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INSPIRING INNOVATION

GEOGRAPHY

Optional Strategy Guide



This comprehensive guide aims to provide aspiring candidates of competitive examinations with a strategic framework for tackling the Geography Optional paper. The guide begins by emphasizing the significance of a well-defined strategy in conquering the vast and multifaceted syllabus of Geography Optional. It delves into the art of syllabus analysis, enabling candidates to discern the weightage of various topics, identify recurring themes, the art of answer writing and utilization of mock tests.



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GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL STRATEGY DOCUMENT

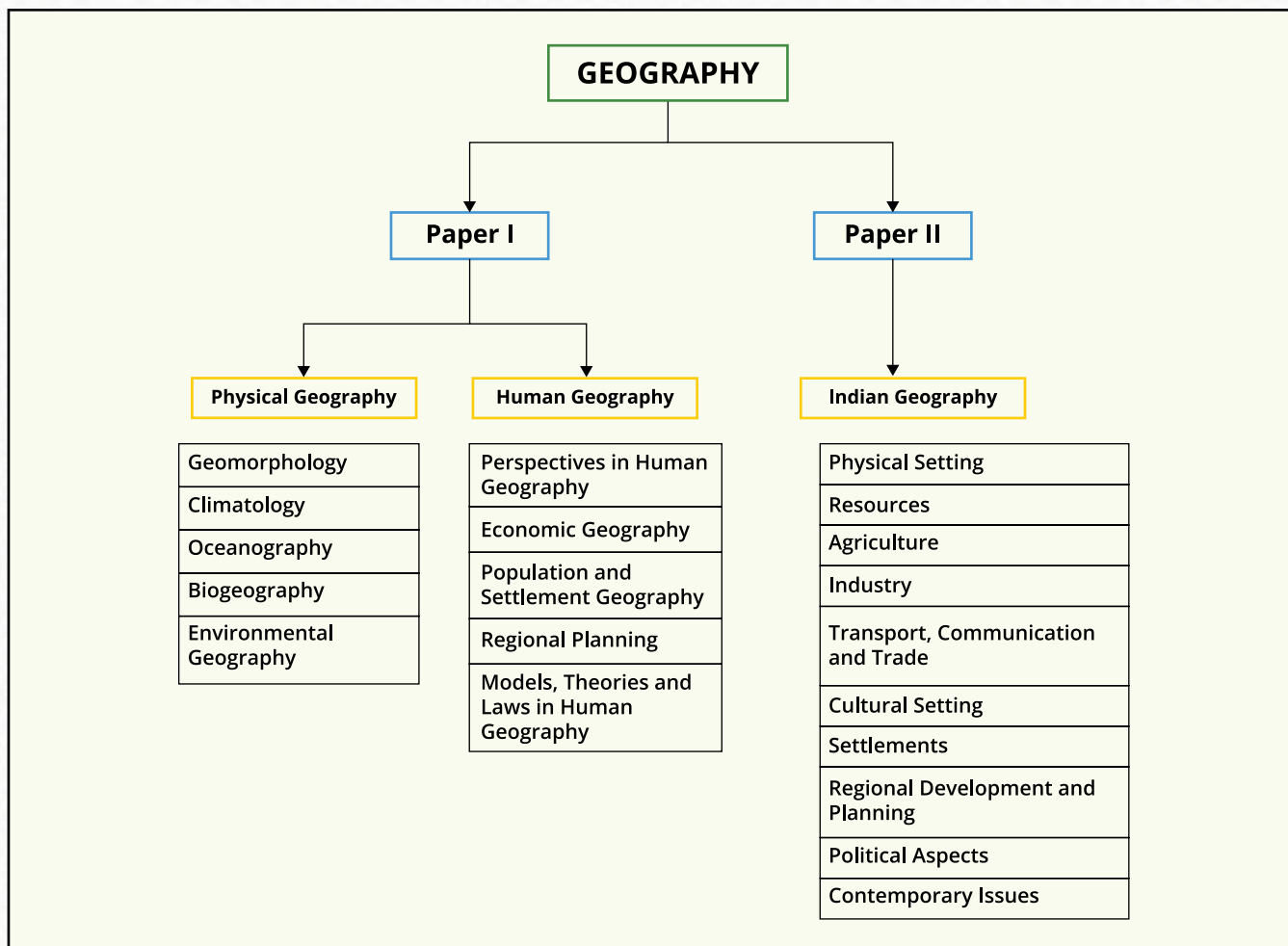
Geography is currently the most popular optional course chosen by candidates, followed by History, Public Administration and Sociology. Each year, over 3000 applicants who are eligible to sit for the UPSC Mains (written exam) select Geography as an optional.

In the journey of becoming a civil servant, choosing the right optional subject is crucial for success. The UPSC exam's optional papers carry significant weightage, with 500 marks in total. Many toppers have achieved extraordinary success due to high scores in the geography optional, as evident in the data given in the table. With geography's comprehensive nature, a well-crafted strategy and expert insights can pave the way for excellence. Now, embark on our specially curated guide to master this subject and achieve success in the UPSC exam.

Year	Geography Optional Toppers	Marks
2022	Shubham	298
2021	Yasharth Shekhar	306
2018	Ajay Jain	324
2018	Junaid Ahmad	321
2017	Pratham Kaushik	327
2016	Shweta Chauhan	326
2014	Ira Singhal	305

1. UNRAVELLING THE SYLLABUS

Make sure you are well-versed in the UPSC Geography optional syllabus. This will assist you in locating relevant topics and keep you far from reading unnecessary material for organised. Study, break the syllabus down into manageable sections.



