



UPSC

Introduction Booklet

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Civil Services Examination

Introduction

The Civil Services Examination is a prestigious examination in India. It is conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). Through this examination, officers are selected for various prestigious civil services in the country, such as the IAS, IFS, IPS, IRS, and IRTS. Every year, approximately 10 lakh candidates apply for this examination; of these, about 4 to 5 lakh actually appear for it, and ultimately, around one thousand candidates succeed.

Examination Format

The Civil Services Examination is conducted in three stages: the Preliminary Examination, the Main Examination, and the Interview. The nature of the examination differs at each stage; for instance, the Preliminary Examination consists of objective-type questions. In this stage, four options are provided for each question, and the candidate must select the correct one. The Main Examination is entirely written, requiring candidates to provide descriptive answers to questions within a specified word limit. The Interview involves oral questioning. We will discuss all three stages of the Civil Services Examination in detail below.

Preliminary examination

Structure of Preliminary Examination

The Preliminary Examination consists of two papers. The first paper is on General Studies, while the second is known as the Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT). The CSAT paper in the Preliminary Examination is qualifying in nature. Both papers carry 200 marks each, making the total examination worth 400 marks. The first paper (General Studies) comprises 100 questions worth 2 marks each, whereas the second paper (CSAT) contains 80 questions worth 2.5 marks each. For every question in both papers, four options are provided, and the candidate must select the correct one. A negative marking system applies to both papers; under this system, marks equivalent to one correct answer are deducted for every three incorrect answers. Specifically, in General Studies, 2 marks are awarded for a correct answer, while 0.67 marks are deducted for an incorrect one. Similarly, in CSAT, 2.5 marks are awarded for a correct answer, while an incorrect answer results in a deduction of 0.83 marks.

Since the CSAT is a qualifying paper, a candidate needs to secure only 33 percent marks (approximately 27 questions or 66 marks) in it to pass the Preliminary Examination. Scoring below this threshold results in failure. The cut-off for the Preliminary Examination is determined solely based on the first paper—General Studies.

Cut-off Level

The cut-off level refers to the score obtained by the last successful candidate in the examination. For instance, suppose a total of 12,000 candidates have passed the exam; a list of the total marks obtained by all candidates would be prepared, and the top 12,000 candidates would be selected. The marks obtained by the last candidate among the selected ones will be considered the cut-off.

Compared to general category candidates, the cut-off marks for candidates belonging to reserved categories and the differently-abled category are somewhat lower. The cut-offs for various categories in the preliminary examination from 2013 to 2020 were as follows:

Category	(General Category)	(EWS)	(OBC)	(SC)	(ST)	(PH-1)	(PH-2)	(PH-3)
2013	241	--	222	207	201	199	184	163
2014	205	--	204	182	174	167	113	115
2015	107.34	--	106.00	94.00	91.34	90.66	76.66	40.00
2016	116.00	--	110.66	99.34	96.00	75.34	72.66	40.00
2017	105.34	--	102.66	88.66	88.66	85.34	61.34	40.00
2018	98.00	--	96.66	84.00	83.34	73.34	53.34	40.00
2019	98.00	90.00	95.34	82.00	77.34	53.34	44.66	40.66
2020	92.51	75.55	89.12	74.84	68.71	70.06	63.94	40.82
2021	87.54	80.14	84.85	75.41	70.71	68.02	67.33	43.09
2022	88.22	82.83	87.54	74.08	69.35	49.84	58.59	40.40
2023	75.41	68.02	74.75	59.25	47.82	40.40	47.13	40.40
2024	87.98	85.92	87.28	79.03	74.23	69.42	65.30	40.56
2025	92.66	89.34	92.00	84.00	82.66	76.66	54.66	40.66

It is clear from the above table that the cut-off does not always remain constant. It varies slightly more or less for each category with changes in the number of candidates, their qualification, number of vacancies and difficulty level of the question papers.

Keep in mind that these calculations of marks are after deducting the loss caused by negative marking i.e. net marks. This means that any candidate should calculate his/her marks by subtracting 1 correct answer for every 3 wrong answers.

Age Limit and No- of Attempts

(Category)	(Age Limit)	(No- of Attempts)
(General Category)	21 to 32 years	06
(OBC)	21 to 35 years	09
(SC)	21 to 37 years	21 to 37 years
(ST)	21 to 37 years	21 to 37 years

- Age will be calculated as of August 1st of the examination's calendar year.
- Candidates who were residents of Jammu & Kashmir between January 1, 1980, and December 31, 1989, will be granted a maximum age relaxation of 5 years.

