



**Want To Ace The
Civil Services
Examination In First
Attempt?**

Follow these suggestions by Top Rankers like Tina Dabi, AIR 1 (CSE 2015), Anuj Malik, AIR 16 (CSE 2016) and more as they share their strategy on **How to Crack IAS in One Year.**

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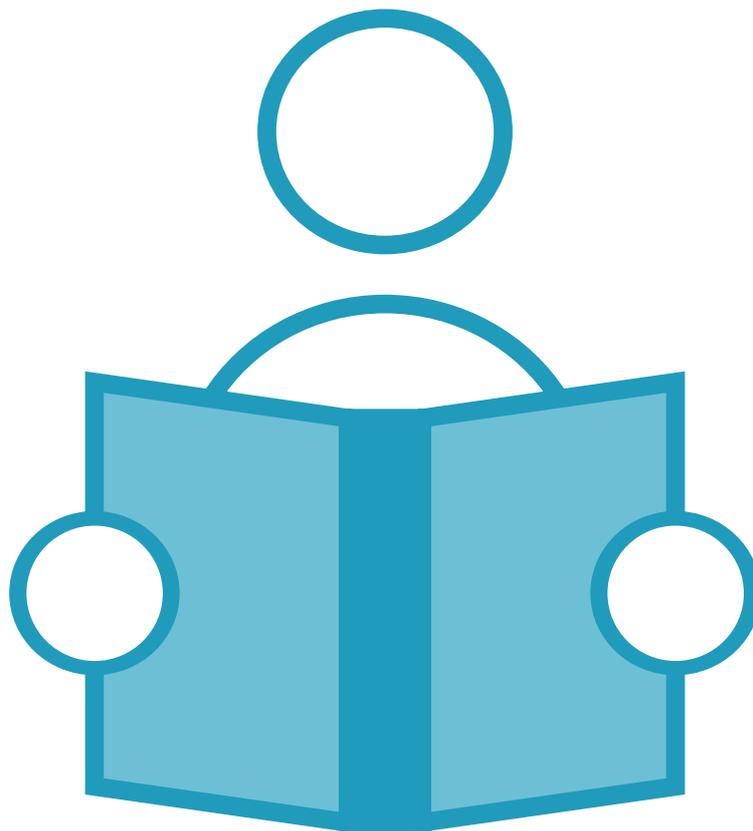
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Preface

The Civil Services Exam conducted by the UPSC is one of the most prestigious exams of the country. Every year, thousands of candidates work hard to clear the exam, but only a few lucky ones get through. The first attempt, that any candidate makes towards qualifying this exam is the most crucial of all, as this is the one which is given with full enthusiasm. Any candidate appearing for the first time must thus not aim at just clearing the Prelims, but should aim to make it through in the first attempt. Candidates who have successfully cleared the exam in past are a good resource when it comes to obtaining tips for successfully clearing the exam.

This is a small compendium based on insights obtained from Tina Dabi and Anuj Malik both of who qualified the Civil Services Examination in their very first attempts and other successful candidates of the Study Circle - Anand Vardhan (AIR 7) in CSE 2016, Shweta Chauhan (AIR 8) in CSE 2016, Sidharth B (AIR 15) in CSE 2016, Mallika Sudhir (AIR 26) in CSE 2016, etc.



1. Strategy to Crack CSE in One Year

The Basics – Get Them Right !!!

Selection in Civil Services requires not more than a year's preparation, if the basics are well in place. The graduation period could be broadly described as the best time to begin one's preparation for the Civils. This section briefly lists down the basic strategies that one must adopt to gear up for the journey - preparing for the Civil Services Examination.

1.1 The Syllabus

A good understanding and hold on the syllabus is the most primary requirement of civils' preparation. The Civil Services are known for their comprehensive and vast syllabus, however, many aspirants falter at this stage itself. An accurate understanding of the nature, clarity and scope of the syllabus is crucial for a good preparation. It helps in understanding what to read and what not to read. It is highly recommended that every aspirant must have a copy of the syllabus handy through every stage of exam. This will help the candidate in identifying if a particular topic needs to be covered or not, while also enabling the candidate not to leave any section or topic unattended.

