

Contents

Preface	(v)
Foreword	(ix)

SECTION 1: The Surface Layers

Basic Questions

- Why is the Union Public Service Commission Civil Services Examination (UPSC CSE) considered one of the toughest exams? 3
- What is the framework of the UPSC Civil Services Examination? 4
- As a mentor to the CSE aspirants, how would you guide them from the beginning? 7
- What are the things a beginner in the CSE preparation should know? 10
- What should a CSE aspirant know beforehand, other than the syllabus, for preparation of various papers? 11
- For the UPSC CSE, people advise the aspirants to go through the syllabus and memorise it. Is that necessary? 13
- How is the life of a CSE aspirant? 14
- What would you advise those who started their UPSC CSE preparation 6–7 months before the Prelims examination? 15

Mistakes and Problems

- What mistakes do aspirants commit in the preparation of CSE? 17
- What are the problems faced by the civil service aspirants which are hardly ever discussed? 18

Contents

Secrets

- What is the something that the UPSC CSE toppers do not tell anyone? 20

Qualities of the Successful

- What qualities differentiate successful candidates from ‘pseudo aspirants’ of the civil services? 21
- What is expected from a civil servant in terms of knowledge and traits? 22

Parents and Relatives

- What should the parents of the UPSC CSE aspirants know? 23
- My parents are not keen about my attempting the CSE. Should I still go for it? 24
- Is it true that telling friends and relatives about your UPSC preparation can cost you dearly later? 25

Motivation and Accountability

- How should one keep oneself motivated? 26
- After two failed attempts, how do I keep myself motivated? In times of setbacks, it is true that motivation takes a big beating. 27
- How does one overcome self-doubt during the CSE preparation? 28
- How do I overcome loneliness during the CSE preparation? 29
- Do the CSE aspirants really need to study for 16–18 hours? 30

Stress and Anxiety

- How can I get rid of anxiety and nervousness during an exam? 31

Strategy for a Working Professional-cum-Aspirant

- What should be my strategy for the CSE next year while working in a private job as I just started my preparation without any coaching? 32
- How do I prepare for the CSE after a frustrating day at work where one not only loses one's energy but it all feels like a lost dream? 33

Coaching and Test Series

- Is it possible to clear the CSE if I have just begun my preparation without any coaching and peers? 36
- Why do some people think that coaching institutes are fraudulent even though most of the toppers mention studying at coaching centres? 38
- What are aspirants to do for the preparation of the UPSC CSE if they do not have enough money to join any coaching? 41
- What factors must I keep in mind before joining a coaching institute for the preparation of the CSE? 42
- What is a test series? What features should be kept in mind while selecting a good test series? 43
- What is a good time to join a test series? 45
- What are the cheapest and the best test series for the CSE Mains? Are there any free test series available to download? 45
- How could you get your answers evaluated during the CSE preparation at home without coaching? 46
- How do I get the maximum benefit from the test series for the Prelims and the Mains? 46

Contents

Changes over the Years	
• Will the craze for the CSE increase or decrease in the coming 5–10 years?	50
• How has the civil services preparation changed over the years?	50
• What is the issue of lateral entry and how would it impact the career of a civil servant?	53
The Cut-off and Scaling Conundrums	
• What is the cut-off for the exams? Does the UPSC declare it after every stage result?	54
• If optional papers are unequally marked due to their subjective nature, how are the marks scaled to bring objectivity? Does the UPSC follow a particular formula for this purpose?	55
Services and Cadres	
• What are the different civil services offered by the UPSC CSE? What are the differences among these services and how do I choose from among them?	56
• What is the current cadre policy followed for allocation of cadres in All India Services and how are initial postings in central services decided?	58
My Own Story	
• What challenges did you face during the CSE preparation?	60
• How did people's behaviour towards you change when you qualified for the UPSC?	61
• How much have you sacrificed to clear the UPSC CSE?	62
• What about your daily routine during your preparation for the CSE? Which food items did you include in your diet?	63