IMPORTANCE OF KEYWORDS MENTIONED IN SYLLABUS

Understanding the syllabus and the types of questions are the first essential steps to succeed in the UPSC CSE. In preparation, focus should be placed on these essential words from the syllabus. Syllabus keywords importance can be understood from following examples of previous year questions.

TOPIC	KEYWORDS MENTIONED IN SYLLABUS	PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS
GEOMORPHOLOGY	Plate Tectonics	The concept of Plate Tectonics has been derived from the Isostasy and Continental Drift Theory. Elaborate citing suitable examples. (2021)
CLIMATOLOGY	Thornthwaite Classification	Explain the techniques to calculate potential evapotranspiration suggested by Thornthwaite. (2019)
POPULATION AND SETTLEMENT GEOGRAPHY	Settlements	Examine the relevance of the Central Place Theory of Christaller in the present context. (2021)
PHYSICAL SETTING	Peninsular plateau	Drainage pattern in Peninsular India is a result of its geological structure and topography. Elaborate. (2017)
CULTURAL SETTING	Migration	Critically examine the relevance of Ravenstein's law of population migration with reference to India. (2021)
POLITICAL ASPECTS	Geo politics	Discuss the political aspects of Himalaya. Explain how it has affected geo-strategy, geo-politics and regional consciousness of Indian federalism. (2019)

From analyzing previous year questions, it is observed that most of the previous year questions asked from syllabus itself and revolve around keywords mentioned in the syllabus.

2. NATURE AND TRENDS OF QUESTIONS IN GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL

Nature of questions - There are basically three types of questions in the geography optional.

Direct Questions

These are direct questions straight from the syllabus such as the difference between tropical and temperate cyclones.
In such cases, since everybody writes the same thing, it is important to present your answer appealingly. Make the answer neat and precise. Draw diagrams wherever possible.

Open Ended Questions

For these questions, there is more freedom to add positive and negative aspects of concepts.
You should also cover multiple dimensions of the issue or concept asked in the question. As usual, do include drawings and map locations if possible.

Map Based Questions

Practice the map-based questions that were asked in the last 20 years in the IAS mains.
Practice daily so that you can internalize important locations, markings, etc.

CHANGING TRENDS IN QUESTIONS

1. INTERDISCIPLINARY NATURE: There's an increasing trend towards questions that link geography with other disciplines like environment, economics, sociology, etc.

Q. "Automation is rapidly changing the economics of labour and will affect trade pattern in significant ways". Clarify? (CSE 2022)

2. APPLIED GEOGRAPHY: Questions now often demand applied knowledge rather than rote-learned facts. For example, the integration of geographical theories in current situations like urban floods, smart cities, etc.

Q. Explain how various aspects of channel morphology are used in transportation settlement, land use planning, flood control and flood management? (CSE 2022)

3. CURRENT AFFAIRS ORIENTATION - In recent times, the Geography optional paper has evolved to include questions that are closely related to contemporary issues, such as climate change, urbanization, migration, resource management and sustainable development. Candidates are expected to link theoretical concepts with real-world scenarios and demonstrate an awareness of ongoing global and regional trends.

For example, on topic of **climate change**, changing nature of questions can be understood below

2009	Explain factors contributing to the Global Climate Change.
2009	Discuss the consequences of Climate Change on agriculture and food security, and on the Coastal Zones of the world.
2009	How does Climate Change affect urban areas?
2011	"Contemporary global climate change is an anthropogenic phenomenon." Discuss.
2012	Impact of Cryosphere on global climate.
2016	Discuss the significance of World Climate Research Programme (WCEF) and its core projects in the understanding of climatic change.
2017	"Climate change is a reality." Explain with suitable examples.
2019	Explain the nature of urban climates and their impact on global environmental change.
2022	"Climate change is serious problem to global food security and eradication of poverty" critically examine

4. CONCEPTUAL CLARITY OVER FACTS: Instead of asking direct factual questions, UPSC tends to test conceptual clarity. Questions delve deeper into understanding rather than mere facts. Questions are getting more & more specific as opposed to previous years in which they were usually on basic topics mentioned in the syllabus.

EARLIER TRENDS QUESTIONS	NEW TRENDS SPECIFIC QUESTION
Discuss the trends in migration focusing on its major thrust. (2014)	Critically examine the relevance of ravenstein's law of population migration with relevance to India. (2021)

5. INCREASED FOCUS ON INDIAN GEOGRAPHY: Recent papers have shown a growing emphasis on Indian geography, especially issues related to agriculture, resources and regional development.

6. GREATER IMPORTANCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL GEOGRAPHY: With rising global concerns on climate change, environmental degradation and sustainability, there's an increased focus on environmental geography.

IMPORTANCE OF ANALYSIS OF PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS IN GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL

One of the key tasks in exam preparation is to analyse geography optional previous years questions because it establishes a framework and limits for study. It helps the candidates in analyzing types of questions, paper patterns and the way in which the geography question papers are framed. It is one of the ways to level up preparation as it creates awareness of the associated challenges by:

- » Familiarizing with the exam pattern: This includes the number of questions, the marks allotted to each question and the division of topics.
- » Analyze the type of questions asked: Are they conceptual, factual or application-based? What is the level of difficulty of the questions?
- » List the crucial topics: What subjects are tested repeatedly in exams? These are the topics that should be the main focus.

Year	Previous year questions (Theme-Food Security, Economic Geography)
2011	Write short notes on population and food security?
2014	Give an account of food security issues in developing countries?
2014	Food productivity with purity of ecosystem is the need of the hour." Elaborate?
2020	Analyze India's food security in the context of population growth?
2020	Describe the role of accessibility and affordability in the food security of the developing world?

