# Opportunities through UPSC Exam

Since before the Indian Independence, the Civil services Exam conducted by UPSC has been the main mode through which India's highest-ranking administrators have been selected.

## Fact File: The Journey of UPSC House

The Union and State Services can be classified into Group A, B C and D categories, with the Group A Services generally carrying higher ranks and responsibilities. Though each of these groups has a different channel for recruitment, there is provision for promotion from Group C to Group B and from Group B to Group A.
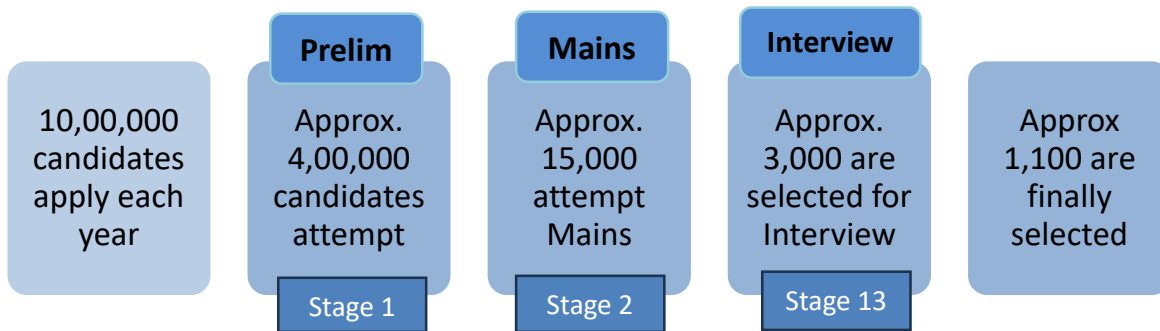
| | | General Management Services | Specialized Services | Technical Services |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group A** | All India Services | Indian Administrative Service (IAS) | Indian Police Service (IPS) | Indian Foreign Service (IFS) |
| | Central Services | | IFOS, IRS, JIS, IRTS, IRAS, IA&AS etc. | Railway Engineering Services, CPWD, CGHS |
| **Group B** | Central Services | CSS, RBSS, DANICS | CSCS | CSCS |
| **Group C & Group D** | Exists in all functional and general management areas | | | |

Group A and B officers are recruited by **the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).** Therefore, the **UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE)** is the only channel through which the highest-ranking officers in the Union and the State government are selected. This makes the UPSC CSE the most sought-after examination in India.

# CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION
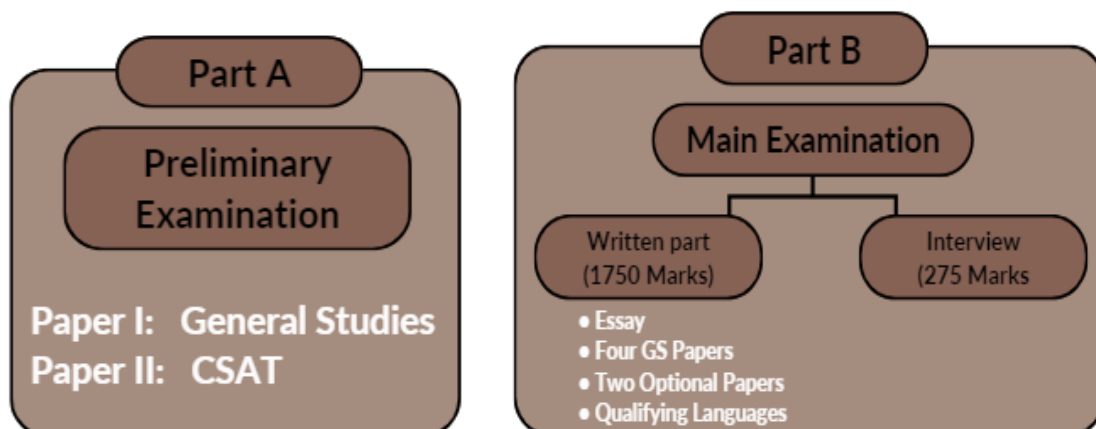
## About Examination

The Civil Services Exam (CSE) is conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) annually to select candidates for various civil services positions in the Indian government. The exam is conducted in three stages: the preliminary exam, the mains exam, and the interview.

