

How to prepare for the Civil Services Mains exam ?

The main examination is all about writing answers according to the demand of the questions. The main things that are to be taken care of while preparing for the mains exam are-

- Understanding the scope of the syllabus
- Timeline to prepare for mains
- Understanding the trends of questions that the UPSC has been asking.
- Maintaining a balance between your health, studies and mental wellbeing.

Understanding the syllabus-

The UPSC provides for an extensive syllabus that deals with almost all the subject areas that are required by an administrator to function.

The syllabus is divided into the four papers for general studies- I, II, III, IV. The examination also includes Essay and optional paper. Tracking previous year questions gives you a glimpse to understand the pattern of question papers and the demand it has for the aspirant to write.

Writing practice is the *sine qua non* for success in the Mains exam. Without writing practice, you would never understand what you are missing and at the same time it is impossible to improve your writing, which also includes raising the speed of writing.

Its generally advised to pin down the whole syllabus into papers that can be pasted in front of your study table. This would help you remember the topics so that you can track back the issue while reading the newspaper or article or for that case any piece of study material.

Timeline to prepare for mains

Its generally advised that you complete the coverage of your mains syllabus once and give at least one revision before you sit for the prelims preparation. Joining a mains test series is one of the easy ways to prepare for the main exam. Its because writing along with a predefined time table help covering the course and at the same time to gauge the important topics for that paper. It also helps one to analyse his/her problem areas for improvement.

It's advisable to club subjects which are related in order to cover them at a desirable pace and also to some extent avoid the boredom. For instance, you can club history and polity, geography and environment, Economy and current affairs. Ethics has to be covered extensively as its importance has been increasing exponentially. With a good booklist, you should target to cover two subjects at a time in two month time. That takes the calculation to almost six months to give a thorough coverage to the whole syllabus.

Starting from July, you should plan your schedule such that you are done with whole of mains syllabus by January end. This preparation will give you extra edge while preparing for the prelims, and at the same time answer writing practice done during the preparation will keep you “mains ready”.

Understanding the trends of questions

To write qualitative answers, you need to understand what is the trend of the questions in each paper including Essay. Here, tracking previous year question papers is most important thing. Reverse engineering is something which can help you tackle this part. For instance, you can see what are the questions that the UPSC has asked from Fundamental Right chapter in previous year and then read the text from relevant books. This will make you understand that some parts are more important than other parts even in the same chapter and there are some topics that can be given reduced importance. The same methodology works for your optional subject as well.

Maintaining a balance between your health, studies and mental wellbeing.

It's very important to keep yourself fit and fine. To clear the exam, you need to stay in the learning curve for over 18 months. In this period, discipline is the only thing that will take you to the merit list. But excessive focus on studies and neglecting health and mental wellbeing does more harm than good.

Do's and Dont's

Do's

- 1) Form a daily time table and follow it meticulously.
- 2) Be regular with your studies including the coverage of current affairs.
- 3) Allot proportionately the time to cover G.S, Optional Subject and Essay.
- 4) Revise your lessons regularly.
- 5) Assess your performance periodically.

Dont's

- 1) Never procrastinate
- 2) Never postpone the development answer writing skills
- 3) Never take lightly the language & CSAT papers that are compulsory.

Brainstorm following quotes :

“ Don't Write What You Know, Write What They Asked ”