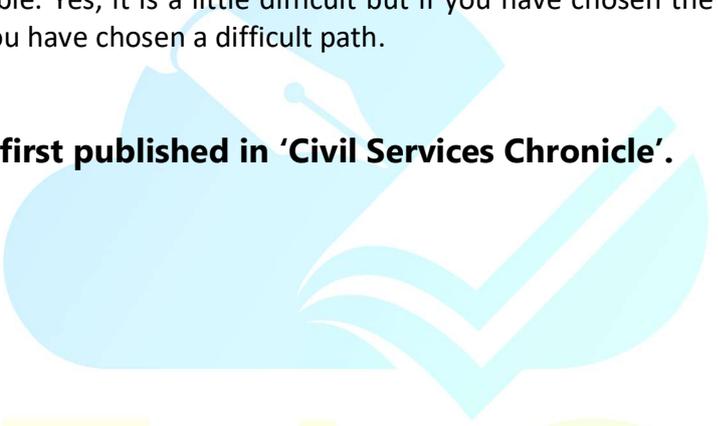
In the following scoreboard I have divided the questions in an exam into three categories. The first category includes questions that have been solved with great care and detail. This means that the student was well aware of the topic. In the second category are questions of medium level of difficulty. The student was unable to answer them very strongly but was still able to do a decent job. The third category includes questions that the student had not prepared for. The student also did not know much about them. However, he solved all the questions thinking that it is better to write something rather than leaving them completely blank. I have not made a fourth category which could have included questions that were left blank. You could include them in the third category.

Take a look at the scoreboard

Question Paper	Maximum	Average	Poorly
Essay	85	15	-----
General Studies - 1	40	40	20
General Studies - 2	50	30	20
General Studies - 3	40	40	20
General Studies - 4	85	15	-----
Optional Paper- 1	75	15	10
Optional Paper- 2	70	20	10
Interview	60	20	30

These are average figures but they are part of a well thought-out strategy. If you are able to answer your exam papers according to this then you can expect to be among the top 100 successful candidates. Just remember that this is not very easy. But, this is also not impossible. Yes, it is a little difficult but if you have chosen the path of civil services then you should not doubt that you have chosen a difficult path.

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


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