Contents

- What was your first thought when you cleared the CSE? 64
 - What were the best and worst moments in your CSE journey? 64
 - What are some tips for UPSC CSE aspirants for proper utilisation of their time of break which indirectly helps in preparation in some ways? 65
- The Day before the Exam**
- I have studied so much, everything under the sun. But now I feel I don't remember much for the exam tomorrow. What do I do to get over this feeling? 66
- Attempts after Success**
- Can I appear in the CSE again after getting selected and getting into a service? What are the restrictions faced on job for preparing for another attempt? 68
 - Would I be judged unfairly, compared to others, by the interview board if I appear again after getting selected once? Is that considered wasting a precious seat in the CSE? 69
- Alternative Careers and Tough Choices**
- What can be done to utilise the pool of talented aspirants who fail to clear the CSE and decide to move on with other options? 71
 - Are there any advantages of a master's degree if we are appearing for the CSE? 72
- How to Deal with Failure**
- I studied so very hard for my exam, but I failed the attempts. I am feeling so depressed, what can I do? 73

SECTION 2: The Milestone Layers

Prelims: General Studies Paper I

- On the face of it, the syllabus for the General Studies Paper I of the UPSC CSE Prelims is both small and vague. How do you break down this syllabus to understand and how to approach it? 79
- What are the must-have books for all aspirants for the preliminary stage in General Studies? 80
- Which NCERT books need to be read? Should I read the old versions or the new ones, or both? 82
- How should I prepare for Indian Polity for UPSC Prelims? 84
- How should one prepare the subject of Indian economy for UPSC Prelims, especially if one comes from a non-humanities background or has not studied economics as a subject? 85
- How does one prepare for ancient and medieval history? How far are they important in the scheme of the Prelims? 87
- How is one to prepare Modern Indian History (or Indian National Movement)? What is the difference between the 'History of Modern India' and 'India's Struggle for Independence' by Bipan Chandra? Which one should be preferred for the UPSC CSE? 90
- Art and culture is like a vast ocean. How can one prepare the subject? 92
- Is Goh Cheng Leong's Certificate Physical and Human Geography absolutely important for the Prelims? What other sources are 93

Contents

available to cover geography for the Prelims? (For this question to make sense, make sure to have G.C. Leong's book in your hand.)	
● How does one tackle map-based questions in CSE Prelims?	95
● Due to the clubbing of the IFoS (Indian Forest Service) with the CSE for the Prelims, the importance of environment and ecology seems to have increased. How should this portion be covered effectively?	97
● Science and Technology (General Science section) seems difficult, especially as many advanced questions have been asked on the topic in the recent Prelims papers. How do I tackle this subject?	99
● What do I gain by looking up previous years' question papers, as the questions are unlikely to be repeated?	102
● Will I be able to get a good score while attempting the previous years' question papers of the Prelims for the first time?	105
● What is a good strategy for current affairs?	107
● How to make notes of The Hindu/The Indian Express?	109
● How do I make notes from RSTV?	115
● What is meant by forward and backward linkages with regard to newspaper reading?	116
● How do I ensure success in the Prelims?	117
Prelims: General Studies Paper II	
● What is the General Studies Paper II all about? How to prepare for it?	121
Mains: General Studies	
● How is preparing for the Mains General Studies different from preparing for the	129

Contents

Prelims? Do we have to prepare these two stages exclusively?	
● How should I approach history in GS I of the Mains?	130
● Is it necessary to read the entire book of Norman Lowe's World History?	133
● How is one to tackle the 'Society' portion of GS I since there seems to be no specific source for this topic?	133
● How necessary is it to read each topic of geography for the UPSC GS Paper I?	143
● How does one approach the Polity section in the GS II paper?	146
● How is one to approach the Governance part of GS II?	151
● Which sources should be referred to in preparing International Relations?	154
● How is the preparation for Indian Economy different for the Prelims and the Mains? What extra sources are needed for GS III Indian Economy?	159
● Security seems like a specialised subject. What sources do I refer to for this topic?	162
● How important is the portion on science and technology in GS III? How can we approach the study of this subject?	165
● How can one prepare for the GS IV Paper on Ethics?	167
Revision of GS	
● How do we remember things effectively for UPSC CSE?	178
● How can I revise my personal notes, current affairs or otherwise, in a short span of time?	179