[Syllabus of General Studies (Preliminary Test)]

In the Preliminary Examination, Paper-1 pertains to General Studies. Its syllabus is as follows:

1	Current events of national and international importance
2	History of India and Indian National Movement
3	Indian and World Geography & Physical, Social, Economic Geography of India and the World
4	Indian Polity and Governance & Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues etc
5	Economic and Social Development, Sustainable Development-Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector initiatives etc
6	General issues on Environmental Ecology, Bio-diversity & Climate Change & that do not require subject specialization
7	General Science

General Studies: An Introduction

As the name implies, General Studies is not an in-depth study of a specific subject but rather a study of various subjects that does not require specialized research or expertise. Clarifying the meaning of General Studies in its notification regarding the Civil Services Examination, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) stated:

“General Studies will include questions to which a well-educated person can provide answers without specialized study. These questions are designed to test the candidate's level of knowledge or awareness regarding various subjects relevant to functioning within the civil services. Through these questions, the candidate's basic understanding of all relevant issues will be assessed, alongside their ability to analyze conflicting socio-economic goals and demands.”

In reality, however, this declaration by the UPSC holds merely formal significance; the truth is that the General Studies question papers often feature questions of such difficulty and depth that even subject-matter experts struggle to answer them.

Challenges of Syllabus

The General Studies syllabus is so vast and comprehensive that it requires at least a year of serious study. For students opting for the Hindi medium, General Studies presents a dual challenge. On one hand, the study material available in Hindi is often not as high-quality as that available in English; on the other, the lack of comfort some examiners have with the Hindi language can disadvantage candidates taking the exam in Hindi. Therefore, Hindi-medium students need to exercise extra caution in their preparation.

If you genuinely aspire to become an IAS officer or a civil servant, reaching your goal will not be easy without studying General Studies in full breadth and depth.

UPSC

Preliminary Examination

Paper-1 General Studies

- Number of questions: 100
- Maximum marks: 200
- Time: 2 hours
- Negative marking: 1/3

Paper-2: CSAT

- Number of questions: 80
- Maximum marks: 200
- Time: 2 hours
- Negative marking: 1/3

Note: In the Preliminary Examination, the CSAT paper is of a qualifying nature, and the merit is determined based on the marks obtained in Paper-I (General Studies).

Main Examination

Interview

This examination is conducted to test the personality of the candidates on the basis of general interest related subjects keeping in view their general knowledge, awareness, intelligence, character, ability to express, personality and general suitability for service.

Maximum Marks: 275

Question papers determining the merit list

Qualifying Paper

Question Paper: A

- Hindi or any language included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution
- Qualifying: 25%
- Maximum Marks: 300
- Time: 3 hours

Paper B

- English Language
- Qualifying: 25%
- Maximum Marks: 300
- Time: 3 hours

Note: Marks obtained in the qualifying papers of the Main Examination are not included in the final ranking; it is mandatory only to pass them.

Question Paper: Essay

- Maximum Marks: 250
- Time: 3 Hours

Paper-II: General Studies-1

- * Indian Heritage and Culture, History and Geography of the World and Society
- Maximum Marks: 250
- Time: 3 Hours

Paper III: General Studies-2

- * Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice, and International Relations
- Maximum Marks: 250
- Time: 3 Hours

Question Paper IV: General Studies-3

- * Technology, Economic Development, Biodiversity, Environment, Security, and Disaster Management
- Maximum Marks: 250
- Time: 3 Hours

Question Paper - General Studies 4

- * Ethics, Integrity, and Aptitude
- Maximum Marks: 250
- Time: 3 Hours

Question Paper VI: Optional Subject

- * Question Paper I
- Maximum Marks: 250
- Time: 3 hours

Paper VII Optional Subject

- * Paper-2
- Maximum Marks: 250
- Time: 3 hours

What should be the appropriate strategy for the preparation

Given the diverse academic backgrounds of candidates, a one-size-fits-all preparation strategy is not feasible. For instance, a candidate who studied History, Geography, and Political Science at the undergraduate level but struggles with science subjects would need a different strategy compared to an engineer or doctor who is comfortable with science but finds the prospect of reading History or Political Science daunting. Naturally, their strategies would differ. Broadly speaking, here are some suggestions regarding strategy:

