UPSC Civil Services Examination

Complete Syllabus & Exam Pattern — Prelims, Mains & Interview

The Civil Services Examination (CSE), conducted annually by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), is the gateway to India's premier administrative services including the IAS, IPS and IFS. The exam is conducted in three successive stages: the Preliminary Examination (screening), the Main Examination (written, merit-deciding), and the Personality Test (Interview). This document summarises the syllabus and pattern for each stage for reference and study planning.

Exam Structure at a Glance

Stage	Papers	Marks	Nature
Preliminary	GS Paper I + CSAT Paper II	200 + 200 = 400	Qualifying only (screening)
Main	2 Language papers + Essay + GS I–IV + Optional I & II	1750 (merit)	Written, descriptive
Interview	Personality Test	275 (merit)	Face-to-face
Total (Merit)	Mains + Interview	2025	Determines final rank

Note: Prelims marks are not counted towards the final merit — they are used only to shortlist candidates for the Mains. The final rank is based solely on Mains + Interview marks (2025 total).

Stage 1: Preliminary Examination

Objective type (MCQ), consisting of two compulsory papers. Both papers carry negative marking of 1/3rd mark for every wrong answer.

Paper I — General Studies (200 Marks, 2 Hours)

- Current events of national and international importance
- History of India and Indian National Movement
- Indian and World Geography — Physical, Social, Economic geography of India and the World
- Indian Polity and Governance — Constitution, Political System, Panchayati Raj, Public Policy, Rights Issues, etc.
- Economic and Social Development — Sustainable Development, Poverty, Inclusion, Demographics, Social Sector initiatives, etc.
- General issues on Environmental Ecology, Bio-diversity and Climate Change (does not require subject specialisation)
- General Science

Paper II — CSAT (200 Marks, 2 Hours, Qualifying — minimum 33% required)

- Comprehension
- Interpersonal skills including communication skills
- Logical reasoning and analytical ability
- Decision-making and problem-solving
- General mental ability
- Basic numeracy (numbers and their relations, orders of magnitude, etc.) — Class X level
- Data interpretation (charts, graphs, tables, data sufficiency, etc.) — Class X level

Stage 2: Main Examination

Written, descriptive examination consisting of nine papers, of which two are qualifying (language papers) and the remaining seven count towards the final merit (1750 marks).

Paper	Subject	Marks	Nature
Paper A	Compulsory Indian Language	300	Qualifying
Paper B	English	300	Qualifying
Paper I	Essay	250	Merit
Paper II	General Studies I	250	Merit
Paper III	General Studies II	250	Merit
Paper IV	General Studies III	250	Merit
Paper V	General Studies IV	250	Merit
Paper VI	Optional Subject – Paper 1	250	Merit
Paper VII	Optional Subject – Paper 2	250	Merit

Qualifying papers (A & B) require a minimum of 25% marks; these marks are not counted for ranking. The Indian Language paper is not compulsory for candidates from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim.

General Studies I — Indian Heritage & Culture, History, Geography

- Indian culture — salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times
- Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present — significant events, personalities, issues
- The Freedom Struggle — its various stages and important contributors/contributions from different parts of the country
- Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country
- History of the world — events from 18th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, redrawal of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization, political philosophies (communism, capitalism, socialism, etc.)
- Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India
- Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization
- Effects of globalization on Indian society
- Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and secularism
- Distribution of key natural resources across the world, factors responsible for location of primary, secondary and tertiary sector industries
- Important Geophysical phenomena, geographical features and their location — changes in critical geographical features and flora and fauna and effects of such changes

General Studies II — Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice, IR

- Indian Constitution — historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure
- 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

- Separation of powers between various organs, dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions
- Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with other countries
- Parliament and State legislatures — structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these
- Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary — Ministries and Departments
- Salient features of the Representation of People's Act
- Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies
- Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies
- Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation
- Development processes and the development industry — the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders
- Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population and the mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these sections
- Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources
- Issues relating to poverty and hunger
- Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance applications, models, successes, limitations and potential
- Role of civil services in a democracy
- India and its neighbourhood — relations
- Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests
- Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora
- Important International institutions, agencies and fora — their structure, mandate

General Studies III — Technology, Economic Development, Biodiversity, Security, Disaster Management

- Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment
- Inclusive growth and issues arising from it
- Government Budgeting
- Major crops, cropping patterns, irrigation systems; storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in aid of farmers
- Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System; issues of buffer stocks and food security; technology missions; animal-rearing economics
- Food processing and related industries — scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management
- Land reforms in India
- Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth
- Infrastructure — Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.
- Investment models
- Science and Technology — developments and their applications and effects in everyday life; achievements of Indians in science and technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology
- Awareness in fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights
- Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
- Disaster and disaster management
- Linkages between development and spread of extremism
- Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security
- Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention
- Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism
- Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate

General Studies IV — Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude

- 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
- Attitude — content, structure, function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour; moral and political attitudes; social influence and persuasion
- Aptitude and foundational values for Civil Service — integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections
- Emotional intelligence — concepts and their utility and application in administration and governance
- Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world
- 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

- Probity in Governance — concept of public service; Philosophical basis of governance and probity; Information sharing and transparency, RTI, codes of ethics, codes of conduct, citizen's charters, work culture, quality of service delivery, utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption
- Case Studies on the above issues

Essay Paper (250 Marks)

Candidates are required to write essays on multiple topics, expected to keep closely to the subject, arrange ideas in an orderly fashion, and write concisely. Credit is given for effective and exact expression.

Optional Subject (Papers VI & VII — 250 Marks Each)

Candidates must choose ONE optional subject from the list below. Each optional has two papers.

- 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

Stage 3: Personality Test (Interview) — 275 Marks

Candidates who qualify the Main Examination are called for the Personality Test. It is a purposive conversation intended to assess personal suitability for a career in public service. The interview assesses mental alertness, critical powers of assimilation, clear and logical exposition, balance of judgement, variety and depth of interest, ability for social cohesion and leadership, and intellectual and moral integrity. Special attention is paid to assessing candidates' awareness of current affairs and their overall personality rather than special or technical knowledge.

Compiled for reference and study planning. The syllabus structure has remained stable since 2013; always cross-check against the official notification released by UPSC (upsc.gov.in) for the current examination year before finalizing your preparation.