

Topper's Talk with Siddhartha Shukla (Rank 18)

29th May, 2023 at 10:00 AM

QUERY REDRESSAL (10:40 AM):

- Only mocks and revisions should be done in the final days of the exam.
- If any aspirant cannot meet the medical standards for certain services like IPS, he/she will be allocated the next service preference as per the rank obtained.

Prelims strategy:

- Attempting mocks and repeated revisions are going to be the two pillars of the prelims preparation and the overall preparation journey as well.
- A very good grip over the basics is inevitable for all the stages of the exam.
- 6-12 NCERTs are inevitable for building the basics.
- We must not think in a manner like "low class" NCERTs are beyond the level of the exam (or one's own level), so covering them will waste time.
- All the questions regardless of subject & difficulty level are going to be of equal weightage.
- So we need to allocate our time both while during preparation and while attempting the paper.
- We must avoid **Revision Inertia**- thinking that covering new topics will be better than revising earlier covered topics.

ATTEMPTING PRELIMS MOCK-TESTS (11:00 AM):

- Though sectional tests will be very helpful, students must try to start attempting full-length tests as soon as possible.
- Though both online and offline modes of attempting the tests are good, students must prefer offline tests if feasible.
- Students must be thorough with the Previous Year's Questions(PYQs) after 2013.
- Students must be clear with each and every statement and option asked in PYQs, rather than only focusing on the correct option.
- Practice will show us a mirror of our preparation- there might be many subjects in which we think we are good, but tests may show otherwise.
- Students must not get too confident or underconfident after the test marks.
- The test marks must be used to guide if our preparation is going in the right direction or not and to point us to our strong and weak areas.
- Practice will also give an idea about time management and how to deal with **absolute terms** - always, only, never, binding, etc.

Mindset while giving the test/Actual exam:

- Our main purpose must be only and only to give one's best.
- We must not indulge in judging our capacity or preparation while giving the test, on the basis of the questions before us.
- We must stay hydrated during the test.

Note Making:

- Note-making is an art and just like other arts, it will get better with practice.
- Students must expect that initially, their notes could get very bulky.
- After practice, and guidance through PYQs and syllabus, our notes will get precise.
- While making notes of static portions, we can leave a certain margin, so that we can do additions from current affairs later.
- Note-making will only guide us for prelims, mains, and interviews and we must not expect exact questions from our notes.

Change in Prelims Pattern:

- Despite the changing pattern under which some questions might not be answered through elimination, we can still use reasoning for them.
- Background knowledge is still necessary as earlier.
- The Prelim exam is still skill-based.
- A calculated guess is going to be necessary for the exam and the judgment regarding the efficiency of our calculated guess will come only with the analysis of full-length tests.

CSAT Paper II:

- Any book/test series would be good for the Aptitude and Reasoning portions.
- Newspaper reading will be the best preparation for Reading & Comprehension.
- Multiple revisions and practice will be inevitable for CSAT Paper II.

Current Affairs:

- Along with daily newspapers, we must also include monthly magazines for our Current Affairs preparation.
- We must start note-making regarding current affairs as soon as possible.
- While making notes for current affairs we must focus more on covering more aspects and facts, rather than getting into scholarly depths of the topics.

MAINS (11:30 AM):

- The exam is mainly based on our writing skills.
- We need to maintain topic-wise notes as per the syllabus and PYQs.
- The demand for the main exam is very generic.
- Students must prioritize covering more and more questions, rather than getting into scholarly depths in some questions we think we know too much about.
- Conveying more information/opinion/dimensions in fewer words must be practiced rather than using too many words.
- PYQs and topper answer sheets must guide us toward perfecting our answer writing.
- While analyzing PYQs (both prelim and mains), we need to take care that some questions are going to be from static syllabus while some questions will be from that year's current affairs.
- We must take care of the tail words- Analyze, Critically Analyze, Examine, etc.

Optional Selection:

- Personal interest must be the main deciding factor.
- No optional subject is good/bad as such, and the final results will depend upon the efforts put into that.
- Though an optional subject is very important, we must balance our efforts given to optional along with those for General Studies and Essay papers.

History Optional:

- The PYQs must be the guiding material for our preparation and practice.
- NCERT books for classes 6-12 are very important to cover the basics.
- Later we can cover standard books like those by Upinder Singh, Satish Chandra, Shekhar Bandopadhyaya, etc.
- The mapping portion is going to be very important for the exam.

Essay:

- We need to do regular practice, despite our academic background, or our belief in our Essay writing skills.
- We must practice adding multiple dimensions, and examples in our essays.
- We can do a **pre-writing** of the essay- a rough write-up of how/what to be in introduction-body-conclusion.
- We can try to allocate daily time for Optional-General Studies- Essay.

Language Papers:

- The preparation must start with PYQ analysis.
- Students must do writing practice before the exam.
- Grammatical basics can be covered from related NCERTs or any other book.

Mapping:

- Students can follow any atlas for mapping.
- Atlas needs to be looked at every day.
- Every page of the Atlas must be written somewhere: like we need to have compilations of major places, mountains, rivers, etc.

TIPS FOR NEW ASPIRANTS (12:00 PM):

- Mains and Optional subjects are important, but it is the successive failure in prelims that break aspirants' confidence the most.
- So we need to be first very confident regarding the prelims preparations before focussing fully on the rest.
- Students must be **process-oriented** rather than **outcome-oriented**.
- Their planning must be more focused on meeting daily, weekly, and monthly targets, and so on, rather than focusing on what to be done after clearing the exams.
- Process orientation will give us self-motivation.
- We need to only compete with ourselves and not care too much about the perceived advantages and disadvantages that we feel some other aspirants might have.
- We must believe that the first attempt is going to be our best attempt so that we have a strong base if we have to prepare later.
- We can reduce the burden on ourselves by reducing our ego.
- Guilt and negativity breed anxiety and we must try to minimize these sources, if not eliminate them altogether.
- We must not push ourselves beyond our physical limits and a minimum of 8 hours of sleep is needed every day.
- The individual is the best judge of one's daily schedule.
- Relaxation gratification is needed but we must go for delayed gratification- setting a target of watching a movie only after 15 tests and likewise.

Interview:

- The three important pillars of the Interview are:
- I. Current Affairs.
- II. Ourself (as per DAF).
- III. Practice from the transcripts of older interviews of toppers.
- The interview is more a test of personality than a test of knowledge which has been judged in the General Studies papers.
- We can accept that we do not know the answer to certain questions but we must have informed opinions on important issues.
- Mock interviews will boost our confidence and make us prepared for random shifts in the topics of the questions.
- We must be fully prepared about each and every detail that we will fill in our **Detailed Application Form (DAF)**.
- Special focus must be laid upon hobbies and interests.
- There can be certain questions where we can shine and get distinguished from other aspirants.
- We can shift between English-Hindi (or another language) for some time, but we must try to revert back to our chosen language as soon as possible.
- Effective articulation of thoughts(Specific and Precise) is more important than the medium of expression.

PARTING WORDS (12:30 PM):

- As we have seen now, someone as accomplished as UPSC CSE AIR 18 can have multiple failures in life.
- The exam provides a level of playing field for everyone.
- We just need to be better prepared, composed, and confident than others.