1.2 Previous Year's Question Papers

Also, aspirants must go through previous years' question papers. It helps in determining the type of questions and also in identifying the best source of reading material. An analysis of previous years' papers helps in putting the syllabus in a better perspective, by highlighting the area from which more questions have been asked. Also, it might be helpful in identifying trends in the paper, if any. It is advisable to divide the topics mentioned in syllabus into sub-topics and again take a re-look at the question papers. Also a look at previous years' question papers, after completing the syllabus, helps in getting a grip of



the orientation of questions being asked. And on a positive note, there could be chances that some questions from previous years gets repeated.

1.3 Focus on Current Affairs

Stay upto date with what is going around in the world. **Current Affairs is not a separate subject area to be covered, but is an integral part of the UPSC syllabus.** Current affairs and contemporary issues are, in fact, the dynamic areas in all the syllabus topics, which are most important from the examination's point of view. Read one newspaper and one magazine regularly.

For instance, the “Focus” magazine from Rau's IAS is sufficient for civils aspirants to stay updated with current affairs.

1.4 Make Notes



It is always recommended to make notes of whatever one reads – be it newspapers or current affairs magazines, or the basics of various subjects being covered in coaching. Making notes is a useful tip to learn and memorize. Also theme-based and structured notes are helpful and handy during last-minute revision of the vast UPSC syllabus that one has covered over a period of time. **Using mind-maps, flow charts, short-cut techniques, etc. to make notes helps in quick revision and better retention.**

1.5 Coaching for the Civils

Coaching is the most crucial part towards cracking the Civils. One must be careful with selecting the right coaching partner, as it will help in building the



foundation towards the Civils dream. Focus on the lectures being delivered and make a habit of noting down everything. Coaching institutes also conduct tests which could be helpful in determining the current stage of preparation one is in.

1.6 Stick to NCERT

It is always a good idea to begin preparation by getting subject fundamentals in place. The best source to get clarity and a good hold on various subjects is NCERT books (Class 9 - Class 12). The UPSC does not aim to check for any specialized knowledge, but mainly tests for basic knowledge across a wide spectrum and more importantly **analytical ability** in the Prelims, and writing and **presentation skills** in the Mains. Often Civil Services aspirants get bogged down with content by referring to multiple books at a time. It is recommended to focus on a few books at a time – the NCERTs' plus one or two books per subject that the professors recommend. More than the number of books, it is important to be thorough with the content. **Read the same book multiple times to get a good grip. Focus only on what is mentioned in the syllabus (this is where again syllabus is important!!!), rather than covering the entire book altogether.**

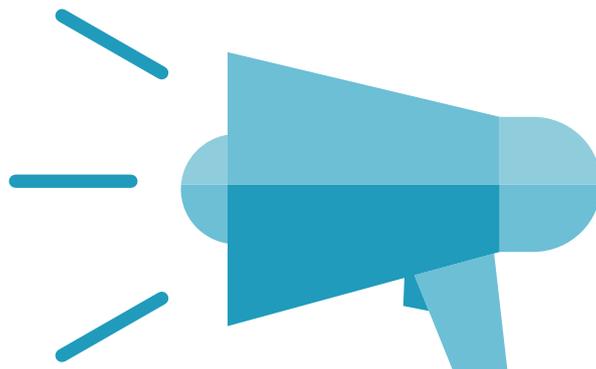
1.7 Introspect

Develop a habit of thinking – in terms of forming linkages of a given topic or subject with other issues. A lot of cross-questioning happens during the interviews and this method helps one with being thoroughly prepared on any given topic. For instance, if a news article talks of the Public Accounts Committee, it must remind the candidate of Public Accounts Committee and its related aspects already covered in the textbooks – such as its role and functions. Also the candidate should be able to relate the two aspects together. This method also leaves a lasting impression of the topic and thus makes it easy to recall

during the examination as well as during interview.

1.8 Talk Out Loud

This activity works wonders. Talk to parents, friends, relatives, room-mates or whosoever is nearby. In the worst case, talk to yourself. Ask questions related to issues that come across and talk on how they can be resolved. This will help adding innovation to one's thinking capabilities, while also helping tighten grip on the topic.



