

UPSC Syllabus: Prelims, Mains & Interview

As you are determined to become an IAS officer, understanding the UPSC syllabus helps you to grasp the backbone of this Civil Services Examination.

The UPSC syllabus comprises three parts, namely, Prelims, Mains, and Interview. Prelims exam consists of objective type of questions and Mains examination has 9 papers (Essay (1), GS I-IV (4), Optional Subject Papers I-II (2), Qualifying: Indian Language & English) followed by an Interview focusing on current affairs, history, geography, polity, economy, environment, ethics, etc. Each part of the syllabus requires specific strategies, expert guidance, and intensive practice to build the expertise.

This UPSC Syllabus blog is committed to answer all your questions regarding the UPSC CSE exam. And, one more thing, don't forget to download the UPSC syllabus PDF which can be kept handy.

Having the expert mentorship on one side, and the intensive practice sessions on the other side allows you to easily crack the UPSC examination. Join [KingMakers IAS academy](#), the best and [trusted IAS coaching centre in Chennai](#), helps you to achieve the highest UPSC score!

UPSC Syllabus - A Brief Overview

IAS aspirants should go through the latest UPSC syllabus to plan their preparation accordingly. There are two main stages in UPSC syllabus that candidates must understand, which are Prelims and Mains, followed by an interview. Each stage of the syllabus covers wide range of topics and subjects, which we have discussed below:

- **UPSC Prelims:** The first stage of UPSC is Preliminary examination, which has two objective type papers. It contains 180 questions for the candidates to answer, totalling the 400 marks.
- **UPSC Mains:** The second stage is called the UPSC Mains examination. It has 9 descriptive-type papers, worth 1750 marks.
- **UPSC Interview (Personality Test):** The last stage of UPSC journey is Personality test, where candidates' administrative aptitude will be tested and measured with 275 marks.

This is the main and essential information regarding the UPSC syllabus. In the succeeding sections, we are providing the detailed UPSC syllabus breakdown for Prelims, Mains and Interview.

UPSC Prelims Syllabus (Objective Type; 400 Marks)

In this section, you can understand the UPSC Prelims Syllabus in detail. As we have already mentioned, it has two objective type papers (*don't think I am repeating, just to help you to strengthen the memory*). Let's understand these two crucial papers inside the UPSC Prelims:

UPSC Prelims Syllabus Paper 1: General Studies (GS)

The General studies 1 paper, under UPSC Prelims syllabus, designed to test the candidates' overall knowledge and awareness about the country. It contains 100 questions, carries 200 marks with a negative marking of 1/3rd (0.66 marks) for every incorrect answer. The exam duration is around 2 hours and it acts as a qualifying examination for the candidates to enter UPSC Mains exam. This GS 1 Paper spans a wide range of subjects like History, Polity and Geography, and topics like History of India, Indian National Movement, and Panchayati Raj.

What are the Topics GS1 Paper Covers?

- Indian History (Ancient, Medieval, Modern Freedom Struggle)
- Art and Culture (Architecture, Literature, Performing Arts)
- Geography (Physical, Human, Indian Physiography, Climatology)
- Polity and Governance (Constitution, Institutions, Panchayati Raj)
- Economy (Planning, Agriculture, Budgeting, Infrastructure)
- Environment and Ecology (Biodiversity, Climate Change, Conservation)
- Science and Technology (Biotech, Space, IT, Nuclear)
- Current Affairs (National/International Events, Reports, Indices)

UPSC Prelims Syllabus Paper 2: Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT)

The CSAT Exam of UPSC Prelims tests the candidates' reasoning, comprehension, basic numeracy, analytical thinking and decision making skills. It comprises 80 questions, with an overall mark of 200 and deducts 1/3rd (0.83 marks) as a negative marking for the wrong answers. The duration of this UPSC Prelims Paper 2 is 2 hours, dealing with subjects and skills such as reasoning and analysis, quantitative aptitude, general mental ability, and data interpretation. In the following section, we have given the topics covered in the UPSC Prelims CSAT exam.

