

7 things to do on XAT day

By now all of you would have taken one major MBA entrance test at the least. This means that you are familiar with the biggest challenge of all — uncertainty on test day

- IIFT turning out to be easier than usual
- CAT throwing up a tough DI-LR
- SNAP coming up with the GK section that made every one question the meaning of the word “general”

For most aspirants (apart from those pursuing an education in HR at TISS) this is the last big attempt to get into a b-school this year. So here is the last to-do list, on which ticking all boxes will ensure that you achieve your dream — an MBA from a premier institution, a launching pad for a great career.

1. Know yourself

Self-knowledge has always been the first step towards mastery in every aspect of life and hence life itself. It is no different when it comes to tests.

You have now taken enough tests to take a few steps backwards and look dispassionately at what tends to happen to you during the 120-180 minutes of test-taking.

This is not about being good at QA, poor at DI or VA. This is about the to-do list that you were not able to execute in the tests so far.

What has been your biggest undoing so far?

- the paper was easy but you did not really pick up pace
- you got stuck on a few questions
- you chose the wrong questions
- you panicked when things did not go well during a particular part of the test
- you made one too many silly mistakes
- questions turned up from all the topics you left!

Identify the big things that you need to change to avoid the same mishaps. For example, if you are prone to making silly mistakes arising from not reading the question properly then resolve to ensure that you will read questions properly.

If you are prone to panicking just visualise things not going well and you handling them with ease, panicking did not get you anywhere in the first place!

You can't do the same things and expect different results. So this has to be the first step.

2. Go in with a timing strategy and stick to time-limits

On any test without enforced time-limits, having a time allocation strategy is critical and adhering to it is sacrosanct. If you deviate even by 5 minutes from your scheduled time slots your whole test can go for a toss. Please go through the time allocation post again to finalise your timing strategy.

3. Do not leave Decision Making for the end

Whatever strategy you choose do not leave Decision Making for the end. Towards the end of the test you tend to

- be low on stamina, not necessarily the ideal state to tackle DM caselets
- rush to mark answers in a hurry, something that will be fatal on DM

4. For Quant do a quick read to mark out easy-medium questions

By now you know that easy questions are interspersed between tough ones and usually towards the end! So start the Quant section by quickly marking out all the easy and medium question that you should attempt.

There is a caveat thought. What if it is an easy section like it is on the CAT? So suppose you read and find 5 out of 6 questions on the page are easily do-able, then stop there and finish those 5 questions.

5. No question is worth more than 3 minutes

78 questions in 180 minutes. We are looking at a cut-off of 45+ which means an attempt of around 55-60 questions. So you do not have more than 3 minutes per questions. So do not ever get stuck, keep moving.

Remember you are the rider and your mind the horse, so ensure you whip it from time to time, urging it to get going!

6. Do not let your performance on one section jeopardise your performance on another section

It is a tragedy that a lot of test-takers bungled up their CAT due to one section, DI-LR. A poor performance on that overwhelmed many and led them to a sub-par performance on the Quant section. In hindsight it turned out that 12-13 attempts were par for DI-LR and many hadn't performed that badly on it but had ended up performing poorly on Quant.

7. It is not over till GK and Essay Writing are over

Lastly, there is a huge possibility that you might take your foot off the pedal at the end of 180 minutes. GK & Essay Writing play a part in the final selection so ensure that you are fully switched on till the end of the test.

In the post before CAT, I had explicitly written about the middle section DI-LR being crucial since performance on it can end up psychologically impacting performance on the last section.

Unfortunately despite reading the post some of my students fell into the same trap. So there is no point reading this post if you are going to feel good for 15 minutes and go ahead do exactly the opposite during the test!

All the best for XAT, hope you have your best test-day of the season and hope this is year is definitely new and you reach your dream b-school. Here is wishing a great year ahead to all readers and aspirants!

How to prepare for the XAT

A curious phenomenon repeats itself year after year when the results of the CAT and the XAT come out – there is little overlap between the students who crack CAT and those who crack XAT. In other words, a largely different set of test-takers ends up cracking each test.