1.9 The Optional Dilemma

Many aspirants are not sure on the optional subject they want to choose. Many seek suggestions from others when deciding on the optional subject. Instead, the optional subject must be with what one is comfortable and also confident about. Also, while deciding on the optional, do not focus on how candidates scored in the subject in previous years. Choose an optional which **one feels confident about** and on which one is also able to find **enough reading material**, as well as **guidance**. Largely, candidates should take up such an optional in which

- ✓ they have more than a passing interest, and
- ✓ which has the maximum syllabus overlap with that of General Studies, or
- ✓ in which they have some previous background (graduation/post graduation subject)

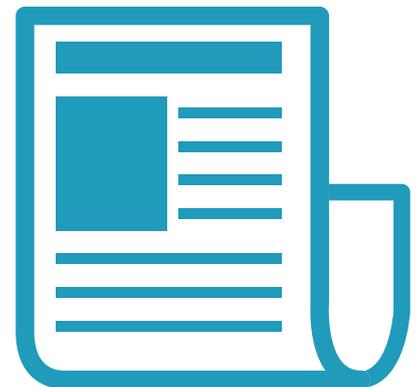
1.10 The Role of Internet

Internet helps in keeping updated with whatever is happening around. It is an effective means to stay updated, especially with the optional subject. Also it is imperative to identify a good and “trusted” source and stick to it, as referring to 10 different sources at a time is not as good as referring to one 10 times.



1.11 Current Affairs

The biggest dilemma around current affairs is what to read for current affairs and how many newspapers to read - is it enough to read just one? How many hours must be devoted towards this exercise? Whether to make notes out of it or not?



1.11.1 Schedule

So, the simplest strategy is to select 1 (or maximum 2 good newspapers), say The Hindu or The Indian Express. Focus on one newspaper until the Mains – ensuring that one is thorough with the reading as well as making notes of the same. After the Mains, two newspapers can be referred to, Civils aspirants must make it a habit to wake up early, and reading newspaper should be the first task they must undertake everyday. Do not postpone the task to a later time of the day, and even if initially one faces difficulty in understanding the content, everything shall fall through in place with the passage of time. **There are many who do not understand the language or the content initially, however, on repetitive attempts, results start showing up.**

No matter how difficult it may look initially, be regular with reading the

newspaper. Also the current affairs magazine provided by Rau's IAS - the "Focus" magazine, must be followed regularly along with the newspaper. "Focus" is a medium-sized compendium of current affairs. Delaying the habit of reading the magazine regularly too might be a detriment towards the exam preparation. Finish the magazine within the period for which it is assigned, so that enough time is available to revise it again later.

1.11.2 Notes are Important

During the initial stages of preparation, aspirants are not clear with what to read in a newspaper and what might be avoided. Rau's provides a list of all **important headlines to be read daily** which helps you maintain focus on only relevant portions of the newspaper. **Take down notes of all that seems important. Notes will be of great help during the revision as it is difficult to go back to everything in detail at the last minute.**

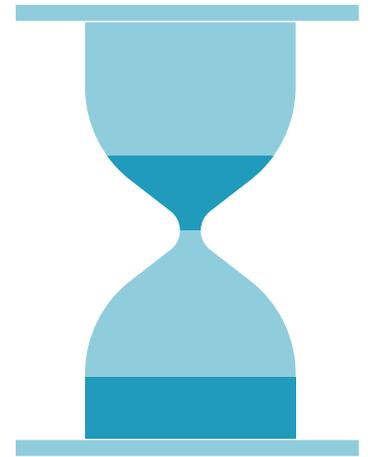


When there is more clarity - make notes of very, very important topics – just to say 2 to 3 pages' notes of current affairs in a week should be good enough. It would be a good idea to make notes of the editorial sections of the newspapers, while all other current affairs are already provided in the 'Focus' magazine. While the 'Focus' magazine provides notes on all the contemporary issues, reading newspapers helps in understanding the overall context of the issue being discussed. Thus, both go hand-in-hand. While the magazine is a collection of notes prepared by professional faculty, taking down notes from newspapers will give added advantage for the preparation.

To help aspirants with newspaper reading, Rau's IAS makes Youtube videos called "Daily News Simplified(DNS)" which guide students regarding what news and editorials to study, why to study as well as how to study them.

1.11.3 Reading Time

Around 40 minutes to one hour is the normal time that must be given to reading a newspaper. If somebody is giving three hours, that is a bit more and if someone is finishing it in 15 minutes, that is too less for appropriate level of preparation. There could be days when the newspaper is light and might just take 30 minutes, so stick to 40 minutes on an average. Depending on an individual's choice, Sunday could be an off-day for newspapers. Instead Sunday could be reserved as a revision day for all the current issues one came across during the past week. Revision is as important as learning something new.