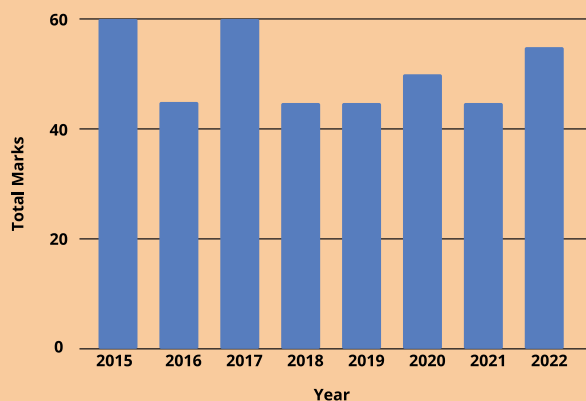
From the above analysis It is generally seen that the theme and pattern of the questions repeated each year.



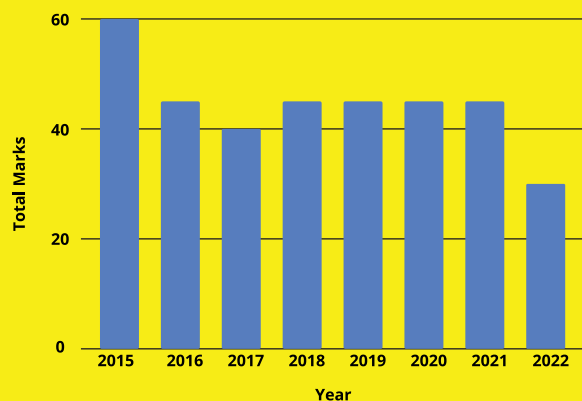
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CHAPTER WISE WEIGHTAGE OF PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY (PAPER -1)

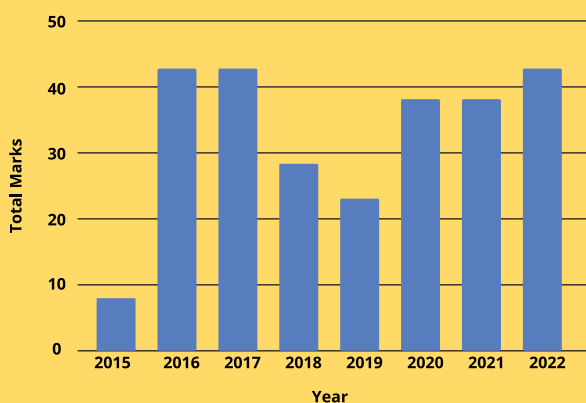
Weightage in last seven years (Geomorphology)



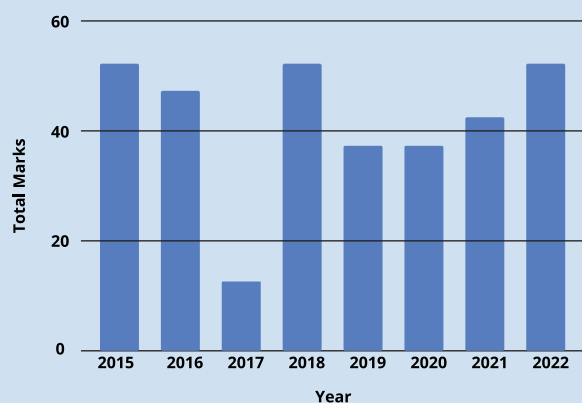
Trends in Climatology



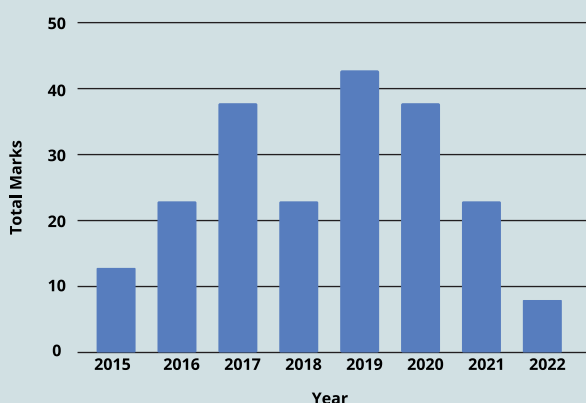
Trends in Oceanography



Trends in Environmental Geography



Trends of Marks in Biogeography



INSIGHTS FROM ABOVE TRENDS – There is no particular segment (chapter) in which UPSC asks the same number of questions. Every year the number of questions from specific unit changes.



CLIFF NOTE

3. SELECTING THE RIGHT SOURCES

Mastering Geography optional for the UPSC Civil Services Exam demands a well-thought-out and strategic approach in selecting the right resources. The subject's vastness and intricacies can overwhelm candidates, leading them to either:

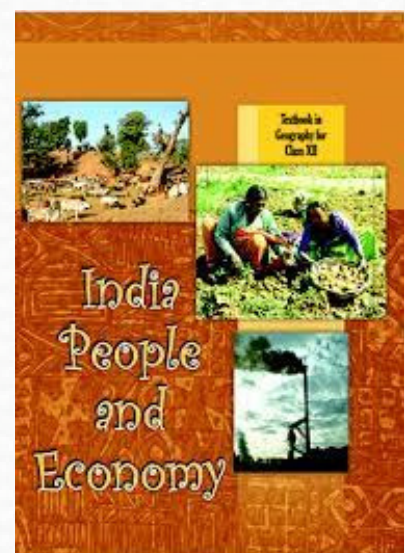
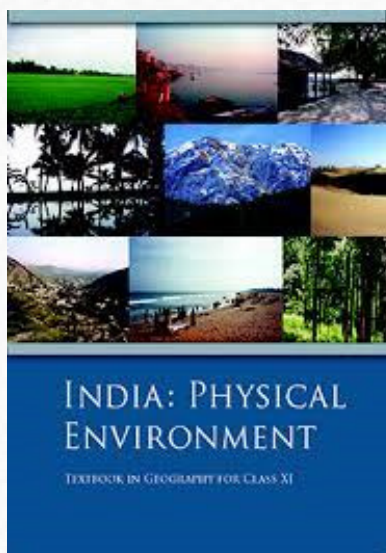
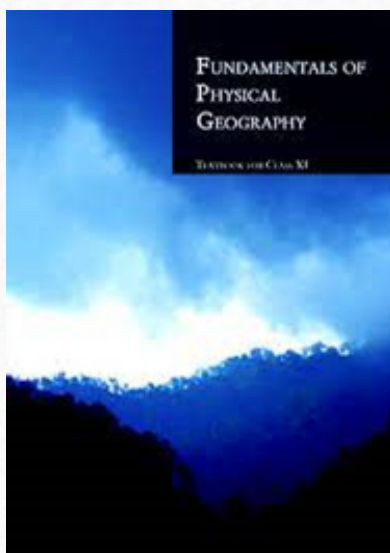
- » Overload themselves with excessive study materials.
- » Unintentionally overlook crucial topics.

To navigate this expedition effectively, candidates must be cautious of common mistakes, **such as:**

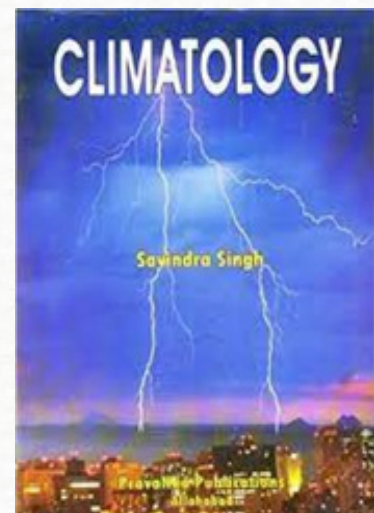
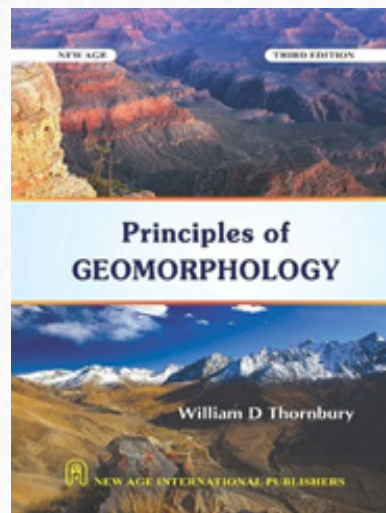
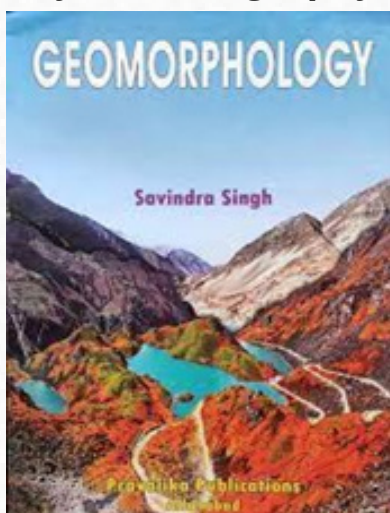
- » Relying solely on topper's notes or ready-made coaching materials.
- » Ignoring the changing trends and requirements of the exam.
- » Using substandard material that has lost relevance due to the evolving dynamics of the exam.

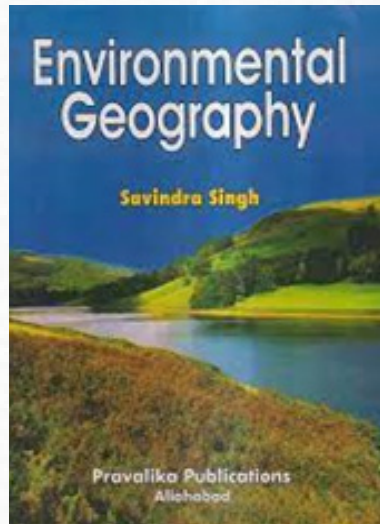
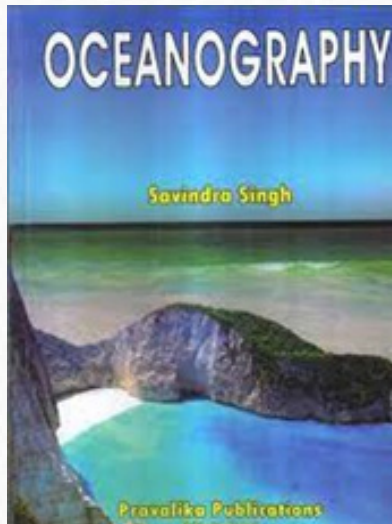
Instead, adopting a scholarly approach and consolidating content from various sources will provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. In this section, we present a carefully curated list of optimal resources for each topic.