What are the Topics CSAT Paper Covers?

- Reading Comprehension (Passages, Inference)
- Logical Reasoning (Syllogism, Puzzles, Blood Relations, Coding-Decoding)
- Analytical Ability (Direction Sense, Seating Arrangement, Data Sufficiency)
- Decision Making and Problem Solving (Ethical Dilemmas, Situations)
- Basic Numeracy (Numbers, Percentages, Profit/Loss, Time/Work)
- General Mental Ability (Geometry, Mensuration, Series)

In the below-given table, we have given the essence of UPSC Prelims Syllabus, its two papers along with the subjects it covers, number of questions, total marks and duration.

Paper	Subjects	No. of Questions	Total Marks	Duration
GS Paper I	Current events, History, Geography, Polity, Economy, Environment, Science	100	200	2 hours
CSAT Paper II (Qualifying, 33% required)	Comprehension, Logical Reasoning, Basic Numeracy, Data Interpretation	80	200	2 hours

UPSC Mains Syllabus (Descriptive Type; 1750 Marks)

Below, we have brought out the complete UPSC Mains Syllabus covering all the topics it entails.

UPSC Mains Syllabus Paper 1: Essay

UPSC Mains Essay is focused to test the candidates' structured thinking, coherence, and persuasive writing across diverse themes, carrying 250 marks. In the following we have listed the important topics covered in UPSC Mains GS 1 Paper:

Philosophical Themes

- Essence of ethics and human actions
- Morality in public life
- Values from great thinkers and leaders

Socio-Economic Development

- Inclusive growth challenges
- Poverty eradication strategies
- Women empowerment dynamics

Environment and Sustainability

- Climate change imperatives
- Sustainable development models
- Resource conservation ethics

Governance and Democracy

- Crisis in democracy
- Federalism tensions
- Judicial activism role

Technology and Society

- AI ethical dilemmas
- Digital divide impacts
- Innovation vs regulation

UPSC Mains Syllabus Paper 2: General Studies 1 (GS 1)

UPSC Mains GS 1 examination tests the candidates' knowledge and expertise in historical, cultural, geographical, and societal analysis. This paper as well carries 250 marks. Below, we have given the major topics covered in the UPSC Mains Syllabus Paper 2 - General Studies 1:

Indian Heritage and Culture

- Salient art forms (painting, sculpture)
- Architectural evolution (temples, monuments)
- Literature traditions (ancient to modern)

Modern Indian History

- Freedom struggle phases
- Key personalities and movements
- Post-1947 consolidation (states reorganization)

World History

- Industrial Revolution effects
- World Wars and decolonization

- Political philosophies (communism, fascism)

Physical Geography

- Salient physiographic features
- Climatology and oceanography
- Natural disasters distribution

Human Geography and Society

- Urbanization trends
- Globalization effects
- Social issues (poverty, communalism, women)

UPSC Mains Syllabus Paper 3: General Studies 2 (GS 2)

In UPSC Mains GS 2 Paper, the candidates are evaluated on polity, governance, justice, and IR understanding, carrying 250 marks. In the following, we have listed the important topics covered in UPSC Mains GS 2 Paper.

Constitution and Polity

- Preamble, fundamental rights
- Directive Principles application
- Parliament, state legislatures functioning

Governance Issues

- Transparency mechanisms (RTI)
- E-governance initiatives
- Citizen charters implementation

Social Justice

- Welfare schemes for vulnerable
- Health, education policy issues
- Poverty alleviation programs

International Relations

- India-Pakistan, China dynamics
- Bilateral/multilateral engagements
- Global institutions (UN, WTO) reforms

UPSC Mains Syllabus Paper 4: General Studies 3 (GS 3)

The candidates' knowledge on economic, tech, security, and environmental expertise is assessed in UPSC Mains GS 3 Paper, which carries 250 marks. Find the essential topics covered in this paper, below:

Indian Economy

- Growth trends and resource mobilization
- Inclusive development strategies
- Budgeting, banking reforms

Agriculture and Industry

- Major crops, irrigation patterns
- Food processing industries
- Land reforms effects

Science and Technology

- Indigenization efforts
- Space, biotech achievements
- IPR issues

Environment and Security

- Biodiversity hotspots
- Climate change mitigation
- Internal security (terrorism, cyber threats)

UPSC Mains Syllabus Paper 5: General Studies 4 (GS 4)

UPSC Mains GS 4 Paper focused on the questions related to ethics, integrity, and aptitude in administration, carrying 250 marks. In the following, we have listed the important topics covered in UPSC Mains GS 4 Paper.