- Instead of placing equal emphasis on all sections, one should focus more on selected sections. Candidates should choose enough sections to cover a combined total of approximately 80–85 questions, aiming to answer about 65–70 of them correctly through rigorous preparation. While completely ignoring the remaining sections is not ideal, it can be considered a viable contingency plan as the Preliminary Examination approaches.
- A careful analysis of questions from previous years reveals that within each section, certain sub-sections tend to yield a higher number of questions. Therefore, it is advisable to devote more time to these specific sub-sections. For example, within the History section, questions frequently appear from two areas: the Freedom Movement and Art & Culture. Thorough study of these two topics alone should enable a candidate to answer approximately 85–90% of the History questions. Similarly, within Art & Culture, special attention should be paid to Ancient India.
- Another important point to consider is that greater effort should be directed towards sections that are also part of the Main Examination syllabus. This enhances the chances of success in the Main Examination. For instance, the history of Modern India is included in the Main Examination syllabus; therefore, studying this topic in depth for the Preliminary Examination also improves the likelihood of achieving better results in the Main Examination. • It is also important to note that sections of the General Studies syllabus that are exclusive to the Main Examination should not be studied during the remaining two to two-and-a-half months leading up to the Preliminary Examination. These sections include World History, International Relations, Social Justice, Internal Security, and Ethics.
- One must also accept that no matter how thoroughly a candidate prepares, there will inevitably be questions in every section that fall outside the scope of their knowledge. For any section you prepare seriously, aim to solve 70–80% of the questions. Attempting to answer every single question correctly in a particular section can lead to a significant, unproductive waste of time.
- When preparing for General Studies, it is crucial to remember that questions across all sections are deep and require a nuanced understanding of the subject matter. Typically, questions combine various facts or statements to create complex options, specifically designed to filter out candidates who possess only a superficial understanding. For instance, most questions begin with three or four statements or facts—some correct and others incorrect. Candidates are often familiar with some of these facts but not others. Subsequently, these facts are combined to present four challenging options—such as (1) statements 1, 3, and 4 are correct while statement 2 is incorrect, or (2) statements 1, 2, and 4 are correct while statement 3 is incorrect. The candidate must select the single correct option from these complex choices. This not only carries the risk of an incorrect answer but also consumes more time due to the complexity of the options, ultimately making time management a challenge in itself.

A better approach to this problem is to first answer questions that fall within the candidate's scope of knowledge and to allow sufficient time for them. Questions that one cannot answer or has not studied in depth should be marked and skipped for the time being; if time remains at the end, one can attempt to answer them, but otherwise, it is best to leave them unattempted.

Classification of questions asked from various sections in the Preliminary Examination from 2012 to 2022.

Category	Indian History, Art and Culture	Indian Polity and Governance	Geography of India and the World	Environment and Ecology	Indian Economy and Development	General Science and Technology	Current Issues	Total
2012	20	21	17	14	14	10	04	100
2013	16	17	18	14	18	16	01	100
2014	19	10	20	20	11	12	08	100
2015	16	13	18	12	16	9	16	100
2016	16	6	3	16	15	7	37	100
2017	13	22	8	17	29	3	08	100
2018	22	13	9	10	22	14	10	100
2019	16	15	8	19	20	15	07	100
2020	19	14	13	11	14	10	19	100
2021	20	18	13	15	14	14	06	100
2022	16	16	15	13	15	14	11	100
2023	13	14	09	21	14	05	24	100
2024	12	15	18	15	14	13	13	100
2025	13-15	14-15	13-15	15	18-21	13-15	11-15	100

CSAT

CSAT: An Introduction

Paper II of the Preliminary Examination is commonly referred to as ‘CSAT’ (Civil Services Aptitude Test).

The CSAT paper essentially assesses a candidate's intellectual capacity (IQ—Intelligence Quotient). The nature and proportion of questions in this paper are designed to align with the requirements of the civil services or administration. For instance, it includes questions related to decision-making and problem-solving in administrative contexts—questions that differ in nature from those related to general management issues.

Overall, the CSAT is a test of intellectual aptitude (IQ), specifically introduced to evaluate the cognitive abilities required for the civil services or administration.

