

How to prepare Geography for UPSC

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After unravelling the strategy of preparing history and politics for civil services, we will now delve into the method of preparation for the third important pillar of general studies – Geography. Before we jump to the plan of action, it will be better to first identify the practical, parallel boundary lines within which we should prepare. As discussed earlier, mixing topics can lead to lack of focus and disrupt our efforts.

The two boundary lines which one should keep in mind are:

- a) The syllabus set by the Union Public Service Commission
- b) The number of questions asked on the subject in the prelims and mains.

The unsolved question papers of previous years will help one determine the level of preparation this subject requires. Hence, let us simplify the above mentioned points.

Syllabus

The curriculum for Geography for the preliminary examination consists of mere nine words – ‘Physical, Social, Economic Geography of India and the World’. Actually, this brief makes the exam sound complex, too detailed and quite scary. Ideally, most of the knowledge on geography we have till now gets embodied in these nine words. If you go on to pick up books related to each mentioned topic, you will definitely be exhausted. But don't worry, we have a solution to this problem.

The solution is in the syllabus of the main exam. Three main points have been mentioned in it which constitute nearly 40% of the general studies paper. Instead of simply stating the mentioned points, I will give a rather simplified version. These points are:

- 1. Salient features of world's physical geography**
- 2. Distribution of key natural resources across the world**
- 3. Important geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, tsunami, volcanic activity, cyclone, etc**

If your motive is to qualify the civil services exam, which of course it is, then your focus should be to prepare for geography according to the syllabus of the main exam. Rather than preparing for prelims and mains separately, this method will simultaneously prepare you for both since focusing on mains will indirectly prepare you for the prelims.

We must not be audacious enough to neglect unsolved question papers. All aspirants must possess the unsolved papers of last five years for both mains and prelims. This helps one know more about the curriculum

and makes us aware of the pattern of questions asked. Also, the question papers help us decide on topics we must look into apart from the syllabus and also the level of attention we must give to those relevant issues. Keeping in mind the three main topics of geography, I would like to throw some light on its subject matter.

- ✓ **A thorough knowledge of the Atlas:** Extensive coverage of the demography, directions, oceans, continents, etc
- ✓ **Understanding the geomorphology:** Earth's Interior (earthquake waves, shadow zone, volcanic eruptions), composition of the earth, plate tectonics, marine landforms and coastlines
- ✓ **Solar system:** In context to the earth
- ✓ **Climatic Regions:** The Mediterranean (tropic of cancer and tropic of Capricorn, equator), reasons that lead to variation in climate, physical division of the world based on climatic conditions, earth's atmosphere, air mass, fronts and cyclones, precipitation and types of rainfall.
- ✓ **Oceans:** Introduction, temperature and salinity, ocean currents, coral reefs, tides, etc
- ✓ Economic geography and distribution of natural resources across the world
- ✓ Climatic regions of India, forests (natural vegetation of India), Indian monsoon (south west, north east monsoons), etc
- ✓ Physical divisions of India
- ✓ Soil profile of India, Indian weather, rainfall and crops
- ✓ The major river systems in India, different types of irrigation and irrigation storage systems
- ✓ Mineral resources and industries of India
- ✓ Population and related issues

The above are the main topics for geography. When you'll sit down to prepare for these topics, you will also come across certain related sub-topics. You need to pay some attention to these as well. Without understanding these sub-topics, your understanding of the main topics will not be too clear.

Background of the examination

You should not waste your time determining whether this subject is of interest to you or not. Keeping in mind the number of questions asked in prelims and mains, an attempt to ignore this subject can prove quite dangerous for you.

As far as the marking scheme is considered, a decent score is given to the subject. It was only in 2017 (out of 100 questions, 8 were from geography) and 2016 (only 6 questions) that slightly less number of questions were asked. Else, during the preceding three years, 15, 22 and 16 questions related to geography were asked.

Here, I would like to point out that such variation in marks is not exclusive to geography. It is a pattern in prelims. It can happen with any subject. It keeps happening, and happens almost every year. Hence, you must be prepared for such circumstances and can't leave it to your destiny or afford to take a chance.

On the other hand, the trend seen in the main exam is quite stable. In the main paper, the marks are divided according to the topics with slight variations every year. The only exception was 2017 when only 70 questions

(out of a total of 250) were asked. However, in 2016, 2015 and 2014, 100, 87.5 and 100 were respectively marked for questions on geography. Hence, you must keep in mind that in general studies paper I, nearly 35% of questions are asked from geography, which certainly is not a less number.

Nature of questions

Irrespective of the subjects, the nature of questions in civil services exam cannot be similar. It will certainly differ from subject to subject. For that matter, if we were to compare any two subjects, the composition of these will never be same. And this, in fact becomes an unnecessary hurdle in systematic preparation for the exams.

We shall now look into the nature of questions asked in geography from the point to view of prelims and mains.

1. The questions asked in the prelims will be of two types. The first type will include questions to check an aspirant's basic knowledge of the fundamental issues of geography. In the prelims, there will not be any straight questions on the fundamentals or issues related to the core topics of the subject. The questions are formed in a way to test one's basic understanding of the subject. Hence, mugging the topics will not help. One must understand the concepts and have a practical approach towards it. The second set of questions will be on contemporary events. There are two kinds of questions related to current affairs that can be asked in geography. It will either be related to a place or a natural calamity. The questions pertaining to place (location) might be slightly difficult, but there is only a subtle difference between each question. If you have befriended the atlas, then you will easily sail through. The questions asked on catastrophe are relatively easy. All you need is to keep a track of news. If you have been reading newspapers well and watching news channels, it will be a cake walk for you. Answering questions with a fluke might prove disadvantageous. Hence, being well informed about your surroundings is advisable.

2. Questions asked in mains are quite 'friendly'. Some questions are so easy and straight that you can easily find it in geography text books. But others (almost half) are related to current affairs. However, these are not difficult or analytical in nature. In fact, you can answer some of these even with a basic knowledge of geography. The only condition is that you must know geography well.

Method of preparation

An aspirant can more or less have an idea about the method of preparation after looking into the types of questions asked. However, there are certain points which I would like to highlight here:

1. Always use an atlas while studying for geography. Use the graphic representation of maps to determine the position of coasts, states, etc

2. Despite being rooted in arts and humanities, geography is primarily a science. Hence, you must prepare for it as any other science subject; which means one has to always look into the 'whys and hows' of a concept. There is always a reason behind every reaction. Hence, it is important to study the reason.

3. The initial chapters of the subject pertain to the basics of the subject. You must have a thorough knowledge of the fundamentals of geography. If you devote some time to patiently analyze and understand these concepts, you'll master geography and also enjoy the subject. Additionally, you will unlock the shackles of forgetfulness.

4. Spare yourself from reading too many books. Mastering a few good books is advisable. After going through the NCERT book, any high-level book would be sufficient for the preparation. For this purpose, you can read Majid Husain's books.

5. If a landscape goes through a stark change or something occurs in the world in relation to geography, then it is obvious that you need to prepare that topic extremely well. I firmly believe that following the above advises will help you secure good marks in the UPSC exam.



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