FOR BASIC UNDERSTANDING

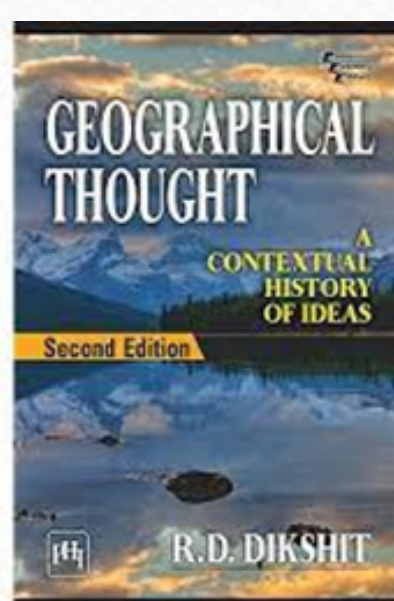
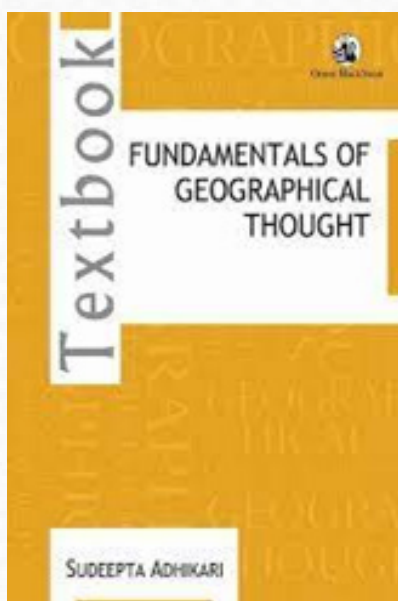
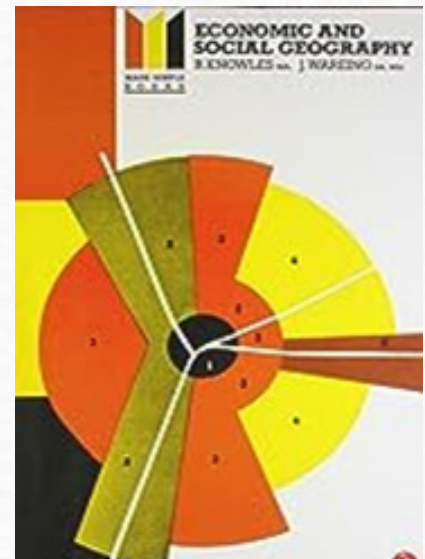
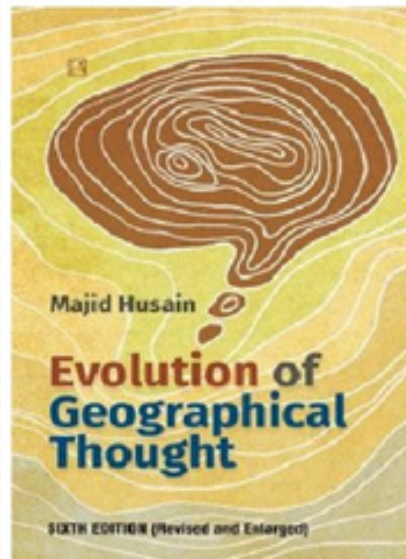
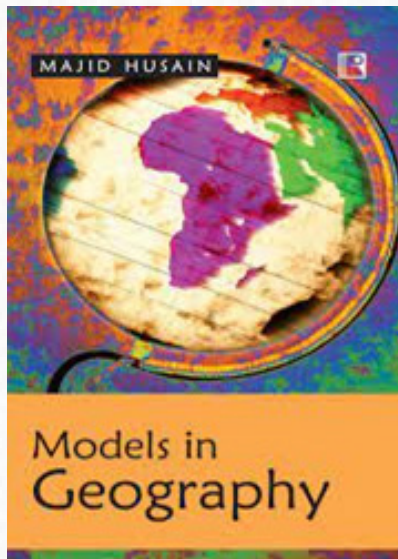


BOOKLIST FOR PAPER- 1 Physical Geography

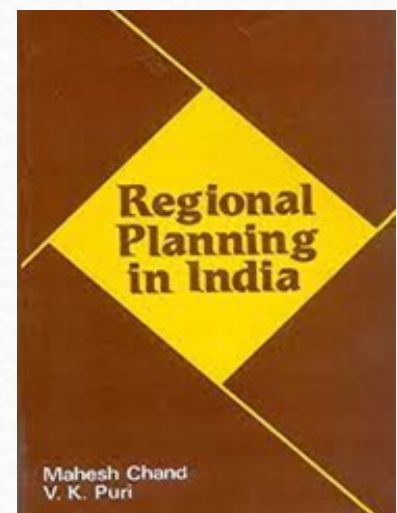
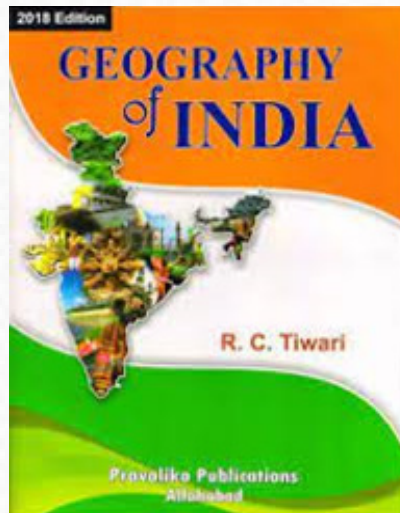
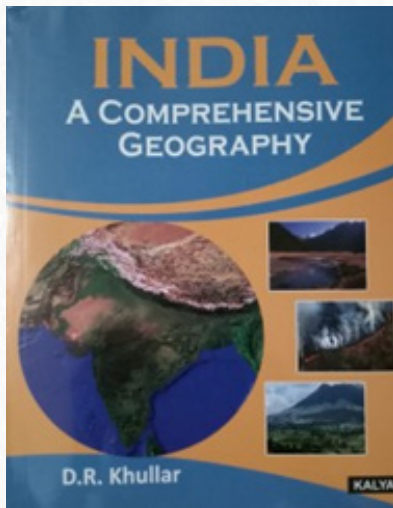