Lastly, cover the entire syllabus – for both the Prelims and Mains, before appearing for the Prelims. This is because later there is no time to learn anything new, but just good to go back to those notes that you have made, or revise what you already know. The main challenge of a civil services exam is its vast syllabus. Focus on covering the syllabus with a good understanding, as also holding tight onto the contemporary issues or current affairs.

The four key factors that shall make a positive impact on Civils preparation are:

- ✓ Professional guidance
- ✓ Patience, coupled with a calm and positive attitude
- ✓ Determination and hard work
- ✓ Methodical study – routine and time-table

2. Prelims Strategy

Many civils aspirants study for Prelims and Mains separately, while not following a comprehensive study for both the levels. However, both must be considered as one examination and the entire syllabus must be covered before one appears for the Prelims.

2.1 Time Management and Revision

With so many aspects to take control of – the current affairs, the class notes, the NCERTs, the subjects, the coaching – UPSC puts one's management skills at test too. **The first management mantra is – REVISE!!!** No matter how simple and easy the topic is, one must revise all that he / she has read through the day. It takes two-three hours to revise on the same day, while postponing it may make the exercise endless. **Also it is recommended that after an advanced session on a topic, go back to the NCERTs again and relook at the basics as well.**

Giving mock tests is a great add-on to the ongoing preparation. It makes one familiar with the examination pattern, mistakes to avoid, strategies to score good etc. Also the mock tests serve as a good practice session, before one finally sits for the final exam. Also, instead of focussing on writing practice at this stage, it is important that candidates focus more on the MCQ's.

Secondly, do not attempt the exam if not well prepared. Poor preparation will only waste an attempt. Instead wait - get back in gear, focus more and prepare better for the next year. It is a thing of pride after all to clear the paper in first attempt.

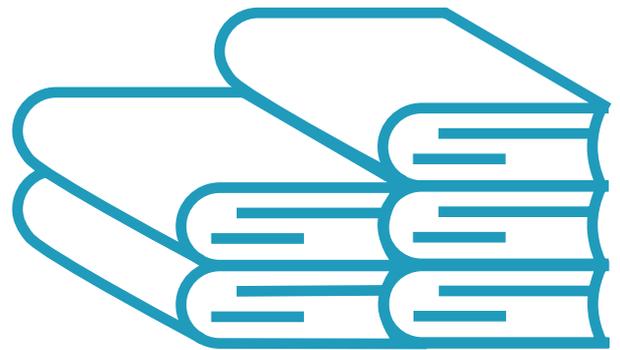
2.2 All Subjects are important



Do not fall in love with a particular subject. The syllabus has different parts and

all the parts are important, that is why, they are included in the syllabus. If, for instance, History was the only important subject, the entire syllabus would be just History. **So, give equal time to all the subjects.** If there is a preference or inclination towards a particular subject, it might be displayed during the Mains-Optional, but for Prelims or General Studies, all subjects are equal. Prepare a book list for all the subjects that need to be covered or referred to for each subject.

Note making is important here as well. Make well structured notes as one might be referring to multiple books for the same subject. A 100 - page book could be brought down to 20-25 pages in the form of notes, making it easier to revise in the later stages of exam preparation.



2.3 The Exam

Generally speaking, it is always recommended to appear for an examination, only when one is fully prepared. But Civil Services aspirants, even after a thorough preparation, might not feel 100% prepared. Aspirants must keep in mind that no preparation may be 100% perfect, still, they should take a plunge, provided they have covered the syllabus; have gone through all the standard courses and materials, and revised them at least 2 to 3 times; and have also gone through, thoroughly, the class notes, a number of times. Remember, **NO ONE IS 100% PERFECT, NOR DO YOU NEED TO BE A PERFECTIONIST.** If you are thorough with your studies and revision, have faith in yourself and **GO AHEAD.**

The prelim preparation strategy can be summed up as:

- ✓ Revise thoroughly all the content – Repeat.
- ✓ Solve previous years' question papers.
- ✓ Take a test series to familiarise yourself with test taking and also with important themes expected in the exam.
- ✓ Do not lose focus and just concentrate on the syllabus.