Why is this so? It is almost like one of the GMAT CR question types – which of the following provides the best explanation for the phenomenon described above?

The answer(s) to this question will also hold the key to know how to prepare to ace the XAT!

XAT favours the Verbose..err those with superior Verbal skills

As far reading goes, there is a hell of a lot of it to do on the XAT!

Firstly, there is VA and there is XAT-VA. The 26 questions on VA will have so many unique question types, tricky directions, deliberate twists, turns and hairpin bends that you can't take your eyes off the ball for a second or go into autopilot mode.

The questions cover the entire spectrum of VA as well – Grammar, Vocab, Reasoning, Critical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension.

Secondly, Decision Making is equivalent to an entire section of reading comprehension! So 48 out of 78 questions or more than 60 percent of the paper involves reasoning via reading compared to 32% on the CAT.

This is one of the major reasons why a different set of test-takers ends up cracking the XAT – those with good Verbal Skills!

There is a good reason for this as well – remember that XAT is a common test for both BM and HR courses and the latter needs people with good communication skills.

Those who prep win

Once the CAT is done with, those who know that they have done well enough tend to put their feet up and maybe rightly so since many would have been preparing for over a year.

The ones who really go after the XAT are the ones who had an ordinary outing on CAT-day and are determined to get into a premier b-school such as XL.

Even among those who prepare, most don't take Mocks seriously since they are not conducted in the same atmosphere as the ones for CAT.

So on average, the prep-levels across the spectrum are likely to be lower than they are for CAT.

Given this it goes without saying that those who prepare seriously with the same diligence that they showed for XAT will end up cracking the test; not necessarily the ones with better skills. They will be in better test-taking rhythm and most importantly more attuned to the uniqueness of the XAT.

Decision Making can end up making or breaking your entire paper

This entirely new section, with no equivalence or similarity to any other section on any other test, holds the key to your entire paper.

Firstly, you need to clear the cut-offs and secondly you need to do it in good time. You might end up doing enough to clear the cut-off but given the amount of reading

required, you might end up overshooting your time-limits and compromising the other section.

Given its novel nature, the DM section in terms of the level of difficulty can be compared to the DI-LR section on this year's CAT, albeit with more reading.

So crossing the cut-off is not going to be a walk in the park. If you are under-prepared for DM then you will definitely be caught on the wrong foot on many questions not knowing what to do.

Decision Making won't be high-scoring section and for this very reason, 0.25-0.5 marks can end up pushing you towards either side of the cut-off.

Apart from the 5 IMS Mocks and previous papers you can also order an IMS book dedicated to DM that has 100 questions covering a variety of HR and non-HR case lets.

This will be the best resource to practise DM apart from tests.

Increase your reading speed by at least 50 WPM

The copious amount of text is not limited to just the VA and DM sections. Even QA will have quite a few 5-6 liner Arithmetic questions that usually involve chase sequences, running back and forth and verbal jugglery.

Given that there will be so much reading to do you need to be to increase your reading speed to ensure that you are able to

- read all questions and
- answer enough of them to clear the cut-offs

One of the resources to do this was suggested by a student —<http://spreeder.com/>.

Dedicated to helping you read faster the site allows you to paste text, set a reading speed and words per chunk (I suggest 6 or 8) before you start reading. The HOME page tells you how to go about using it.

The best way to use this resource:

- For passages download the GMAT Official Guide PDF (I don't need to teach you how to do that:-))
 - Copy paste text into the software and read at a faster paste
 - After reading, solve questions from the passage
 - Two passages every day should suffice
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Practice Modern Math to ace the Quant section

The Quant on the XAT as mentioned earlier has long Arithmetic questions. Apart from this a fair bit of questions from Modern Math props up on the test.

So please ensure that you revise all those things that irritate most test-takers —

Logarithms, Permutation & Combinations, Probability, Functions, Polynomials and Trigonometry; numbers do not feature much on the XAT (this year they did not on the CAT as well) so don't waste too much time re-doing them.

