

CSAT SYLLABUS AND DETAILS

Will CSAT provide a level – playing field?

CSAT, replacing the prelims, aims at selecting a candidate with an aptitude for public service. A look at the change, apprehensions and ways to crack the exam.

The Civil Services Examination has been considered the toughest and most selective competitive examination since the times of the British. The numbers speak for themselves. Of about two lakh who actually appeared for the exam in 2009, only 875 could make it to the services. In recent years, the trend for the best and brightest to opt for the Civil Services has continued in spite of the lucrative private sector jobs available.

The changes brought about in the examination pattern by the Union Public Service Commission will further strengthen this trend. Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) has replaced the Preliminary examination conducted every year in May as a qualifying exam for the Mains. Now all candidates have to appear for two common qualifying papers instead of an optional subject chosen from a list of 23 subjects.

The Second Administrative Reforms Committee, Prof. Yoginder K. Alagh Committee and others have recommended that testing a candidate's knowledge in a particular subject would only produce specialists but would not select a candidate with an aptitude for public service. The CSAT is set to address this issue. It would also remove the need for a controversial scaling system currently being used to ensure that no single optional subject is advantageous due to the varying levels of difficulty in that year.

What are the changes?

The UPSC has notified the syllabus for CSAT to be conducted on June 12 along with a set of sample questions. Unlike before, both papers are to be of 200 marks of two hours duration and all questions are multiple-choice questions. The General Studies paper remains the same except for added emphasis on environmental ecology, bio-diversity and climate change. Paper II will test comprehension, interpersonal skills including communication skills, logical reasoning and

analytical ability, decision-making and problem-solving, general mental ability, basic numeracy, data interpretation, and English language comprehension skills.

What do they mean?

As can be seen from the sample questions given by the Commission, comprehension will test the candidate's ability to understand and evaluate real-life situations and relevant issues while interpersonal skills will test the candidate's ability to conduct himself/herself in social interactions.

Logical reasoning involves drawing conclusions and determining logical rules behind a set of statements. Questions on decision-making and problem-solving will test the candidate's ability to use common sense and logic in solving hypothetical problems that administrators might face.

General Mental Ability questions from the previous General Studies paper have been shifted to the second paper now. Basic numeracy will involve mathematics questions of the class X level and data interpretation will test knowledge of basic statistics.

Data sufficiency questions will provide a set of statements and would require the candidate to state whether the data is sufficient to answer the given question. Reading passages in English will also be given to test the candidate's understanding and knowledge of the language. Sample questions and syllabus can be seen on the UPSC website at www.upsc.gov.in along with the notification for the exam.

Apprehensions

“The new system will encourage more candidates from professional courses to apply since the second paper of CSAT appears to be quite similar to CAT”, feels Abhishek, an engineer who is preparing for the civil services.

“Many of the Arts students feel that the new pattern might be a hurdle for qualifying for the Mains”, Vivek, another candidate, says. But this new emphasis on analytical ability and numeracy need not frighten away those with math phobias. In fact the syllabus given by UPSC clearly states that questions on basic numeracy will be of class X level.

Allaying such fears, Yeshwanth, a faculty at a coaching centre in the city, says, “The CSAT has been introduced to provide a level playing field to all candidates,

be they from arts or professional background. With proper understanding of the syllabus and what the examiner wants, all candidates can enhance their innate abilities and succeed.”

How do I crack it?

Those who are preparing for the Civil Services 2011 need not panic! There is no need to assume that the new syllabus might prove a tough nut to crack. On the contrary, it will only test the common sense and logical ability of the student. All he needs to do is to practice and hone those skills. He should obtain as many model questions as he can.

Many of the other competitive exams held by state and central governments like the state public services and defence exams are on the same lines and solving old question papers can help.

There are many good books available in the market which have objective-type questions on mental ability, logical reasoning and English comprehension. Students should take practice tests with a proper time limit as per the exam pattern.

As the name itself suggests, it is only the aptitude which is being tested. Students may safely brush up their analytical skills and concentrate more on the exhaustive study required for the Mains.

Get set for the all-new CSAT

Anyone with the right amount of practice and a little common sense can do well

Easiest topic first is a time-tested strategy that should be used to get a good score

The time has come to sit down and start preparing for the most competitive exam in India, possibly the world. Aptitude tests have become an integral part of any competitive examination, especially if it is meant to select the people who would be the drivers of the Great Indian Growth Story. Civil Services Aptitude Test, the new pattern of the Civil Services Preliminary exam, conducted by UPSC, need not cause heartburn among the lakhs of candidates who are set to appear for it. A first

step in any preparation should invariably involve understanding the syllabus. Now it is time to shore up your skills with some tips and tricks.

General mental ability

General mental ability is a basic measure of IQ which is used by psychologists the world over and is commonly found in most competitive exams. It involves tests of verbal and non-verbal ability. Verbal ability is generally measured by means of verbal analogy where the relationships between words are tested. For example word A is to Word B, then Word C is to?