Role of CSAT

As previously mentioned, the CSAT paper in the Preliminary Examination is qualifying in nature. To clear the Preliminary Examination, a candidate must secure 33% marks in the CSAT paper. The paper consists of 80 questions, each carrying 2.5 marks, making the total value of the CSAT paper 200 marks. A candidate is required to obtain 66 marks out of the total 200—meaning they must secure a net score of 66 after accounting for deductions due to negative marking. To achieve this, a candidate needs to answer approximately 27 out of the 80 questions correctly (after adjusting for incorrect answers).

Therefore, if a candidate fails to secure 33% marks in the CSAT paper, they are considered to have failed the examination, regardless of how well they performed in the General Studies paper.

Syllabus of CSAT

S.No.	Section
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1	Comprehension
2	Interpersonal skills including communication skills
3	Logical reasoning and analytical ability
4	Decision-making and problem-solving
5	General mental ability
6	Basic numeracy (numbers and their relations, orders of magnitude, etc.) (Class X level), Data interpretation (charts, graphs, tables, data sufficiently etc. (Class X level)],

Main Examination

Introduction

The second stage of the Civil Services Examination is known as the 'Main Examination'. Candidates who qualify in the Preliminary Examination are generally invited to appear for the Main Examination during the months of September and October. While the Preliminary Examination is entirely objective—requiring candidates to select the correct option from four choices provided for each question—the Main Examination features descriptive questions with varying word limits, and answers must be written within those prescribed limits. For this reason, writing style is considered a crucial skill for success in the Main Examination.

Structure of Main Examination

The Main Examination carries a total of 1,750 marks, comprising 1,000 marks for General Studies (four papers of 250 marks each), 500 marks for an optional subject (two papers of 250 marks each), and 250 marks for the Essay paper. Additionally, there are two papers—one in English and one in an Indian language (Hindi or any other language included in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution)—carrying 300 marks each, which are qualifying in nature. A minimum qualifying score of 25% (75 marks) has been prescribed for both these papers.

Medium of Examination

The question papers for the Main Examination are published simultaneously in both Hindi and English; however, candidates are permitted to answer in any of the 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Candidates must write the answers for all papers of the Main Examination in the specific language they have indicated as their medium in their Civil Services Examination application form. An exception exists for literature subjects, where candidates may write answers in the script of that specific language, even if it is not their chosen medium of examination. For instance, if a candidate whose medium is English selects Punjabi as an optional subject, they would write their answers in the Gurmukhi script. Nevertheless, if a candidate has chosen a medium other than English for the Main Examination, they retain the option to write the optional subject paper in English.

List of Optional Subjects for the Main Examination

Agriculture	Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Science	Anthropology
Botany	Chemistry	Civil Engineering
Commerce & Accountancy	Economics	Electrical Engineering
Geography	Geology	History

Law	Management	Mathematics
Mechanical Engineering	Medical Science	Philosophy
Physics	Political Science & International Relations	Psychology
Public Administration	Sociology	Statistics
Zoology		

- Literature of any one of the following languages: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santhali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and English.

General Studies (Mains) Syllabus

G.S. Paper 1: Indian Heritage and Culture, History and Geography of the World and Society

S.No.	Topic
1	Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.
2	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.
3	The Freedom Struggle - its various stages and important contributors/contributions from different parts of the country.
4	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country
5	History of the world will include events from 18th century such as Industrial revolution, World wars, Redrawing of national boundaries, Colonization, Decolonization, Political philosophies like Communism, Capitalism, Socialism etc.- their forms and effect on the society.
6	Salient features of Indian society, Diversity of India.
7	Role of women and women's organizations, Population and associated issues, Poverty and developmental issues, Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.
8	Effects of globalization on Indian society.
9	Social empowerment, Communalism, Regionalism & Secularism.
10	Salient features of world's physical geography.
11	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian sub-continent); factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India).
12	Important Geophysical phenomena such as Earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, Cyclone etc., geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including Waterbodies and Ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

G.S. Paper 2: Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice and International Relations

S.No.	Topic
1	Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.
2	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.
3	Separation of powers between various organs, dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.
4	Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.
5	Parliament and State Legislatures- structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.
6	Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.
7	Salient features of the Representation of People's Act. (Note: "Salies" is a typo in the original text for "Salient")
8	Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.
9	Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.
10	Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.
11	Development processes and the development industry- the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.
12	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population. by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.
13	Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.
14	Issues relating to poverty and hunger.
15	Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.
16	Role of civil services in a democracy.
17	India and its neighbourhood-relations.
18	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.

19	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.
20	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate.