Questions from Modern Math, unlike those from Arithmetic, tend to be shorter in length. So preparing for questions on these topics will be strategically useful.

Combine this with Arithmetic practice from cat100percentile.com and Quant should be taken care of.

A bit of GK a day to keep the section at bay

GK is a section that poses a peculiar problem for people — can one even prepare for it?

The GK on most tests, barring IRMA, is as *general* as the G in GK can get. But usually, it is a mixture of static GK and current-affairs(CA). While preparing for current affairs is a tricky affair, Static GK is something that can be tackled. Just get the Manorama YearBook and spend 30 minutes every day with it. In the next 4 weeks, you can easily cover quite a bit this way rather than just fret about it and do nothing. Also, GK will be a feature on your PIs as well, so this preparation will hold you in good stead for the same.

8 mocks to ace the test

The XAT is an old-fashioned paper-based test that will demand something that most test-takers are not comfortable with — time-management

There is no way you can crack a PBT without sectional time-limits without practising enough Mocks to get your timing strategy right.

I recommend at least 8 Mocks in the last 8 days leading up to the XAT — 5 IMS SimXATs plus 3 Papers from previous years. So a test a day from 26-Dec to 3-Jan, barring New Year's Eve.

Until then your practice schedule should comprise

- 90 minutes of Quant
- 60 minutes of DM
- 30 minutes of DI-LR or Verbal Reasoning on alternate days
- 30 minutes of RC Speed Reading
- 30 minutes of GK (all through till test day)

The biggest gainers on the XAT will be those who prepare with a plan and take enough Mocks. There is no reason why should not be one of them.

Don't trust the CAT, like the animal it is sly!

Even if your CAT went well, you can't be sure of your percentiles till they come out. Till the 97th percentile things will be pretty predictable but above that, we don't know how well the guys at the higher end have performed.

So even if you have done well on the CAT, it is still not a great idea to put all your eggs in one basket.

XL is right up there with the IIMs, so there is everything to play for

While XLRI-tag might not seem to carry the same weight as the IIM-tag it is right behind IIMs – A, B & C, up there with IIM-L & FMS and better than the rest of the IIMs in terms of placements.

The batch size is still not very large and the HR department of most premier firms are filled with XL alumni, what better guarantee does one need that placements at XL will be good!

So start your prep in all earnestness and I will be putting up the following posts in the coming days.

- How to crack XAT Decision Making
- How to crack XAT Essay Writing
- How to allocate your time on XAT
- All need to execute on XAT-day

XAT 2016: A Prep Plan

The next big exam for most IIM aspirants is XAT (Xavier Aptitude Test) – the gateway to XLRI Jamshedpur and 147 other institutes that include names like S.P.Jain, XIM Bhubaneswar, MICA, TAPMI, GIM Panaji, LIBA, K.J. Somaiya, Welinkar, Great Lakes Chennai, IIFM Bhopal and IMT Ghaziabad.

Know the test

1. XAT is a paper-based test with 2 parts: Part I. Objective Questions and Part II. Subjective with an Essay to be written
2. As per the FAQ section on the XAT website, this year the duration of the test will be three and a half hours (3 ½) i.e. from 10:00am to 1:30pm. (Last year it was a 3 hour test with 150 minutes for the objective part and 30 minutes for the essay)
3. The objective part of the test has four sections (i) Verbal and Logical Ability (ii) Decision Making (iii) Quantitative Ability and Data Interpretation (iv) General Knowledge. As per the latest notification, the first 3 sections will have 72 questions to be solved in 170 min. GK will have 25 question and the time allotted for the GK and Essay section will be 35 minutes.
4. The marks of General Knowledge will not be used for determining the percentile and cut off at first stage of selection.
5. Over the years, the number of questions per section has varied as follows:

6.	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
Verbal and Logical Ability	28	28	30	32	34	31
Decision Making	23	24	25	25	24	30
Quantitative Ability & Data Interpretation	33	31	36	28	43	40
Overall	84	83	91	85	101	101
General Knowledge	30	20	30	–	–	–

5. The questions in the four sections are in the MCQ format with 5 options each.
6. Marking system: Each question carries 1 mark (except in 2011 when the test had differential marking).
7. Negative marking: The instruction page last year stated “You MAY BE penalized one fourth of the allotted marks for every incorrect response” (don’t read too much into the difference between may be and will be). As per the latest notification, a student can skip up to a total of 12 questions in the first 3 sections. Beyond this every skipped question will attract a penalty of 0.05 marks per question. In other words, you need to attempt a minimum of 60 questions out of 72 to avoid negative marking. Also, GK questions will not have negative marking.

8. There are no sectional time-limits – you can attempt the first 3 sections in any order.
9. *Level of Difficulty of the Test: In past XAT papers, students would end up solving only half the questions – leading to very low score ranges. This year the level of difficulty of the test will be watered down to ensure that the best students (top 100) are able to answer all questions in 170 minutes while other students are able to significantly increase their number of attempts. What this implies is that students with a sound conceptual base should be able to score significantly high scores in this test. All the questions in GK will be “General” in nature rather than “Specific”.*

The “Syllabus” – What to prepare for XAT ?

If you have been preparing for CAT – then you are already on the right track in your preparation for XAT. However, as the test structure above indicates you will need to additionally prepare for the Decision Making (DM), Essay and General Knowledge(GK) sections – the DM section is important to secure your GD/PI call while the Essay and GK sections are important for the second stage of the selection process. Let us have a look at what has been appearing in the various sections in the recent years:

1. Quantitative Ability & Data Interpretation

A quick look at this section over the last 3 years shows that Geometry, Modern Maths and Data Interpretation have had the highest weightage in this section. A topic like probability that has seldom appeared in past CAT papers is a regular feature in this test. A few questions from Quantitative Ability have also been asked in the “Data Sufficiency format”. Majority of the questions (70-80%) ranged from medium to high level of difficulty – and after the recent CAT experience, I would not be surprised if students find this section to be slightly tougher than the CAT. The Data Interpretation questions have been fairly complex over the years and with no calculator to mitigate your pain – you cannot overly depend on this area to take you across the sectional cut-off. Almost every year you have had at least one calculation-based DI set with data in a Table and/or Graph format. DI sets with non-standard formats have also regularly appeared in past XAT papers. Find below a break-up of the XAT Quantitative Ability section over the past 3 years:

	2015		2014		2013	
	# Qs	Topics	# Qs	Topics	# Qs	Topics
Numbers	3	Number Properties, Factorials, Divisibility	3	Base Systems, Remainders, Number properties	5	Number properties, Number puzzle, Indices, Base system
Arithmetic	4	Mixtures, Percentages, Profit & Loss, SI & CI	1	Averages	6	TSD, SI, Work, Averages, Proportion,
Algebra	3	Simple equations, equation of a curve, Maxima & Minima	4	Equations and polynomials	3	Word Problem, Minima & Maxima
Geometry	9	Mensuration, Triangles, Quadrilaterals, Trigonometry, Circles, Coordinate Geometry	9	Mensuration, Triangles, Quadrilateral, Circles, Coordinate Geometry	5	Circles, Triangle, Quadrilateral
Modern Math	6	Functions, Sequence & Series, Probability, Statistics,	5	Probability, Progressions, Logarithms	6	Counting, Set Theory, Probability, Functions, Graphs
Data Interpretation	8	Tables-Cal Based, Multiple graphs - Obs based	9	Table-Cal Based, Table+Graph - Obs/Cal based, Multiple X-Y graphs - obs based	10	Table- Cal based, Time-chart - Obs based, Table/Bar graph - Deduction based
Overall	33		31		35	

How to prepare for XAT – Quant-DI?