| 10,00,000 candidates apply each year | **Prelim**<br>Approx. 4,00,000 candidates attempt<br>Stage 1 | **Mains**<br>Approx. 15,000 attempt Mains<br>Stage 2 | **Interview**<br>Approx. 3,000 are selected for Interview<br>Stage 13 | Approx 1,100 are finally selected |
|---|---|---|---|---|

## Stages of the Examination

The preliminary exam consists of two objective-type papers, General Studies and Civil Service Aptitude Test (CSAT), which assess the candidates' knowledge and skills. The mains exam is a written exam consisting of nine papers, including two qualifying papers in Indian languages and English, and seven papers on various subjects such as history, geography, polity, economics, and ethics.

Candidates who qualify the mains exam are called for an interview, which assesses their personality, communication skills, and knowledge of current affairs. The final selection is based on the candidate's performance in the mains exam and the interview.

### Part A

**Preliminary Examination**

**Paper I: General Studies**
**Paper II: CSAT**

### Part B

**Main Examination**

Written part (1750 Marks)   Interview (275 Marks)

- Essay
- Four GS Papers
- Two Optional Papers
- Qualifying Languages

# Preliminary Examination

The Preliminary Examination is the compulsory Qualifying stage, the marks of which do not count in the final merit. It consists of two papers. **Paper 1** is the **General Studies Paper**, and **Paper 2** is the **Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) paper.**

|  | Maximum Marks | Cut-off | Syllabus Gist |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Paper I: General Studies** | 200 | Around 90-100 (in last 5 years) | Current Events, History of India, Geography, Polity, Economics, Environment, General Science. |
| **Paper II: CSAT** | 200 | Need 67 marks to Qualify | Comprehension, Logical reasoning; Decision making; General mental ability; Basic numeracy, Data interpretation |

- Duration of Paper: 2 hours each

The **CSAT paper** is qualifying in nature. However, securing the minimum **33% score** (i.e. 67 marks) in it has become increasingly challenging in recent years.

The cutoff marks of the **GS Paper** decide the qualification for the Main Examination. As shown in the table below, these cutoff marks have remained in the 90-100 range in recent years. However, it can vary depending on the number of seats offered by UPSC and the difficulty of the paper.

| Subjects | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Polity & Governance** | 16 | 12 | 18 | 15 | 11 |
| **Environment** | 19 | 14 | 15 | 11 | 9 |
| **Geography** | 8 | 11 | 9 | 14 | 11 |
| **Science & Tech** | 9 | 12 | 8 | 7 | 9 |
| **Economy** | 14 | 14 | 10 | 14 | 11 |
| **History** | 18 | 14 | 17 | 17 | 22 |
| **Current Affairs** | 16 | 22 | 23 | 22 | 27 |
| **Cut-off** | 92 (expected) | 87.54 | 92.51 | 98 | 98 |

# Main Examination

The UPSC Civil Services Exam (CSE) mains test is the **second step** of the selection process after the preliminary exam. The mains exam is a written test consisting of nine exams, two of which are qualifying in character and the remaining seven are used to determine merit.

**The two qualifying papers are as follows:**

- Indian Language Paper A (300 marks)
- English - Paper B (300 marks)

**The seven papers considered for the merit rating are as follows:**

|                      | Maximum Marks | Ideal Score | Syllabus Gist                                              |
|----------------------|:-------------:|:-----------:|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| **Essay**            | 250           | 120+        | Two 1000-1200 words Essays (Philosophical/Technical)      |
| **GS-I**             | 250           | 100+        | History, Society, Geography                               |
| **GS-II**            | 250           | 100+        | Polity, Governance International Relations                |
| **GS-III**           | 250           | 100+        | Economy, Agriculture, Science-Tech Environment, Internal Security |
| **GS-IV**            | 250           | 110+        | Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude                             |
| **Optional Paper - I** | 250         | 125+        | Detailed Syllabus of both papers of each subject can be availed from the latest UPSC CSE Notification |
| **Optional Paper - II** | 250        | 125+        |                                                           |
| **Total**            | **1750**      | **750+**    |                                                           |

• Duration of Paper: 3 hours each

The mains papers last five to seven days. The marks gained in these seven examinations are combined together to produce **a candidate's ultimate CSE** rank. A person who can achieve the ideal scores, as mentioned above, can generally qualify for the Interview. The cutoff for the Interview has remained in the range of 720-750 marks out of 1750 in the last few years.