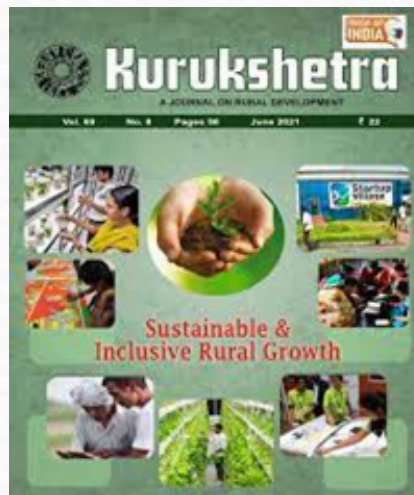
Human Geography



BOOKLIST FOR PAPER- 2



OTHER SOURCES FOR WHICH NEED TO BE FOLLOW FOR PAPER-2



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EPW

Economic & Political WEEKLY



These magazines can be best utilized for case study and examples and data specifically for paper-2. Apart from this use various committee's recommendations, reports, govt. policies and commission in paper-2.

For examples

Gadgil commission.	Western ghat ecology expert section.
Meena Kumari committee.	For comprehensive review of deep-sea fishing policy
Virginus XAXA committee.	Mandated to examine the socio-economic, educational and health status of tribal communities.

Trying to cover too many resources can lead to information overload. In contrast, Selective study of resources helps manage vast syllabus by focusing on quality over quantity, allowing you to engage more deeply with the material. Thus, it is advisable to confine your reading to topics explicitly outlined within the syllabus, both from recommended books and other sources.



CLIFF NOTE

4. IMPORTANCE OF CURRENT AFFAIRS IN GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL

Preparing current affairs for the geography optional in competitive exams can be a challenging task due to the vastness of the subject. However, with a structured approach, you can systematically cover the required topics. Geography topics are heavily current affairs based. Even if questions are asked about the static portion, answer require linkage with current affairs or current relevance. Current affairs are important for both the papers.

Some of the important Current affairs topics

Physical Geography: Recent natural disasters (earthquakes, cyclones, floods, etc.) Developments in the field of geomorphology, climatology, and oceanography. Climate change discussions, reports, and summits etc.

Human Geography: Census data, population dynamics, and migration patterns, Urbanization trends, smart cities, and urban planning issues, agricultural patterns, Green Revolution 2.0 and related technologies etc.

Major current affairs themes (CSE Mains 2022),








Paper-1 Rise of surface temperature, shifting global trade patterns, automation and related impact on labour dynamics, climate change and impact on food security.


Paper-2 Particulate pollution in Delhi, ground water contamination and major public health issues, recent change in institutional framework of agriculture, water dispute in north- west India.

HOW TO PREPARE CURRENT AFFAIRS FOR GEOGRAPHY

Newspapers: Reading and noting down relevant news from leading national newspapers (eg- the hindu, the indianexpress etc.) are essential for current affairs preparation. Relate current news to foundational geography concepts. For example, if there's news on a cyclone, revise the concepts related to cyclones, their formation, and their impact.

For example, the Content of **joshi math** news can be better used in the questions of geomorphology, disaster management, tourism side impacts, settlement chapter etc.

WHAT AILS JOSHIMATH	
 <p>Settled on approx 500m of debris from past landslides, the town has low soil bearing capacity</p>	 <p>Population and tourism pressure leading to deforestation and occupancy of unstable land areas</p>
 <p>No drainage system due to unplanned settlement and water seeping in has further reduced the bearing capacity</p>	 <p>Sub-surface ground motion leading to development of cracks</p>
 <p>NTPC tunnel may be the cause but no expert from GSI, IIT Roorkee, WIHG had commented on that yet</p>	 <p>Leakage and flow of water at places located below buildings</p>
 <p>However, source of water not yet identified and requires further investigation</p>	
<p>Note: Inputs from the Centre's fact-finding team and experts assessment on the latest sinking of landmass in Joshimath</p>	



Magazines: Yojana, Kurukshetra, and Down to Earth are some magazines that cover topics relevant to geography.

Govt websites and publications: Websites like PIB (Press Information Bureau) and AIR News can provide official news releases. Publications like the annual reports of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and others are valuable.

Yearly compilations: There are yearly current affairs compilations made by various coaching institutes. These can be handy for revision.

Remember that the objective is not just to remember the current events but to understand their geographic significance and implications. This understanding will make your answers stand out and fetch you better scores.

5. ANSWER WRITING IN GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL

You must make sure that your answer is unique and specific if you want to receive high scores. you must offer an in-depth analysis of both the query and the solution.

HOW GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL ANSWER IS DIFFERENT FROM THE GEOGRAPHY GENERAL STUDIES ANSWER

Geography general studies answer has limited scope in terms of content and words both. Some aspects which make geography answer geography optional answer.

1. **Use of geographical keywords, geographer names and their concepts, quotes.**
2. **Use of definitions by geographers** (for eg. - areal differentiation by Hartshorne).
3. **Use of examples used by geographers** (Julian Wolpert's Swedish farm).
4. **Quoting the books of geographers and what geographers emphasized in it.**
5. **Use of recommendations from reports, committees etc.**
6. **Addition of critical analysis** (in support and against or geographers' debate).

Additionally, you must provide maps and examples in most themes so that your answer is clear and conveys to the examiner that you are competent about the issue

HOW TO ENRICH GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL ANSWERS

1. **USE OF DEFINITIONS** - The **definitions** have to be precise. While preparing make a list of topics and find out their definition. For example, Areal Differentiation could be defined in a wide variety of ways, But if we write the definition mentioned by its first proponent, **Richard Hartshorne** used in his book "**Nature of Geography**" published in **1939** the examiner would be bound to reward marks.
2. **USE OF EXAMPLES** - People can write a number of examples for this concept but quoting the actual **example** used by the first proponent of this theory would be appreciated by the evaluator. The examples used in Human Geography should be what the geographers who conceptualized the theory used. Here are some examples.