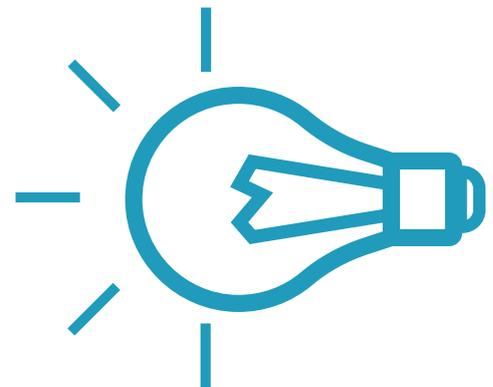
3. The Mains Strategy

Prelims is just a qualifying stage, Mains is the life-changing stage of any UPSC aspirant. UPSC ranks determine the service one gets, and rank depends on performance in Mains.

Remember, while Prelims exam ask Multiple Choice Questions, Mains exam ask Descriptive Questions. So, what is also at test here, besides knowledge and analysis, is writing and presentation skills.

3.1 The Strategy

3.1.1 Look for Keywords



Look for keywords in questions. For example, every question would have a question tag such as “critically analyse”, “discuss”, “elaborate”, “comment”, etc. When it says, “critically analyse”, one should mention positive and negatives about that topic. When it says, “discuss”, it is required to discuss the given statement in detail.

Second, read every single line of the question. For example, if a question says, emotional intelligence is very important for a Civil Servant, and the next statement says ‘in your opinion, what is the role of Emotional Intelligence in the course of service of a bureaucrat’ - Emotional Intelligence is the keyword here, and the first line of the question says emotional intelligence is important for a civil servant. This question may thus be answered by explaining this statement in the introduction part of the answer. The second part of the question becomes body of the answer. It can further be divided say into three parts - again structuring coming to rescue. The structure could be, for instance – one, at the level of public dealing; second, when dealing with colleagues; and third, when dealing with the political masters.

3.1.2 Develop Writing Skills

And how do you develop good writing skills? Writing skills cannot be developed overnight, but over a period of time. **Practice writing on a daily basis.** Pick up an editorial from a newspaper and rewrite it in your own words. When Rau's professors give writing assignments in class, attempt them and get them evaluated by the professor.



3.1.2.1 Practice Tests

The Mains exam is lengthy and it is imperative to manage every second efficiently. There might be candidates who have a very slow writing pace, and might be looking for ways to tackle the same. Practice tests come in handy for such candidates. These practice tests not only help all candidates – be they fast or slow paced, in preparing for the mains, but also help in learning **time management**. Initially, even fast paced candidates with good writing speed might not be able to complete the practice tests within stipulated time, but eventually they learn to manage time, and thus begin to learn and attempt in full. Also, many ignore this aspect of mains preparation, while it is really important and helps in mental preparation for writing the exam.

3.1.2.2 Word Limit

The practice tests also enable one to give appropriate consideration to the word limit i.e. not attempting one question in great length, while falling short of time for others. Practice with as many answers as possible, or as many practice tests as possible.

3.2 Read & Read Again!!!!

It is not possible for anybody to memorize the book after its first reading. First reading should be a reading to familiarize with the topics, second reading should be a recollection, and, third reading will help one to remember the concept. Also, each one has a different pace when it comes to memorizing, and thus learning must happen at an individual's specific pace only. As shared earlier, since **one full preparation for the Mains must be done before the Prelims**, the period after the Prelims must be devoted more towards revising the concepts. Read the same piece of content again and again, go through the notes and revise all that one knows already.

3.3 Writing the Exam - The Mains!!!

3.3.1 Attempt All Questions

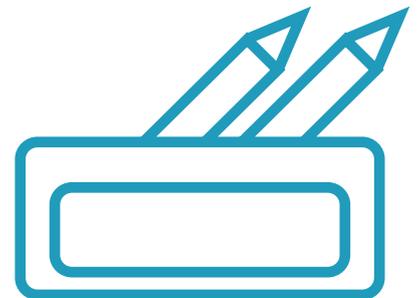
Attempt all questions in the paper. Do not get de-motivated if a particular answer is not known in complete. At least attempt all questions— based on whatever is the best understanding of that particular topic. The secret to being able to attempt all questions is to focus on each aspect of the syllabus. If the syllabus is not covered thoroughly, notes not prepared, one might not be able to attempt all questions with ease.

3.3.2 The Answers

Always structure the answers. Learn from the model answers to the many questions provided by RAU's IAS.