# Language Papers

The candidates must obtain **a minimum qualifying score in English (Paper-A) and the Indian Language (Paper-B)** examinations in order to qualify for the interview. The candidate can choose any one language of the eighth schedule as the Indian Language. In the UPSC-2023 Notification, the qualifying marks for both language papers have been fixed at 25%, i.e. 75 marks.'

Although, it is not mandatory for the candidates from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim to attempt the **Indian Language Paper.**

# Optional Papers

The optional papers consist of two 250-marks papers. A candidate has to choose **one Optional subject** from the following list of 25 academic subjects and 16 Literature subjects.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Agriculture | 14. Management |
| 2. Animal Husbandry and Veternary Science | 15. Mechanical Engineering |
| 3. Anthropology | 16. Mathematics |
| 4. Botany | 17. Medical Science |
| 5. Chemistry | 18. Philosophy |
| 6. Civil Engineering | 20. Political Science and International Relations (PSIR) |
| 7. Commerce and Accountancy | 19. Physics |
| 8. Economics | 21. Psychology |
| 9. Electrical Engineering | 22. Public Administration |
| 10. Geography | 23. Sociology |
| 11. Geology | 24. Statistics |
| 12. History | 25. Zoology |
| 13. Law | 14. Management |

# Literature Optional Subjects

| Language | Script allowed |
|---|---|
| **Assamese** | Assamese |
| **Bengali** | Bengali |
| **Gujarati** | Gujarati |
| **Hindi** | Devanagari |
| **Kannada** | Kannada |
| **Kashmiri** | Persian |
| **Konkani** | Devanagari |
| **Malayalam** | Malayalam |
| **Manipuri** | Bengali |

| Marathi | Devanagari |
|---------|------------|
| Nepali | Devanagari |

| Language | Script allowed |
|----------|----------------|
| Odia | Odia |
| Punjabi | Gurumukhi |
| Sanskrit | Devanagari |
| Sindhi | Devanagari or Arabic |
| Tamil | Tamil |
| Telugu | Telugu |
| Urdu | Persian |
| Bodo | Devanagari |
| Dogri | Devanagari |
| Maithilli | Devanagari |
| Santhali | Devanagari or Olchiki |

Candidates select optional papers based on their interests, specialty and past successes.

# Interview

**Here is an overview of the Interview part in UPSC CSE along with some insights and factual data:**

## What is the Interview of UPSC CSE?

The interview part of UPSC CSE, also known as the personality test, is the final stage of the selection process for the Civil Services. It is conducted by a panel of experts who assess the candidate's personality, aptitude, communication skills, and overall suitability for a career in the civil services.

## Duration of the interview:

The interview usually lasts for 30-40 minutes, during which the panel asks the candidate a variety of questions related to their personal background, academic achievements, work experience, and general awareness of current events and issues.

## Weightage of the interview:

The interview carries a weightage of 275 marks out of the total 2025 marks in the entire selection process. The marks obtained in the interview are added to the marks obtained in the mains examination to determine the final merit list.

## Selection process after the interview:

After the interview, the final merit list is prepared based on the candidate's performance in the mains examination and the interview. The top-ranked candidates are then offered the various civil services positions based on their rank and the vacancies available.

## Insights and factual data:

The interview panel consists of experienced and knowledgeable experts from various fields, including academia, industry, and civil services.

## Interview Board:

The interview panel consists of five members including a Chairman. At least one of them is a UPSC member and other 3-4 members of the panel are experts in their fields including ex-bureaucrats themselves. These members are selected by the UPSC Chairman after consultation with other UPSC members.

## Language of the Interview:

The interview is conducted in English or any other language chosen by the candidate, and candidates are expected to have a good command of the language.

## Objective of the Interview

The interview questions are designed to test the candidate's knowledge, analytical abilities, communication skills, and overall suitability for a career in the civil services. It assesses a candidate's personality traits such as Confidence, honesty, integrity, leader- ship, and decision-making ability, among others.

The interview panel also takes into account the candidate's body language, communication skills, and overall presentation during the interview.