G.S. Paper 3: Technology, Economic Development, Biodiversity, Environment, Security & Disaster Management

S.No.	Topic
1	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobili-zation of resources, growth, development and employment.
2	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.
3	Government Budgeting.
4	Major crops - cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems- storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.
5	Issues related to direct and indirect from subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System - objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.
6	Food processing and related industries in India - scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.
7	Land reforms in India.
8	Effect of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
9	Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.
10	Investment models.
11	Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life.
12	Achievements of Indians in Science & Technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
13	Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.
14	Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.
15	Disaster and disaster management.
16	Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
17	Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.
18	Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.

19	Security challenges and their management in border areas- linkages of organized crime with terrorism.
20	Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

G.S. Paper 4: Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude

This space will include questions to test the candidates attitude and approach to issues relating to integrity, probity in public life and his problem solving approach to various issues and conflicts faced by him in dealing with society. Questions may utilise the case study approach to determine these aspects. The following broad areas will be covered.

S.No.	Topic
1	Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions; dimensions of ethics; ethics in private and public relationships. Human Values lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators: role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.
2	Attitude: Content, structure, function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour; moral and political attitudes; social influence and persuasion.
3	Aptitude and foundational values for Civil Services-integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections.
4	Emotional intelligence-concepts, and their utilities and application in administration and governance.
5	Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world.
6	Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration: Status and problems; ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions; laws, rules, regulations and conscience as sources of ethical guidance; accountability and ethical governance: strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance; ethical issues in international relations and funding; corporate governance.
7	Probity in Governance: Concept of public service: Philosophical basis of governance and probity; Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.
8	Case Studies on above issues.

Qualifying Subjects

Hindi or any language included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution

Two papers in the Main Examination are of a qualifying nature. One of these is in the English language, and the other is in any one of the Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

For the Indian language paper, candidates must select one of the 22 languages listed in the Eighth Schedule. As an exception, this paper is not mandatory for candidates hailing from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim.

The maximum marks for this paper are 300, with a qualifying requirement of 75 marks (25%). The general format of the questions will be as follows:

Comprehension	Precis Writing	Usage and Vocabulary	Short Essay
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Translation from English to the Indian language and from the Indian language to English

English Language

The maximum marks for this paper are 300, with a qualifying requirement of 75 marks (25%). The general format of the questions will be as follows:

1. Comprehension
2. Precis writing
3. Usage and Vocabulary
4. Short Essay

Note:-

- The question papers on Indian languages and English will be of matriculation or equivalent standard; candidates are required only to qualify in these papers. Marks obtained in these papers are not counted towards determining the merit ranking.
- The answer scripts for the Essay, General Studies, and Optional Subject papers will be evaluated alongside the qualifying papers in Indian languages and English; however, the Essay, General Studies, and Optional Subject papers will be considered only for those candidates who have secured a minimum of 25% marks in both the Indian language and English papers.

Problems associated with Hindi Medium

Candidates preparing for the Civil Services Examination in the Hindi medium need to understand the specific challenges related to General Studies that they face during their preparation and the examination itself.

The most significant issue is that Hindi-medium candidates are at a relative disadvantage compared to English-medium candidates in the General Studies paper of the Main Examination. For instance, a comparison of General Studies scores between English- and Hindi-medium candidates across any given year's results reveals that Hindi-medium candidates lag behind by an average of 30–35 marks. A similar disparity is observed when comparing the scores of toppers from both mediums. However, this does not imply that the UPSC deliberately conspires against the Hindi medium; rather, this disadvantage stems from the inherent nature of the examination system. Some of the reasons for this are as follows:

- First, the quality and range of study material available in Hindi do not match that available in English. This problem is particularly acute in sections related to current affairs—specifically Science and Technology, international developments, and the economy. It is worth noting that high-quality study material for these sections is scarce in Hindi, not only in books, magazines, and journals but also on the internet.

- Second, most examiners evaluating General Studies answer sheets are more comfortable with English than Hindi; consequently, they often fail to fully connect with the expression and articulation of Hindi-medium candidates. This issue is more pronounced in sections requiring extensive use of specialized or technical terminology, as the Hindi translations of these terms can be difficult for examiners to grasp. Key examples of such sections include Geography, Economy, Environment, and Science and Technology.
- It is important to note that the Civil Services Examination question paper is originally drafted in English and subsequently translated into Hindi. Consequently, Hindi-medium candidates sometimes suffer disadvantages due to translation errors in question papers; if a translator renders a technical term differently from the standard usage found in textbooks, or misinterprets an idiom—thereby distorting its intended meaning—it is the Hindi-medium candidates who bear the consequences of that error.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, we must not overlook the fact that Hindi-medium candidates are often at a disadvantage during the interview stage as well.