Possibilism	The example was of the cultivation pattern on the French Plateau on the German side and the French side. This was the subject of the PhD thesis of Vidal de La blache.
Behaviouralism	Similarly for this theory, sighting the example of Julian Wolpert's 1964 paper on Swedish farmers while answering anything related to behaviouralism is more classy than creating a new example.
Stop and go determinism	Sighting the example used by the Griffith Taylor in his book to explain this theory would be better than sighting your own.

3. **QUOTING SCHOLAR AND THEIR WORK** - Use geographer full names, their work, their quotes and geographical terms.
 - » Remember the books that these geographers wrote and explained the various concepts. If possible, mention the year too in which the book was written. **Example: the book that was written by Weber to explain Theory of Industrial Location (Uber den Standort der Industrien), Nature of geography (1939) by hartshorne.**
 - » Quotes are always plus point in your answers, therefore, sprinkle some quotes with facts and figures. For examples -

- » Hence, it is advisable to focus on current affairs while preparing for the static part. For the same, you can refer to Yojana, Kurukshetra, and Down to Earth magazine.
- » Try to put current angle / Contemporary issues in question asked.

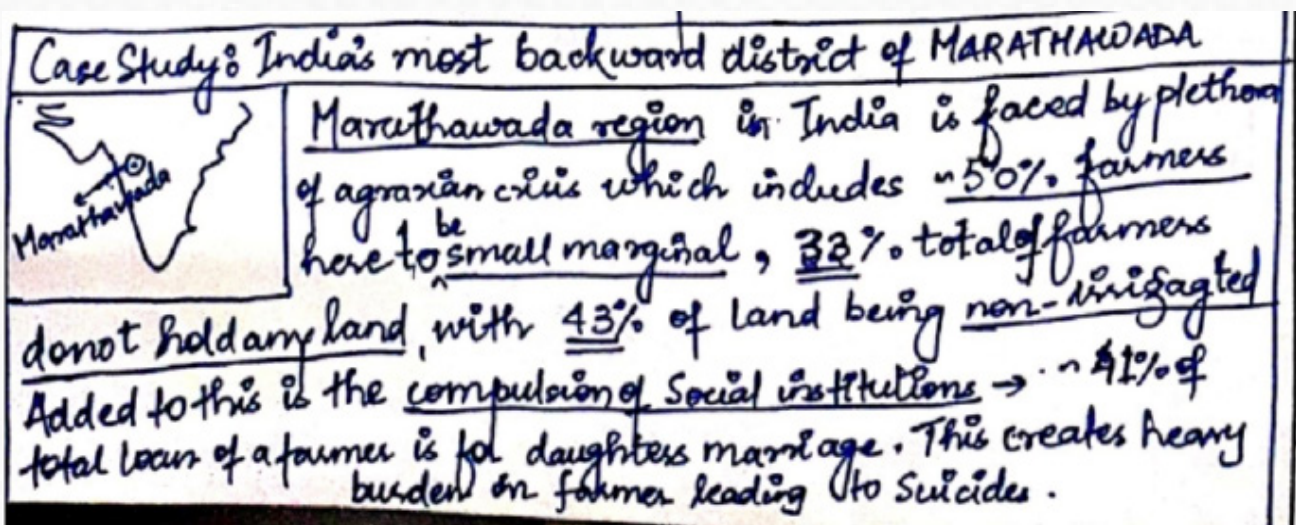
For Example - Try to link **Russia-Ukraine** war to geopolitical theories of Spykman and Mackinder, **Joshi math News** with geomorphology, recent Yamuna flooding with rainfall variability and encroachment over floodplains.

6. USE OF DATA AND FACTS IN ANSWER - If you want to put weight and authenticity in your answers, use Facts as well in your answers.

- » Providing sources for data will help you to give credibility to your data. Try to use data from official reports, govt. website etc.

For Example - Use IPCC assessment report data in answers of climate change.

7. USE OF CASE STUDIES - Real-world examples can enhance the understanding of theoretical concepts. For instance, the recent urban floods can be used to explain the concept of urban heat islands or the importance of urban planning.



- » Case studies can be collected through yojana, Kurukshetra, & magazine, govt reports, newspaper etc.
- » Make compilation of case studies topic wise.

8. INTEGRATED APPROACH (LINKING PAPER 1, PAPER 2 AND INTER TOPIC LINKAGE) -

- » While preparing , try to link paper I and paper II. For example, topics like population, regional development, climatology, environment and settlement geography and so on can be used for both papers. Examples from one section can be used to make your answers for the other section more relevant.
- » Try to incorporate aspects of both physical and human geography in your answers. Wherever possible, try to present the human dimension also.

For example, in a question about Himalayan and Peninsular drainage systems, you can talk about the differences in cropping patterns also.

- » when you write answers, make them along the lines of the syllabus like illustrated below:

Question - "Examine the role of small towns in the regional development process?"

You can divide your answer in following segments: Population and Settlement, Regional Development and Planning, environmental, Industries, Resources, Agriculture, Transport and Trade, Political Geography and Cultural Setting. This will make the answer more diverse and multidimensional in nature.

DIFFERENCE OF ANSWER WRITING BETWEEN PAPER 1 AND PAPER 2

- » The geography optional requirement for Paper 1 and Paper 2 are very different. Things that the examiner finds relevant in Paper 2 might not function in Paper 1.
- » The typical trend is to respond to questions in the same manner that we did in Paper 2, which is to compose your own responses. This is now becoming ineffective in scoring marks.
- » Paper 1 asks for answers that take a purist approach. The language used should be similar to the textbook as feasible. For this memorization of the entire textbook is not necessary.