## Success Ratio in Interview:

According to the UPSC data, the success rate of candidates in the interview round has been fluctuating in recent years. In 2019, the success rate was 46.83%, while in 2020, it dropped to 41.88%.

Overall, the interview part of UPSC CSE is a critical component of the selection process that tests the candidate's personality, aptitude, and suitability for a career in the civil services. It requires a high level of preparation, knowledge, and communication skills, and it is a decisive factor in the candidate's final selection.

# Eligibility Criteria

## 1. Nationality

**The candidate must be either:**

1. Citizen of India
2. A person of Indian origin who has migrated from Pakistan, Burma, Sri Lanka, East African countries of Kenya, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Zaire, Ethiopia, or Vietnam with the intention of permanently settling in India.

## 2. Age Limit

The candidate must have attained the age of 21 years and must not have attained the age of 32 years on 1st August of the year in which he/she is appearing for the exam. This means that the candidate must have been born not earlier than August 2, 1989, and not later than Augus

| | Category | Relaxation |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | SC/ST candidates: | 5 years |
| 2. | OBC candidates: | 3 years |
| 3. | Residents of J&K between 1st Jan 1980 to 31st Dec 1989: | 5 years |
| 4. | Defense Services Personnel disabled during war or operation in a disturbed area and released as a consequence thereof: | 3 years |
| 5. | Ex-servicemen who have rendered at least 5 years Military Service, and have been released: | 5 years |
| 6. | Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD) | 10 years |

## 3. Educational Qualification

The candidate must possess a **Bachelor's degree** from a recognized university or possess an equivalent qualification.

The candidates who are in **their final year of graduation** can also apply for the UPSC CSE exam, but they have to produce the proof of passing the Bachelor's degree examination at the time of filling up the application for the UPSC CSE Main Exam.

## 4. Number of Attempts

| Category | No. of Attempts |
|---|---|
| General | 6 |
| OBC | 9 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **PwBD belonging to General and OBC categories** | 9 |
| **SC/ST** | Unlimited |

## 5. Physical Standards

Candidates must meet certain physical standards as prescribed by the UPSC. The physical standards include parameters such as height, chest measurement, and eye-sight, among others. These are different for different posts and services, and candidates are required to meet the specific physical standards for the post/service they are applying for.

# Syllabus

1. Prelims Syllabus
2. Mains Syllabus
3. Optional Syllabus

Note: Aspirants are urged to read over this section for the Prelims and Mains, as the syllabus has been revised on a regular basis in various areas.

## Preliminary Examination

### Paper I-(200 marks), Duration: Two hours.

- Current events of National & international importance.
- History of India & Indian National movement
- Indian and World Geography.
- Indian Polity and Governance - Constitution, Political System, Rights Issues, etc.
- Economic & Social Development - sustainable Development, Poverty etc.
- General issues on Environmental ecology, bio-diversity and Climate change
- General Science

### Paper II-(200 marks), Duration: Two hours.

- 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.)
- Data interpretation (charts, graphs, tables, data sufficiency etc. - Class X level);
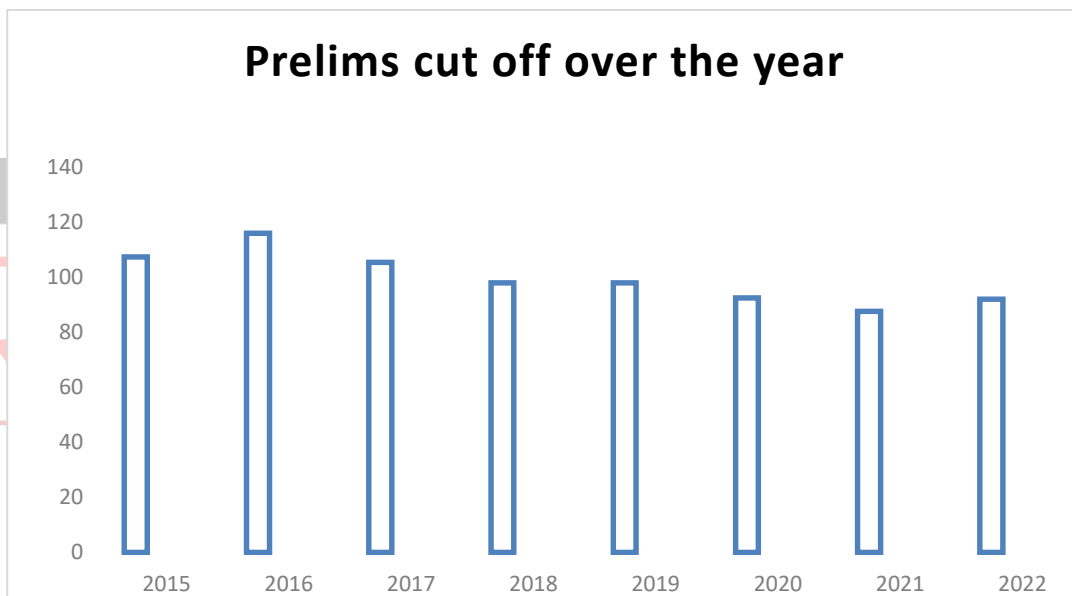
### Important Note:

1. Paper-II will be qualifying paper with minimum qualifying marks fixed at 33%. 1
2. All Questions would be Multiple Choice Questions - objective type.

3. It is mandatory to appear in both the papers of CS(P)E for evaluation, otherwise candidate will be disqualified.

# Prelims GS Cut-off

The Prelims cut-off keeps fluctuating depending on the number of seats and the difficulty of the paper. In recent times, the questions have shifted towards the fine lines on the basic understanding of the concepts. Due to this, the difficulty of the paper has increased, and therefore the cut-off has been falling despite the increase in competition, as illustrated below:

**Prelims cut off over the year**

| Year | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Cut-off | ~108 | ~116 | ~106 | ~98 | ~98 | ~92 | ~88 | ~92 |

# Mains Syllabus

The main examination is intended to assess the overall intellectual traits and depth of understanding of candidates rather than merely the range of their information and memory.

The nature & standard of questions in the **GS papers (Paper II to V)** will be such that a well-educated person will be able to answer them without any specialized study. The questions will be such as to test a candidate's:

- General awareness of variety of subjects, which will have relevance for a career in Civil Services.
- The questions are likely to test the candidate's basic understanding of all relevant issues, and

- Ability to analyse, and take a view on conflicting socio-economical goals, objectives and demands.
- **Type of Answers:** The candidates must give relevant, meaningful and suc-cinct(brief) answers.

The scope of the syllabus for optional subject papers (Paper VI & VII) for the exam-ination is broadly of the honours degree level i.e. a level higher than the bachelors' degree and lower than masters' degree. In case of engineering, medical science and law, the level corresponds to the bachelors' degree.

# Syllabus of Language Papers

**Qualifying papers on Indian Languages & English:** Aim is to test candidates' ability to read & understand serious discursive prose, and to express his ideas clearly and correctly, in English & Indian language concerned.

## Syllabus of English Language

i. Comprehension of given passages.
ii. Precis Writing.
iii. Usage & vocabulary.
iv. Short Essays.

## Syllabus of Indian language paper:

i. Comprehension of given passages.
ii. Precis writing
iii. Usage and Vocabulary
iv. Short Essays
v. Translation from English to Indian Language & Vice-versa.

The papers on Indian Languages & English will be of Matriculation or equivalent standard and will be qualifying in natures only. The marks obtained in these papers will not be counted for ranking.

The candidates will have to answer the English and Indian languages papers in English & the respective Indian language (except where translation is involved).

# Essay Paper (Paper-I)

- Candidates may be required to write essays on multiple topics. These topics can be philosophical as well as Technical.
- They will be expected to keep closely to the subject of the essay to arrange their ideas in **orderly fashion**, and to write **concisely**.
- Credit will be given for **effective and exact expression**.

# General Studies - I (Paper II)

**Indian Heritage & Culture, History and Geography of the World and Society**

1. **Indian Culture** will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature & Architecture from ancient to modern times.
2. **Modern Indian history** from about the middle of the 18th 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, redrawal of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
6. Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc. their forms and effect on the society.
7. Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.
8. Role of **women** and women's organization,
9. **Population** and associated issues,
10. **Poverty** and developmental issues,
11. **Urbanization**, their problems and their remedies.
12. Effects of globalization on Indian society.
13. Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism and Secularism
14. Salient features of **world's physical geography**.
15. Distribution of Key natural resources across the world (including South Asia & Indian sub-continent);
    - factors responsible for location of primary, secondary and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India).
16. **Important Geophysical phenomena** such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, Cyclone etc.,
    - **geographical features** and their location changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies & ice caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.