It is required to first determine the relationship between A and B and apply the same to C. Here a good knowledge of synonyms and antonyms of standard words is required. But now is not the time to start gobbling up that dictionary. Most tests only involve words of general usage. While reading the newspaper next time, try to understand words with the help of their context and usage.

Non-verbal ability may be tested by means of visual tests which involve choosing the picture which comes next in a sequence or which fits best in the given picture. Many such questions based on visual ability are available in standard books on mental ability. Coding and decoding is another type of question you might encounter which involves use of letters, numbers or symbols in a code that is to be deciphered. So, give a free rein to all your aspirations to be a spy! But you don't have to be a James Bond to solve them. All it requires is to pay close attention to the symbols given.

It also helps to write out the whole alphabet and number the letters in a rough sheet so as to avoid careless mistakes. Finding the odd one out in a given set of letters or words again involves first determining the relationship between the given set and choosing the one that does not fall into this set. Other types of questions could be direction sense, time sequence and blood relation questions. One trick in solving these types of questions is to fit in all the information in the question into diagrams and tree models and then draw inferences from the same.

Logical reasoning and analytical ability

These kinds of questions are part of logic which involves statements, conclusions and rules to arrive at the conclusions. You should arrive at the given conclusion based on the statements or state whether a given conclusion can be inferred from

the statements. Some basic rules should be kept in mind solving such questions. Never make any assumption other than what is already stated in the questions, however logical it might seem. Choose only the conclusion which must definitely follow from the question, not that which seems “most likely”, and pay close attention to key words like “some”, “all” etc. You might even use Venn Diagrams to solve some of them. Extensive practice will help you crack these questions.

Numerical ability and data interpretation

Numerical ability can be brushed up by refreshing knowledge of basic mathematics from school textbooks, starting from sixth standard if required! Topics such as calculus and algebra can be safely ignored. Number sequence is a favourite in such tests. Using simple arithmetic rules, a single or sometimes, two alternating number sequences are to be identified and the missing number chosen. Practising many such sequences would make it easy to identify them in tests. In recent years it has been noticed that general mental ability requires adequate knowledge of probability, permutation and combinations too.

This topic can be easily covered by referring to NCERT books for mathematics for Class XI and XII. Data interpretation skills can be improved by starting from the basics of statistics, which can be found in the NCERT statistics books, all of which are available online here http://ncert.nic.in/NCERTS_textbook/textbook.htm

No preparation required

Interpersonal skills including communication skills cannot be easily tested in a written test. But the examiner can give real life situations and expect you to show your communication skills in choosing the right response by understanding the meaning conveyed in a passage. Here the questions on comprehension, problem solving and decision making might easily overlap. In all such questions, it is important to read the hypothetical situation or an analysis of it carefully. It is required to use both common sense and knowledge of how a good leader and administrator might react. Always analyse each of the alternatives given and evaluate their consequences with respect to efficiency and propriety.

Needless to say, this section should not require you to burn the midnight oil. A cool head is all it needs. In reading comprehension questions, don't panic if you see a passage full of jargon. Ignore the technical words and try to understand the gist of the passage in the first read. Then read all the questions and with them in mind, read the passage again, this time identifying the relevant portions for the answers. One key fact which should be kept in mind while answering is that no outside

knowledge is required and all the answers are right in front of you. For improving reading comprehension skills, it is advisable to read daily at least for an hour articles from magazines, newspapers or books.

General tips for objective questions

One basic strategy that experts say should be part of your arsenal is the art of elimination. If a question seems difficult or if you are hard pressed for time, it is recommended that you try to eliminate as many alternatives as possible based your analysis of the question. You should keep in mind the one-third negative marks applicable for a wrong answer. This means that out of four alternatives, if you have eliminated two, it's a safe bet to choose any one of the other two.

Another trick is a basic strategy of problem solving in psychology. It involves working backwards from the question starting from each of the alternatives. The alternative which lets you arrive logically to the question statement is the correct choice. But this is possible only if you have enough time on your hands. Hence, it is imperative that while practising you identify your strengths and weaknesses in terms of the topics in the syllabus. Easiest first is a time-tested strategy that should be used to get a good score.

Resources

There are many standard texts available for reasoning and aptitude tests in the market. It is advisable to choose a comprehensive one and practice the questions repeatedly instead trying to solve new problems each time. The trick is to solve a set and check the answers right away so as to correct the logical fallacies you have been using to solve them. Strategies for solving them can also be identified and kept at hand for reference later. Mock tests with a time limit can be taken for each type of question. Many sample questions and tests are available online. You need not be a math geek to qualify in the Preliminary exam. Anyone with the right amount of practice and a little common sense can do it. As Thomas Edison said, genius is 99 per cent perspiration and one per cent inspiration. So, time to hit those books, what say!