Ethics Foundations

- Human interface determinants
- Attitude influences
- Emotional intelligence applications

Governance Ethics

- Civil service values

- Ethical concerns in funding
- Corruption prevention strategies

Aptitude and Case Studies

- Decision-making frameworks
- Probity in governance
- Administrative ethics dilemmas

UPSC Mains Syllabus Optional Subjects (Paper 1 & Paper 2)

UPSC Mains Optional Subjects demand subject mastery from 48 choices (core and literature), each 250 marks.

Popular Core Subjects

- History: Ancient civilizations, medieval polity
- Geography: Geomorphology, economic geography
- Public Administration: Theories, accountability
- Sociology: Social stratification, change

Literature Subjects

- Hindi/English: Poetry, prose analysis
- Tamil/Sanskrit: Classical texts, modern works
- Comparative literature themes

Analytical Components

- Current affairs linkages
- Policy/case applications
- Theoretical debates

UPSC Mains Syllabus for Qualifying Language Papers (Any Indian Languages & English)

UPSC Mains Qualifying Language Papers test basic proficiency, each 300 marks (qualifying threshold).

Comprehension Skills

- Passage understanding
- Precis summarization
- Inference questions

Writing Proficiency

- Essay on given topics
- Formal letter writing
- Report composition

Grammar and Translation

- Error detection/correction
- Idioms and phrases
- Language-to-English translation

In the following table, we have provided the overview of UPSC Mains Syllabus, its nine papers along with the subjects, number of questions, total marks, and the duration.

Paper	Subjects	No. of Questions	Total Marks	Duration
A (Qualifying)	Indian Language	Varies (Essay, Precis, etc.)	300	3 hours
B (Qualifying)	English	Varies (Essay, Precis, etc.)	300	3 hours
I	Essay	2 essays	250	3 hours
II	GS I (History, Geography, Society)	20 (10+12+10 marks)	250	3 hours
III	GS II (Polity, Governance, IR)	20 (10+15+10+15 marks)	250	3 hours
IV	GS III (Economy, Tech, Environment, Security)	20 (10+10+15+10+15 marks)	250	3 hours
V	GS IV (Ethics, Integrity)	12-14 (case studies)	250	3 hours
VI	Optional Subject Paper 1	Varies	250	3 hours
VII	Optional Subject Paper 2	Varies	250	3 hours

UPSC Interview Syllabus (Personality Test; 275 Marks)

UPSC Interview is structured in diverse ways where the candidates' skills, personality traits, current affairs and critical thinking are tested to figure out the capability to become IAS officers. Below, we have given the required skills, question types and themes helping the IAS aspirants to handle the UPSC Personality test in a better way.

Required Skills

- Analytical aptitude and critical thinking
- Mental alertness and quick assimilation
- Clear and logical communication
- Leadership and social cohesion abilities
- Balance of judgment and decision-making
- Emotional intelligence and integrity
- Intellectual depth and variety of interests

Question Types

- Personal background questions (DAF-based)
- Situational/ethical dilemmas
- Opinion-based on current affairs
- Hobby and interest probes
- Work experience or academic challenges
- Abstract or hypothetical scenarios
- Leadership and teamwork examples

Main Themes

- Current national/international events
- Constitutional values and governance
- Social issues (poverty, gender, diversity)
- Economic policies and development
- Environmental challenges and security
- Personal ethics and public service motivation
- India's foreign relations and culture

The following table provides the major information required you to get the overall idea about UPSC Interview Syllabus:

Focus Area	What Panel Tests	Typical Question Styles	Key Preparation Tips
Personal Details	Background, values, motivation	Tell us about your hometown and its	Review DAF thoroughly; prepare 2-min bio pitch

		challenges.	
Education/Work	Knowledge depth, experiences	Why the gap in your career? Explain your project.	Link to civil services; practice explaining achievements
Optional Subject	Conceptual clarity	Recent debates in your optional field?	Revise core syllabus; read latest papers
Current Affairs (National)	Awareness, analysis	Views on recent policy like NEP 2025?	Daily newspaper; form balanced opinions
Current Affairs (International)	Global perspective	India's stance on Ukraine-Russia conflict?	Follow The Hindu editorials; track bilateral ties
State/Region Issues	Local insight	Challenges in your home state cadre?	Study home state + preferred cadres' economy/social issues
Ethics & Values	Integrity, decision-making	How would you handle corruption in a team?	Practice case studies; use GS4 framework

Bonus: How to Choose the Suitable UPSC Optional Subject?

Below, we have given the several points that serves as guidelines to choose the suitable optional subject for UPSC examination:

- **Read the Syllabus:** The first and foremost thing is to read and analyze the syllabus of optional subjects. Ensure to get the sense of the length of the syllabus and the subjects it covers.
- **Expertise and Preference:** Identify the subjects you already have expertise and then consider your interests and preference when it comes to choosing the optional subjects. Both factors come into play in the game of learning the UPSC materials.
- **Availability of Materials:** Check whether you are having the materials or not for the available optional subjects. Considering this factor can help you in the long run.

In UPSC Mains examination, there are a total of 48 optional subjects (25 core subjects & 23 literature optional) available for the candidates to choose.

Core Subjects

Agriculture	Animal Husbandry	Anthropology	Botany	Chemistry
-------------	------------------	--------------	--------	-----------

Civil Engineering	Commerce & Accountancy	Economics	Electrical Engineering	Geography
Geology	History	Law	Management	Mathematics
Mechanical Engineering	Medical Science	Philosophy	Physics	Political Science
Psychology	Public Administration	Sociology	Statistics	Zoology

Literature Subjects

Assamese	Bengali	Bodo	Dogri	Gujarati
Hindi	Kannada	Kashmiri	Konkani	Maithili
Malayalam	Manipuri	Marathi	Nepali	Odia
Punjabi	Sanskrit	Santhali	Sindhi	Tamil
Telugu	Urdu	English		

How UPSC Merit is Calculated?

Only the UPSC Mains and Interview round marks will be considered in your final UPSC merit. UPSC Prelims only acts as a qualifying assessment for Mains examination. It will not reflect in your final UPSC merit.

Small Strategy to Digest the UPSC Syllabus

Not every subject or topic is the same, so the method of learning also must be changed. For objective type questions, flashcards can be used to develop recall and mock tests can be implicated to strengthen the memory. For mains-oriented answer writing, regular structured exercises can help the students to develop the ability. And, the Feynman technique is good for understanding abstract concepts, where the subject matter has to be explained to an imaginary audience that exposes gaps and misunderstandings. This tailored strategy helps you to attain the digest and master the subjects more effectively.

Recommended Books to Crack the UPSC Syllabus

In the following, we have provided the list of books which can help you to crack the syllabus and UPSC CSE examination.

- “Indian Polity” by M. Laxmikanth
- “Certificate Physical and Human Geography” by G.C. Leong
- “Indian Art and Culture” by Nitin Singhania
- “Governance in India” by M. Laxmikanth
- “Environment and Ecology” by Majid Husain
- “Lexicon for Integrity, Ethics, and Aptitude”

Planning to Achieve the Top UPSC Score? Join KingMakers IAS Academy

At KingMakers IAS Academy, we help the IAS aspirants to achieve the ideal UPSC score. Our expert mentors, extensive range of mock tests, comprehensive practice writing exams, and mock interviews guides our students to the UPSC Syllabus more efficiently and effectively. As we know, action matters more, let's get into the preparation mode and score the best marks in the UPSC CSE examination.