Contents

- What was your strategy for revision during the preparation for CSE? 180
- Can you give a strategy to revise Geography and Environment portions? 181
- What is the best way to revise a monthly magazine on Current Affairs? 182
- What should be the strategy for reading Yojana and Kurukshetra? How do I revise the matter? 183
- Do aspirants have to be thorough with the India Year Book of every year? How to go about it? 183

Answer Writing in GS

- When and how should I start practising answer writing for the Mains? 184
- How to begin if you have no clue about what the exam demands? 184
- How can I improve my answer writing for the Mains? 185
- How can I develop critical thinking and analytical skill for CSE Mains? 188
- How can we get an edge over other students by presenting unique content in the Mains? 188
- Is practice necessary for the 'static' type of questions? 190
- How do I practise answers for the static portions of the Mains? 190
- What is the difference between the presentation and content of an answer? Which one is more important? 191
- Are civil service exam toppers able to write the 'exact' answers to the questions asked in the exam? The questions seem to be getting 192

Contents

rather vague, year by year. How do you approach random questions?	
● For the Mains GS papers, do we always need to write the negative aspects on a topic along with positive ones in the answers?	192
● What are the exact dimensions of the answer booklet of the UPSC Mains GS examination? What is the size of the actual/writing area on each page?	193
● Which pen is the best for the Mains?	194
Essay	
● Essay seems to be the most subjective part of UPSC Mains. No 'syllabus' has been given for it. The way the paper is marked is also not clear as people get marks ranging from 80 to 160 out of 250. So, what should be the starting point for an aspirant?	195
● Can you give some tips for essay writing?	197
● What are the main areas or topics for essays to prepare?	202
● Examples of Essays	204
● Essays in Outline	211
Interview/Personality Test	
● What is the UPSC CSE interview all about?	215
● What is a DAF (Detailed Application Form) in the Personality Test of CSE?	216
● What can be good hobbies for civil service aspirants?	217
● I have been studious all my life and am now preparing for the UPSC CSE, which is also a fulltime occupation. I had little time to cultivate a hobby. What do I write in the hobby column now?	220

Contents

-
- Can we have some true examples of UPSC interview questions and possible answers? 221
 - Can you give some basic tips for the UPSC interview? 228
 - How was your UPSC interview experience? What questions were you asked? 231

SECTION 3: The Reward Layers

About Some Services

- The Indian Administrative Service 239
- The Indian Police Service 241
- The Indian Revenue Service (Customs and Indirect Taxes) 244
- The Indian Civil Accounts Service 246

FAQs About the IRS

- What is the training period for the IRS IT, and what are the initial postings like? 249
- What if I want to remain only in one city as an IRS officer? 251
- Can you shed some light on the exact nature of job of IRS officers? 251
- What challenges do you face in discharging your duties? How do you deal with them? 252
- Are there any particular perks that only IRS officers enjoy? 254
- What are the opportunities of foreign visits in official capacity and postings abroad in IRS IT? 255
- How would you describe the life of a female IRS officer (IT) in terms of posting and work-life balance? 256
- What is the promotion sequence in IRS IT and what is the highest level that one can reach in the overall bureaucracy? 256

Contents

- How do you see the service evolving in the future? What major changes can be reasonably expected? 257
 - I want to put IRS IT as my first preference. What kind of questions will I be asked at the interview? 258
 - What impression would it give if I do not select the IAS or the IPS in my preference list? 259
- Miscellany**
- What are the biggest myths about Civil Services as a career? 261
 - What questions should be raised in an aspirant's mind when he/she meets a civil servant? 262