Essay: An Introduction

The essay paper is divided into two sections. Each section offers four topics, and candidates are required to write one essay from each section. A word limit of 1,000 to 1,200 words and a weightage of 125 marks have been assigned to each essay; thus, the total marks for the essay paper are 250. A primary dilemma for Civil Services aspirants regarding this paper is understanding the true nature of an essay and what the examiners are seeking to assess through it. Therefore, it is essential for candidates to first grasp what an essay entails and how to maximize their scores in this paper.

In simple terms, an essay acts as a mirror to our personality. UPSC's objective behind this paper is to assess our personality rather than merely our knowledge. During essay writing, our choice of words reflects our sensitivity, our integrity as a civil servant, and our steadfastness and ethical commitment toward our objectives.

One of the two sections typically features topics of an abstract and philosophical nature, while the other focuses on information-based topics. For abstract and philosophical topics, in-depth analysis, our understanding of the subject, and our perspective on its presentation are crucial; conversely, for information-based topics, we are required to present a blend of facts and analysis.

A major challenge in the essay paper is presenting all facets of the given topic within the prescribed word limit (1,000 to 1,200 words). This necessitates identifying the core essence of the topic and presenting the relevant content within the allotted time and word constraints. However, with abstract topics, we have the liberty to define the subject in our own way—for instance, the 2019 Mains exam featured the topic: "Wisdom finds out the truth." On such a topic, we can define 'discernment' and 'truth'—and their various facets—based on our own understanding. However, when the essay topic is of a different nature—such as "Biased media poses a real threat to India's democracy"—it demands both facts and analysis. Yet, one point must be clearly understood: an essay is not merely a dry compilation of facts, but a harmonious blend of information, language, expression, analysis, and knowledge.

How, then, should one prepare for the essay? This is a crucial question for candidates preparing for the Main Examination. A good essay cannot be written merely by reading a couple of books or learning a formula; rather, it requires a deep understanding of the subject and consistent practice. Furthermore, it is important to realize that beyond simply helping you clear the Main Examination, a well-written essay can play a decisive role in your final selection; after all, this is the one component of the entire examination where you can distinguish yourself from other candidates through your creativity and originality.

Interview

The interview is the third and final stage of the Civil Services Examination. This stage assesses the personalities of candidates who have succeeded in the Main Examination. It evaluates qualities such as integrity, mental alertness, logical analytical ability, social harmony skills, and leadership potential. In essence, the Civil Services Examination is a comprehensive test of a candidate's decision-making ability, communication skills, and personality. Unlike the Preliminary and Main Examinations, the interview involves oral questions posed by board members, which the candidate must answer verbally. Furthermore, there is no fixed syllabus for the interview—unlike the Preliminary and Main Examinations—resulting in a wide scope of potential questions. The final selection list for the Civil Services Examination is prepared based on the combined marks of the Main Examination and the interview. Although the weightage of interview marks (275) is lower compared to the Main Examination marks (1750), the interview plays a pivotal role in the final selection.

An examination of the nature and scope of the questions asked during the interview reveals a clear point: this stage of the Civil Services Examination cannot be prepared for within a fixed timeframe of one or two years, unlike the Preliminary and Main Examinations. Since the interview tests a candidate's personality, preparation effectively begins early in life, as personality is not shaped in just a year or two. Experiences and opportunities encountered within the family, neighborhood, school, and college play a crucial role in shaping one's personality. However, this does not mean that one's personality cannot be further refined within a specific timeframe. During the preparation for the Civil Services Examination, candidates encounter various practical challenges, emotional dilemmas, and situations requiring decision-making. Therefore, focusing on personality development during this period can lead to significant improvement in one's personality. It is certain that, regardless of the current level of a candidate's personality development, systematic and planned preparation can help boost their score beyond what they might otherwise achieve. For instance, if a candidate possesses a highly developed personality and is capable of securing 175–180 out of 275 marks without specific preparation, a strategic approach could well enable them to reach the 190–210 range. Given that every single mark plays a crucial role in the final selection and service allocation for the Civil Services Examination, neglecting interview preparation would be a strategic error.