All toppers would have a common thing is that they structure their answers: They give an introduction, a body, and a conclusion to their answers.

Open the answers with a brief background of the topic or keyword identified. Always provide a context for the answer in this section. The answer to the specific question being asked then makes up the body of the answer.



Also add multiple dimensions to the answer, by dividing the question into parts. And the conclusion should always be optimistic, a forward-looking conclusion. If there is a question on women empowerment, one can always quote that the new initiative of the government that is the 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' is the right step in the right direction.

3.3.3 Paragraphs Vs. Points

This depends on the comfort level of each candidate and there is no rule of thumb, as such.

3.3.4 Name Dropping Technique

Try to answer questions in a manner that it is easier for the examiner to check. Drop in terminologies in the answer and highlight them. For instance, when solving a case study on leadership, one might drop in terms such as 'motivation', 'empathy' etc. and highlight for them to be easily discoverable.

3.3.5 Presentation



Underline - Underline important things. This makes the answer more readable and understandable for the evaluator, making the task of answer checking effortless. The Mains do not offer the relaxation of changing pen or to use green pen, blue pen, etc. or to even hold a pencil. Only the simplest thing which can be done is to underline the important things, with whatever is in hand.

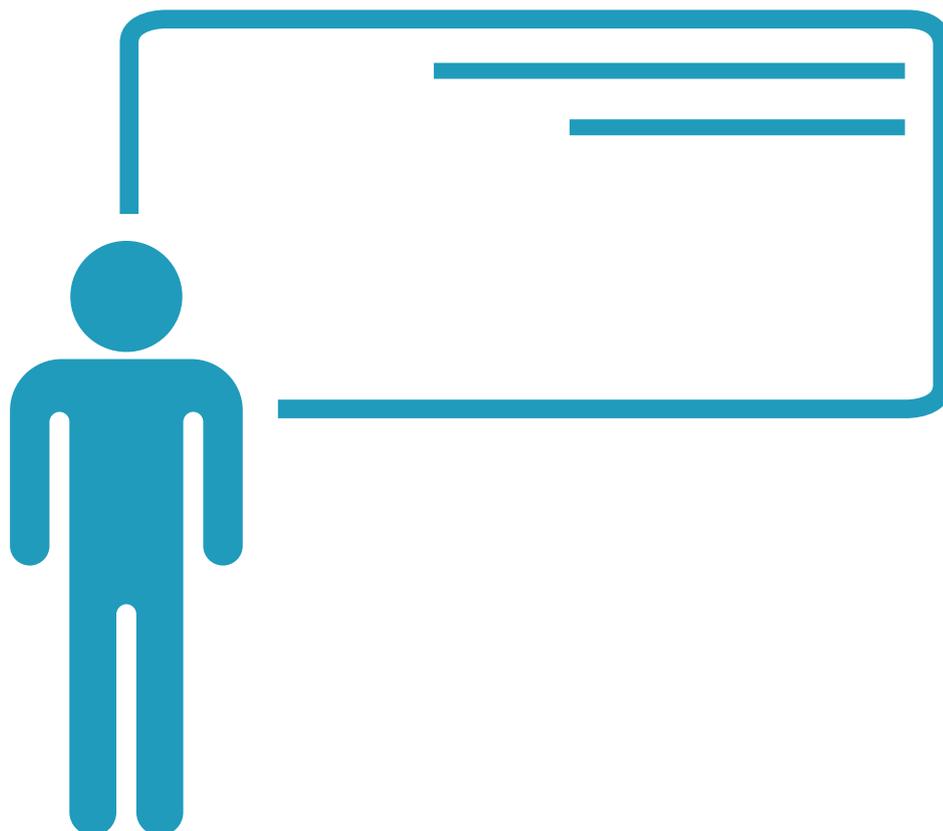
Flowcharts & Tables – If there is shortage of time, instead of going for text-based answers, opt for flowcharts. One may easily sum up the entire answer, in a flowchart. Similarly, tables also come in handy when presenting any kind

of data. Instead of putting data within the text and making it difficult for the examiner to locate, add-in tables – making the answer more presentable.

Diagrams - Make diagrams, but only where they are necessary. For example, if there is a question on air mass – it could be well represented using a diagram. Do not make a repetition of what you have already indicated in the diagram. Use the text for providing additional information. Diagrams can also be used when there is less time or when less content in the form of text is available for a given question.