# General Studies - II (Paper III)

**Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice & International Relations**

1. **Indian constitution** - historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.
2. **Functions & responsibilities** of the Union & the States,
   i. Issues & challenges pertaining to the **federal structure**,
   ii. Devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.
3. **Separation of powers** b/w various organs dispute redressal mechanisms & 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 & Functioning of **Executive & Judiciary** - M/o & D/o the govt.;
7. **Pressure groups** & **formal/informal associations** and their role in the polity.
8. Salient features of **Representation of People's Act.**
9. **Appointment** to various constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various constitutional bodies.
10. Statutory, regulatory and various **Quasi-Judicial bodies**.
11. **Welfare schemes** for **vulnerable sections** of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes;
12. Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and **betterment of these vulnerable sections.**
13. Issues relating to the **development and management of social sector/services** relating to Health, Education, resources.
14. Issues relating to **poverty and hunger**.
15. **Government policies** and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation.
16. **Development processes** and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.
17. **Important aspects of governance**, transparency and accountability, e- governance - applications, models, successes, limitations and potential;
18. citizens charter, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.
19. Role of Civil Services in a democracy.
20. India and its neighbourhood - relations.

21. Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India &/or affecting India's interests.
22. Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

# General Studies - III (Paper IV)

**Technology, Economic Development, Bio-diversity, Environment, Security and Disaster Management.**

1. **Indian Economy** and issues relating to
    i. planning,
    ii. mobilization of resources,
    iii. growth,
    iv. development and employment.
2. Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.
3. **Government Budgeting**.
4. **Major crops** - cropping patterns in the various parts of the country, - different types of **irrigation** and irrigation systems
5. storage, transport and marketing of **agricultural produce** and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.
6. Issues related to Direct & indirect farm **subsidies** & MSP;
7. PDS objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security;
8. Technology missions; Economies of Animal - Rearing.
9. Food processing and related industries in India scope and significance, location, upstream & downstream requirements, supply chain management.
10. **Land reforms** in India.
11. **Effects of liberalization** on the economy,
12. Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.
13. **Infrastructure**: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railway etc.
14. **Investment models**.
15. **Science & Technology**: development & their applications & effects in everyday life.
    - **Achievements of Indian S&T**; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.
    - **Awareness in the fields of IT**, space, computers, robotics, nano- technology,
    - **Bio-technology** and **issues relating to Intellectual property Rights (IPR).**
16. Conservations, environmental **pollution** and degradation, environmental impact assessment.
17. **Disaster** and disaster management.
18. Linkages b/w development & spread of **extremism**.

19. Role of **external state and non-state actors** in creating challenges to internal security.
20. 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 preservations.
21. Security challenges and their management in border areas linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

# General Studies - IV (Paper V)

**Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude**

The paper 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 the society. Questions may utilize the case study approach to determine these aspects. The following broad areas will be covered:

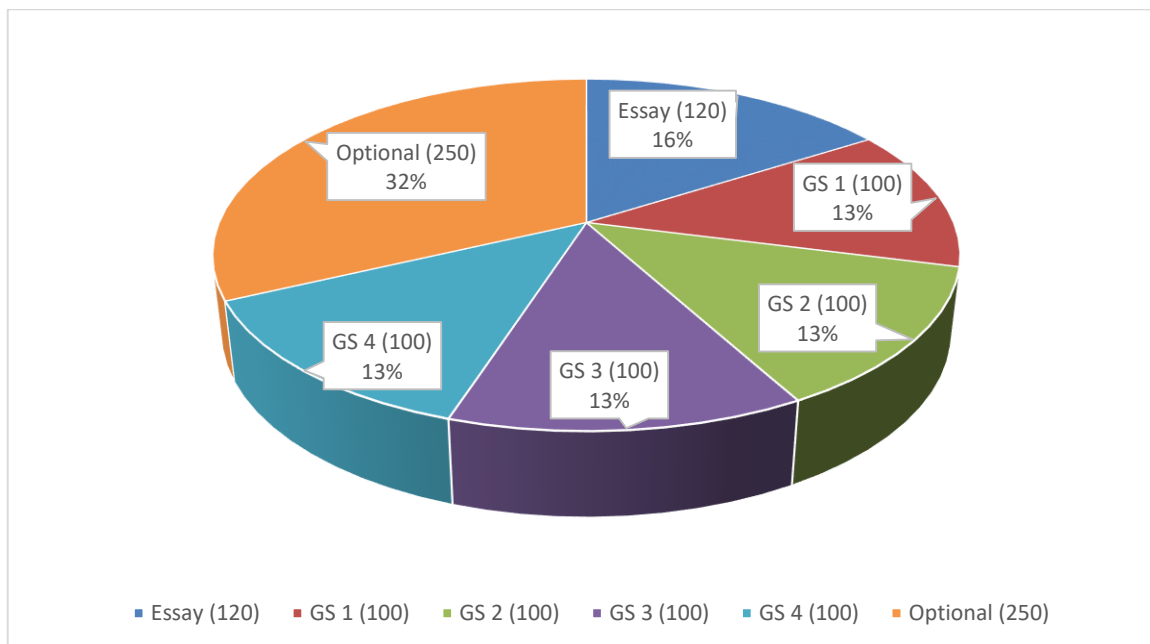- **Ethics and Human interface:**
  - Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions;
  - Dimensions of ethics;
  - Ethics - in private & public relationships.
  - Human values lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators;
  - Roles of family, 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 services, integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections. OTES
- **Emotional intelligence** concepts, and their utilities and application in administration and governance.
- Contributions of moral thinkers & Philosophers from India & world.
- **Public/Civil service values** in Ethics & Public administration: Status & 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 & transparency in government, Right to information,
  - Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charter,
  - Work Culture, Quality of Service delivery,
  - Utilization of public funds, Challenges of corruption.
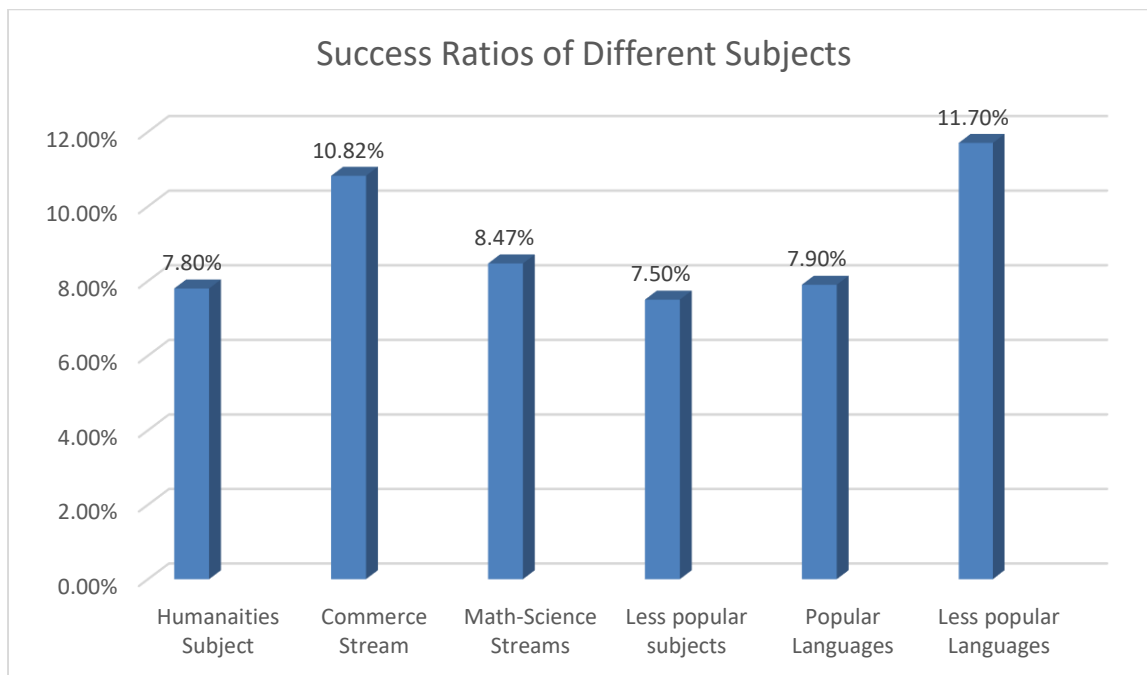- **Case studies on above issues.**

