

CIVIL SERVICES (MAIN)-2015: INSIGHTS ON ESSAY AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

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The role played by the essay paper and current affairs in determining the success of a civil services aspirant is not fully recognized. A true assessment of the mains papers brings out very clearly that the route to success lies in commanding over two crucial papers, viz; Ethics and Essay. In addition, the current affairs part is also a great determinant of success in the main exam. In my considered view, a candidate must realize it at the right stage of his preparation and orient his preparations factoring in the importance of these three crucial areas i.e. Ethics, Essay, and Current Affairs. I would call these three areas as the dynamic part of the syllabus as they encompass most contemporary issues from all fields of knowledge. In my last article in this journal (28th November - 4th December, 2015), I have already explained about the ethics paper in all its dimensions. In the present article, I will outline the strategy to cover the essay and the current affairs parts. In these two areas, there is a lack of proper guidance available to the aspiring candidates. My guidelines are relevant for candidates appearing in CS (main) exam 2015 as well as for those also who plan to write the exam in 2016.

Essay Paper

In its new format, two essays have to be written by the candidate in three hours time. Though, there is no prescribed word limit for an essay, I recommend that each essay should be of 1200- 1400 words. The time for one essay

is one and a half hour, which is more than adequate to finish the writing part. However, the real challenge is not writing the essay but managing its structure and design. If the essay is well designed, it will become forceful and fetch high marks. Thus, the key to a good essay is its proper structure and keeping the content close to the topic of the essay. UPSC has given the following guideline for the essay paper.

"Candidates are expected to keep closely to the subject of the essay, to arrange their ideas in an orderly fashion, and to write concisely. Credit will be given for effective and exact expression."

Now let me explain these requirements with examples.

● Keeping closely to the

subject of the essay: "An essay is a piece of writing that methodically analyses and evaluates a topic or an issue". Michel de Montaigne, who coined the term essay defines an essay as an "attempt to put ones' thoughts in writing." It is clear from this definition that one has to write close to the subject of the essay. For example, if the essay is on '*Ethics of Climate Change*', then, keeping close to this topic would mean writing about the ethical rationale for checking and reversing the climate changes that are taking place. This ethical dimension of climate change should be the central theme in this particular essay topic. This theme is: if the world is to do something about climate



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change, there has to be an ethical response apart from the scientific and technological response. The ethical response will require those responsible for greenhouse emissions to reduce it for the future generations even if they themselves are not so much threatened immediately by their acts. The essay must capture this central theme and develop along this theme.

● **To arrange ideas in orderly fashion:** This requires a proper structuring of the essay paper. Since an essay is an attempt to persuade its readers about what his writing is attempting to convey, it must be accordingly structured in the following parts:

a. Introduction: It gives the reader a way into your essay. The reader will get a map into a journey that your essay will take him to. In introduction, you should cover (a) the theme of the essay (b) its importance and (c) how you are going to take up the theme. Introduction should be concise, engaging and well written to create the first impression. It must have something to grab the attention of the reader.

b. Main Body of the essay: The main body of the essay will consist of three to four different paragraphs, each having its own theme connected to the central theme of the essay. In the main body, you should be able to develop the central ideas, arguments, counter arguments in different paragraphs.

c. Conclusion: Conclusion is the summary of the main points of the argument made in the essay. It captures the essence of the essay.

d. Writing concisely: This guideline from UPSC with regard to essay writing implies that you should be able to make compact sentences and not disparate lines which are not connected with each other. Each sentence should connect with the next sentence in terms of logic, facts, arguments etc.

e. Effective and exact expression: This is about forceful expression. For this, you need to use metaphors, sim-

iles, rhetorics, idioms in the essay wherever they can fit in appropriately. Without such usage, your essay will look dull and descriptive.

Expected topics for essay in 2015 exam are as follows:

Yoga, Smart City, Intolerance, Mobile Telephony, Magna Carta, Hundred years of First World War, Hundred years of Gandhi's Return to India, Climate Change, Value Education, Twenty First Century as the Asian Century, Uniform Civil Code, Lack of a Robust Sports Culture in India.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Current affairs run through the entire IAS mains syllabus barring some static parts. But covering and commanding it is a major challenge because it entails a wide spectrum of events and issues. The best part of the current affairs is that if prepared holistically, it can pay you in any part of the General Studies Main papers. For example, if you are covering the issue of climate change, which is extremely relevant for Civil Services(Main)-2015 exam., then you should cover it in such a way that you can answer it from the perspective of the ethics paper, essay paper or the environment topic in GS Paper III. The climate change has an ethical dimension, and from this perspective, a question can be asked in the ethics paper. Similarly, it is a scientific issue and its scientific/technological aspect can be asked in GS Paper III which deals with environment and ecology. Finally, climate change can be an essay topic from the perspective of an urgent need in human agenda. Thus, the same topic, (climate change, corruption, etc) should be studied in a very wide perspective. Secondly, more than knowing about the current topics, it is more important to know the key points involved in the topic. For example, if you are going to cover SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), You should emphasize on two key components of this key body viz; importance of India joining it, and secondly, its emphasis

on tackling terrorism. Just knowing about SCO, without comprehending its relevance in exam will not fetch you good marks in the exam.

Secondly, in current affairs, the coverage is from the events and issues of last one year. Thus, for IAS Mains, you need to cover events between October 2014 and November 2015. For Civil Services 2016, you need to cover the major events between August 2015 and November 2016 because you will have to take into account the current questions that are going to be asked in the prelims 2016 exam as well.

Thirdly, in most cases, current affairs questions have two components. One is about the issue itself which needs to be elaborated in your answer. The second part is about the solution or your suggestions on the issue. You should answer both the parts of the question in a balanced manner. In many cases, candidates just explain the issue without offering a proper solution or suggestion in their answers. This is a very important point to bear in mind while approaching a current affairs question.

Finally, one should guard against the tendency to put lots of facts and figures in current affairs questions. It is not a test of your statistical ability to produce data on current affairs. It is about comprehending the current issues.

Digital India, Swachha Bharat, Net neutrality, FDI reforms and sector sensitivity (e.g. FDI in media, defence), Niti Aayog, Banking sector reforms, New bank licenses, Small & payment banks, Japans' new security policy and issues raised by China effect in Asia, South China sea, NJAC, All India Judicial Service, Labor law reforms, GST, Reforms in Railways, Shanghai Cooperation Organization- India's entry in SCO, BRICS, New development bank - Can it be a parallel to World Bank?, Energy Security in India, National Solar Mission, Coal tax regime, India's intended national defined target for Paris COP 21 for renewal of Kyoto like protocol, Forward Market and Food inflation, National Green Tribunal & issues regarding its ambit of power, Uniform Civil Code, Lack of concerted policy in fighting global terrorism, ASTROSAT, IRNSS, Mars mission, North east insurgency, Naga issue, Inner Line Permit, AFSPA, Uniform Civil Code, Smart City, Geo-engineering etc.

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