Summing up the main points of Mains Preparation:

- ✓ Revise and practice all the time
- ✓ Continue reading newspapers and making notes
- ✓ Give Practice Tests – as many as possible
- ✓ Prepare your answers well – Structure them
- ✓ Work on the presentation aspect of answers
- ✓ Learn to manage time
- ✓ Focus and concentrate



4. The Personal Interview

This is the final day and everything is just a surprise. No candidate knows what will happen this day – what questions will be asked, who will be the chairperson. As the nervousness sets in, many candidates even forget their graduation subjects at the time of interview, leave alone the answers to questions being asked.

4.1 Preparing for the Interview

The Detailed Application Form (DAF), that needs to be filled up after the Prelims, should be done with utmost caution and honesty, as it is the first step towards a good interview. This form also serves as the basis of preparation for the interview. For instance, a candidate who mentions a family background of ex-serviceman, must have knowledge about the defence sector – the reforms required, any current issue related to it and other relevant information. Also, any hobby that is mentioned in the form, graduation subjects, achievements, anything written on the form – the candidate must be thorough with every aspect of it. If playing cricket is a hobby – one must have knowledge about various rules of the game, India's performance of late, controversies related to the game and the BCCI, etc.

An easy way to prepare for the interview is to pick up words from the form – every single word possible – and make a note of questions that could be built around these words. Brainstorm on the questions that could come up around these keywords.

4.2 Work on Communication Skills

It is important that a candidate should have a good command over language and is able to communicate effectively. At times, during interviews, candidates search for words



and thus run short of time in expressing themselves. A good way to prepare for interviews is to watch debates and news on television channels. Also, qualifying the Mains does not imply that one stops reading the newspapers. They are not only a useful source of information for interview preparation but also help in building up vocabulary and communication skills.

4.3 Mock Interviews

Just as the test series are important to prepare for the Mains exam, mock interviews serve as a platform for interview preparation. A candidate must attend at least 3 to 4 mock interviews before the final drill, and ensure that all feedback offered by the interview panel has been put to use during the preparation. Along with communication skills, candidates also must project a good overall personality, in terms of a positive body posture, body language and appearance.



5. The First Attempt – This is it!!!

Instead of appearing for the exam again, why not put the best foot forward in your first attempt. Prepare well, work hard and go for it. Direct all efforts towards achieving the cut-off score or all the efforts for that year get wasted.

5.1 Give in your Best

So, integrate, complement, do everything that requires clearing this examination in a single go. Since the syllabus for Prelims is a subset of that of the Mains, first and foremost, prepare for the Prelims according to the Mains. The last two months before Prelims focus on the revision of the syllabus of Prelims, however, before that one must focus on the entire syllabus.

5.2 Don't Overdo

One does not need 10 different coaching institutes to excel in a single exam, nor are 20 different books required to read a single subject. The maximum number of sources that you need for a good preparation is 2, so that if one misses out on something, the other complements.



5.3 Revise....& Revise !!!

The most important thing would be to revise, whatever one studies, multiple times. Revise current affairs of last one year for the Prelims, and be thoroughly prepared with them. Also make notes of all that is in the syllabus, highlight important points and revise. It is not important to read more, but it is of utmost importance to revise whatever has been read.

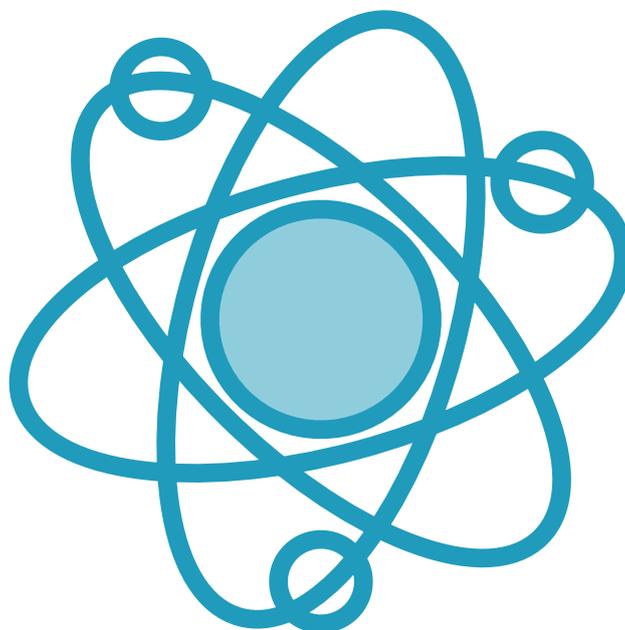
Rau's C3 (Current-Core- Concepts) notes, Test Series and QIP (Quality Improvement Program) classes conducted right before the Prelims and the Mains exams respectively, are specifically designed for revision and practice.