SOME GOLDEN RULES FOR ANSWER WRITING IN GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL

- » **Use bullet points rather than paragraphs.** Bullet points help the examiner see your answer more clearly and presentably. If the answer calls for paragraphs, be careful to break them up into smaller sections of 4-5 lines apiece.
- » **Try to write more points for each question;** the more pointers, the better.
- » **Underline the dates, authority names, critical keywords, pertinent phrases** and significant events whenever possible. You can underline with a writing pen. There is no need to keep an extra ink on hand only for highlighting.
- » **Don't leave any questions** - It's acceptable to be unsure of the precise response to a question. However, you can partially respond to it using logic.
- » **Utilize headings** - Make sure to utilise the right headings and write them down when they come to you.
- » **Aim to address every aspect of the question** - Whether the question is stated clearly or implicitly, you must address every aspect of it.

6. NOTES MAKING FOR GEOGRAPHY OPTIONAL

Notes making for each and every topic of geography will be very time consuming thus selective notes making will help you to save time. Refer to your class notes/ standard books and add on to them in your class notebook only. For this, prepare class notes on either A4 sheets or leave enough margins in your notebook. Prepare only notes for those topics which you find very difficult to comprehend.

- » For Paper 1 and paper-2 you can have short summary of repeated topics which are important for exams and complex to understand. (identification from previous year paper)
- » Syllabus key terms wise notes can be made – for example

Chapter: Regional Planning

Sub-topic: environmental issues in regional planning

Content which can be prepared:

- » Nature of problems: natural or man-made.
- » Scholar(geographer) quotes / concept and their work to support argument.
- » Listing out of each related to environment in regional planning.
- » Listing out of solutions: broad and general solutions for each topic (short term/long term).
- » Examples of contemporary times: Chandigarh, recent urban flood examples can be used for environmental issues in regional planning.
- » UN Reports, Conventions (available on net- just type UN report on environmental issues).

- » Prepare region wise maps of India from standard books in which all aspects of a region are covered like terrain, drainage, resources, agriculture, industries etc. Basically, this is the regional approach to study geography which can be adopted for Paper 2.

(For example- rainfall variability map can be used in question of precipitation, cropping pattern, food productivity, food security, climate change, monsoon with creating context).

- » Make compilation of case study topic wise/unit wise.
- » Diagram bank can be made unit wise.
- » Data and facts from reports and govt. website, commission/committee recommendations can be compiled unit wise especially for paper-2.

KEY POINTS FOR EFFECTIVE NOTE MAKING

- » **Comprehensive & Lean:** Create detailed notes covering important Geographers' names and their significant works. After understanding the entire syllabus, add value to your notes with additional insights.
- » **Source Consolidation:** Note down content from different sources in one place to avoid scattered information. Compile and organize your notes for easy reference.
- » **Value Addition Techniques:** Enhance notes with well-labelled diagrams, case studies, and innovative content presentation methods to make learning engaging and effective.
- » **Interconnections:** Develop links between different topics in your notes to grasp the subject holistically, improving your understanding and analytical abilities.

Remember, relying solely on topper's notes or ready-made materials may not provide a deep understanding. Embrace the process of note-making as a critical part of your preparation will help you in fostering deeper comprehension and preparing you for the UPSC Geography optional paper with expertise. Avoid shortcuts and invest time in self-made notes for a successful UPSC journey.

7. MOCK TESTS AND ANALYSIS

After practicing with past year's question papers and gaining conceptual clarity, the next crucial stage is the mock test phase.

- » Mock tests simulate the actual UPSC exam environment and enable candidates to gauge their preparedness.
- » Getting answers evaluated by experts during mock tests helps identify strengths and weaknesses in answers.
- » Experts' feedback and suggestions aid in correcting mistakes and improving answer writing skills.
- » Mock tests enhance time management, providing a glimpse of the actual exam's time constraints.
- » Consistent practice with mock tests boosts confidence and reduces anxiety before the UPSC exam.
- » It is essential to utilize mock test analysis to fine-tune your preparation and optimize performance on the final day.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Remember, the Geography optional requires a blend of rote learning and conceptual understanding. Be patient and persistent and over time, you'll find yourself well-prepared for the exam. The tips and frameworks shared aim to transform aspirants into discerning students of geography, augment exam readiness and set them firmly on the path to becoming exemplary civil servants. We at Vision IAS hope that this comprehensive strategy guide will prove highly valuable for all UPSC geography aspirants in their preparation journey.



CLIFF NOTE

Heartiest Congratulations

to all Successful Candidates

**39 in Top 50
Selection
in CSE 2022**



**1
AIR**
Ishita Kishore



**2
AIR**
Garima Lohia



**3
AIR**
Uma Harathi N

**8 in Top 10
Selection
in CSE 2021**



**2
AIR**
ANKITA AGARWAL



**3
AIR**
GAMINI
SINGLA



**4
AIR**
AISHWARYA
VERMA



**5
AIR**
UTKARSH
DWIVEDI



**6
AIR**
YAKSH
CHAUDHARY



**7
AIR**
SAMYAK S
JAIN



**8
AIR**
ISHITA
RATHI



**9
AIR**
PREETAM
KUMAR



SHUBHAM KUMAR
**CIVIL SERVICES
EXAMINATION 2020**



HEAD OFFICE

Apsara Arcade, 1/8-B, 1 Floor,
Near Gate 6, Karol Bagh
Metro Station

Mukherjee Nagar Centre

635, Opp. Signature View
Apartments, Banda Bahadur Marg,
Mukherjee Nagar

For Detailed Enquiry,

Please Call: +91 8468022022,
+91 9019066066



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