# Importance of the Optional Subjects

- The Mains part of the UPSC CSE decides the actual rank of a candidate and therefore is the most significant aspect of the examination. Even after clearing UPSC CSE Prelims multiple times, candidates find it difficult to secure a rank. The selection of optional subjects plays a critical role in this aspect.
- Out of 1750 marks in the written papers of the UPSC Main examination, only 500 marks are allotted to the Optional subject. However, when it comes to analysing the final scorecards, we find that candidates fetch over 33% of their scores from the optional subject itself.
- Anything around 40% marks in the GS subjects is a good score, but anything less than 50% in the optional is not good enough. Thus, we can comfortably say that optional subjects can often be a rank-deciding factor in this examination.
- Public/Civil service values in Ethics & Public administration: Status & 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 & transparency in government, Right to information,
  - Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charter,
  - Work Culture, Quality of Service delivery,
  - Utilization of public funds, Challenges of corruption.
- Case studies on above issues.

Legend: Essay (120) • GS 1 (100) • GS 2 (100) • GS 3 (100) • GS 4 (100) • Optional (250)

Pie chart values: Essay (120) 16%, GS 1 (100) 13%, GS 2 (100) 13%, GS 3 (100) 13%, GS 4 (100) 13%, Optional (250) 32%

# Factors considered for selecting Optional subject

1.  **Candidate must have an Aptitude for the subject:** A candidate must not get stuck with a subject which doesn't suit them. Going through the syllabus gives a rough idea about the nature of the subject, and therefore, this must be the first step before choosing an optional subject.
2.  **Length of the syllabus:** For many, a few optional subjects are too lengthy to cover, which makes it difficult for the student to both complete the syllabus as well as revise it on time.
3.  **Availability of Study material and a peer group** also plays a vital role in the preparation. If a candidate chooses an unpopular Optional subject, there is a high chance that they have to prepare the whole subject solitarily without a peer group or support from a teacher.
4.  **Overlap of the syllabus with General Studies** is another factor to be considered. For example, the syllabus of Political Science and International Relations (PSIR) covers the syllabus of GS 2 completely.
5.  **Historic Success Rates:** Every year, around 7.5% of all who write the Mains examination are recommended by UPSC for selection. However, many optional subjects are not able to achieve a success rate of even 7% for many years.
6.  **Commentary by the previous toppers** is also essential to grasp the nuances of a subject. Although there can be more than one strategy to approach a subject, the solutions experienced candidates give to various challenges in a subject cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, candidates must always be mindful that the nature of the subject might change in 3-4 years.

## Success Ratios of Different Subjects

| Subject | Success Ratio |
|---|---|
| Humanaities Subject | 7.80% |
| Commerce Stream | 10.82% |
| Math-Science Streams | 8.47% |
| Less popular subjects | 7.50% |
| Popular Languages | 7.90% |
| Less popular Languages | 11.70% |

# Checklist to select the Optional Subject

Generally, technical and professional subjects have higher rates of success. However, they are difficult to follow and have minimum overlap with the Gener- al Studies papers.

It is necessary that a candidate remains confident and motivated enough to pursue the study of the optional subject during preparation. Thus, choosing optional should be done with patience and after giving enough thought.

A candidate can follow the following steps before making a choice:

**Step 1:** Analyse the syllabus and check what you know already. You can also check the previous year's papers to check the difficulty level of the subject.

**Step 2:** Check the reviews by the previous toppers.

**Step 3:** Search for the study material and peer groups (if you like to study in groups).

**Step 4:** If you think you would need to join a coaching class, search for classes and take their demo lectures.

Once all the above factors are considered, a candidate is well-equipped to make a choice. If some degree of confusion still persists, you might consult a mentor who has either attempted the UPSC CSE exam in previous years or has taught such candidates. But in any case, never go against your gut feeling.