5.4 Connect The Dots

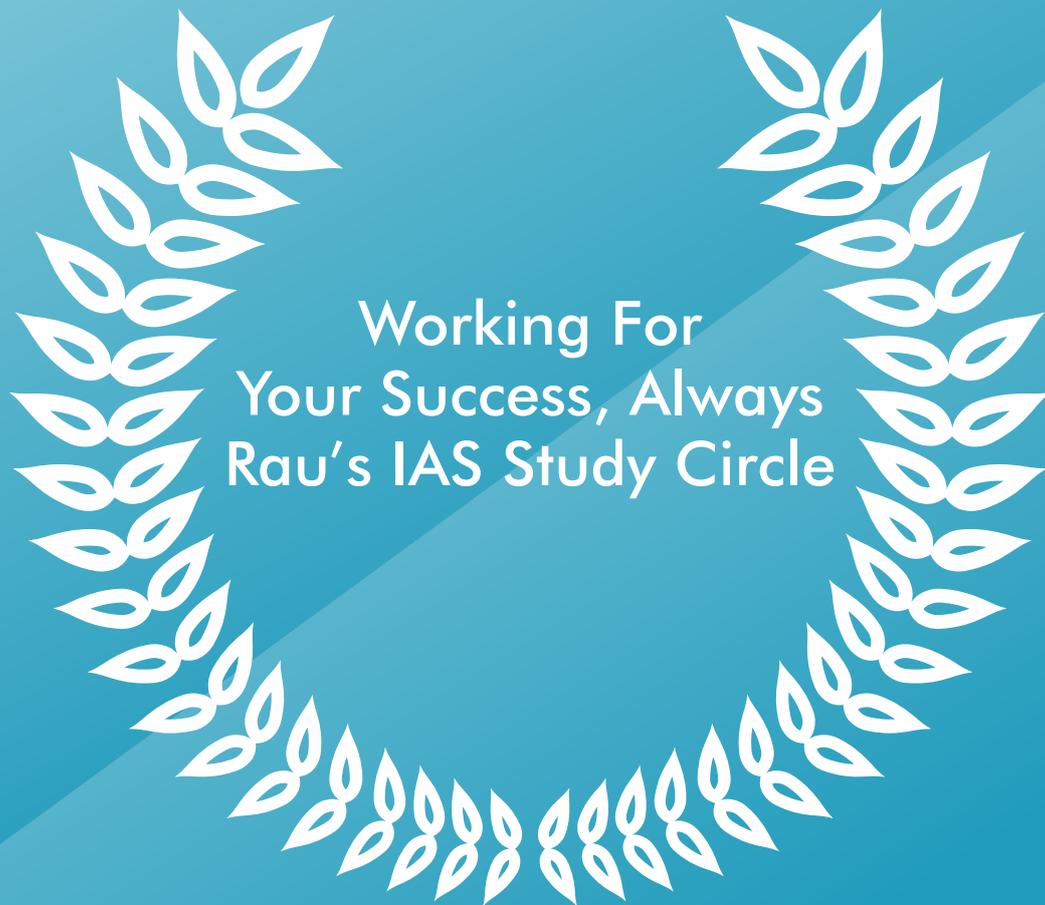
Current affairs is the success mantra to cracking the Civil Services Examination. The Mains examination comprises the current affairs largely – and candidates must try to link the theory part with current affairs in all their answers. One must try to connect different articles and themes they come across in newspaper everyday. For instance, for any answer related to monsoon and its impact on agriculture the answer could be connected to the El Nino effect, its current position etc.

5.5 Syllabus is the Key

A good grip on the syllabus helps one connect with everything being read. For instance, a person who understands the UPSC syllabus thoroughly, might, while reading an article in the newspaper be able to relate it to some part of the syllabus. It helps in transitioning between the static syllabus and current affairs, smoothly and in one go.



Wishing You All the Best for Your preparation.



Incase of any query please write to us at
contact@rauias.com