Brush up concepts across ALL areas of Math – you should be able to solve the easy to medium level questions of difficulty even if they belong to your areas of weakness – and all questions if they belong to your areas of strength. Solve the Quant-DI sections of all the past year XAT papers (XAT 2010 to XAT 2015 available on the official XAT site. As you solve them, you may come across areas where you need to brush up concepts or learn new ones. For these areas, you may do well to practice more questions of a decent level of difficulty from resources like section tests, CAT 500 and CAT mock tests. For topics like probability – you can do well to go through the relevant posts on <http://cat100percentile.com/tag/probability/> . After solving all the XAT papers, move on to take the XAT mock tests provided to you. A test every 4 to 5 days should be a good frequency. After every test, analyse your performance in the same and work on at least a couple of identified areas of weakness.

2. Verbal & Logical Ability

Traditionally, the Verbal section in XAT has known to mainly comprise Reading comprehension questions – with a majority being inferential in nature. Do not be surprised if you encounter some really long passages and sometimes very heavy passages in this section.

In 2013, for example, there were passages that could be considered to be esoteric for a plain graduate. The remaining questions in this section are based on grammar, vocabulary and verbal reasoning.

Some of the Verbal reasoning questions (like the Definition-based and Statement Relations) have known to be tricky or confusing – and therefore, difficult to solve. You need to be a good reader with sound reasoning skills to ace this section. Lastly do not

get confused by the name of this section – it does not include “logical reasoning” questions (as referred to in the CAT terminology).

Find below the breakup of the XAT Verbal Ability section in the last 3 years:

Area	2015		2014		2013	
	No. of Qs.	Question Type	No. of Qs.	Question Type	No. of Qs.	Question Type
Vocabulary & Grammar	4	Synonyms, FIB (Multiple blanks), FIB - 4 sentences, Antonyms	7	FIB (double), FIB (Multiple blanks), Parts of Speech, Choose grammatically correct replacement	6	FIB (Multiple blanks-Parts of Speech), Choose grammatically correct sentence - one part in italics
Verbal Reasoning	6	Parajumbles, Para completion, Critical Reasoning, Statement relation	5	Parajumbles, Para completion, Definition Based Qs,	6	Parajumbles, Statement relation
Reading Comprehension	18	6 passages - Mostly Inferential questions	16	5 passages - 3 Inferential questions each; 1 small paragraph with 1 Direct Qn	18	4 passages - Mostly Inferential questions - 2 really long passages
Overall	28		28		30	

How to prepare?

Brush up your Grammar and Verbal Reasoning concepts (the CAT reference material should be good enough for the same). If you do not have a sound vocabulary, here is your chance to scan the wordlists and make most of the next one month. For Verbal Reasoning, you may need some additional practice for question types like “Definition-based questions”(eg. FIJs) as you may not have solved too many of them whilst preparing for CAT. Attempt a couple of Reading Comprehension passages on a daily basis – time yourself and check your accuracy. Again, the CAT RCs (especially the difficult ones) should be sufficient to prep you for the XAT. If you need additional practice across all the areas, dig into the section tests, CAT 500 and CAT mock tests. Before you start taking the XAT mock tests, solve the Verbal sections of past XAT papers to get a flavor of questions asked in the XAT. As in the case of QA, after every test analyse your performance in the same and work on one or two areas of weakness.

3. Decision Making

As an MBA, you will be involved in “Decision-making” on an almost daily basis. Decision-making is a process of selecting the best possible course of action from two or more possibilities. Decisions need to be taken based on objective or subjective criteria depending on the situation that you face. So, for example, in an ethical dilemma the decision you take is highly subjective and is dependent on the set of needs, preferences or values that you have or seek as an individual. In a case that involves financial implications, you may take decisions objectively based on expected values of one more parameters in different scenarios.

XAT is one of the only B-School Entrance Exams to test this ability – other institutes evaluate it, if at all, during the second stage of the selection Process. The Decision-making Section in XAT comprises business and everyday situations wherein you need to decide what the various stakeholders should do in given situations. The different types of cases that you may encounter in this section can be classified as (1) Cases needing application of Maths & Stats; (2) Cases based on ethics; (3) Cases based on evaluation of qualitative information. Answers to some of these questions

sometimes border on the subjective – with more than 1 option appearing to be equally correct).

Additionally, standard Logical Reasoning and Critical reasoning questions have also appeared in this section over the years. Multi-source reasoning questions (typical of GMAT Integrated Reasoning section) have also appeared in the XAT 2014 paper. In this type, you need to analyse different sources of information (in this case, there were 3 newspaper reports) to answer the questions that follow. Find below the breakup of the XAT Decision Making section in the last 6 years:

	2015		2014		2013	
Area	# Qs	Topics	# Qs	Topics	# Qs	Topics
Caselets involving knowledge of Maths and Stats	3	Investment in Technology	8	Graph from caselet, Two Probability based sets	6	Data Sufficiency + Profit/Loss calculations, Probability based set
Caselets based on ethics	3	Quality vs Sales	6	Sales vs quality, Present vs Past - Retail vs local stores	9	Corruption vs Success, Governance related issues, Misrepresentation for benefits
Caselets based on Qualitative information: For eg. HR Issues, Politics etc	13	Employee related issues, Candidate selection process, Politics based case, Sales Volume & Employee related	3	Employee related issues	6	Employee related issues-2 sets
Multi-source Reasoning			4	Analysis of 3 reports		
Logical Reasoning	3	Venn Diagram Based	1	Linear Arrangement	2	Numerical based set, Linear arrangement
Critical Reasoning	1	Order of actions	2	Best Conclusion, Which statement disproves	2	Which statement accounts for,
	23		24		25	

	2012		2011		2010	
Area	# Qs	Topics	# Qs	Topics	# Qs	Topics
Caselets involving knowledge of Math and Stats					3	Down fall of airline industry
Caselets based on ethics	3	Corruption in bidding for govt work			5	Environment Vs Business case, Actions of Environmentalists
Caselets based on Qualitative information: For eg. HR Issues, Politics etc	18	Compliance related issues, Delay in product launch, Organisational change, Employee related, Candidate selection, Salary determination parameters	6	Merger attempt -2nd time, Labour related issues	3	Politics Based set
Multi-source Reasoning			4	Evaluating sales offers		
Logical Reasoning	4	Shortest Route problem	12	Numerical puzzle, Conditionalities, 2 Numeric-based sets, Matrix arrangement	18	Conditionalities, Truth & Lies, Matrix Arrangement, Linear Arrangement
Critical Reasoning			2	Strengthen the argument, Order of statements based on quantitative & quantitative information	1	Course of Action
	25		24		30	



Trusted for Success

How to prepare?

As this is entirely a new section, ensure that you solve caselets and questions that have appeared in past XAT papers – to understand the nature of questions as well as the concepts (like Probability, expected value etc) that may be required to solve them. Ensure that you practice with critical reasoning questions (refer CAT and/or GMAT study material for the same) and Logical Reasoning sets (refer CAT material for expected question types). For Ethics and General Management based caselets – practice with the Case Studies that are generally used at the Group Discussion stage of the B-School selection process. *IMS has launched a book with 100+ practice questions for Decision Making. You could buy this book ([Click Here](#)) for additional practice with questions that are closely based on past papers.* Finally, have a crack at comprehensive mock tests – and focus on selecting the right sets in each of the tests – so that you meet the sectional cut-offs (which are pretty low each year – last year solving 12-15 questions with 80-85% accuracy would have comfortably got you through in this section).

XAT General Knowledge – Way ahead

The General knowledge Section will comprise 25

questions that need to be solved in around 10 minutes. As per the latest notification on the XAT portal, the questions in this section are likely to be more “General” in nature than “Specific”.

Further, this section will have no negative marking – so 100% attempt will be the order of the day. You should take not more than 30 seconds per question in this section.

Further, the marks of this section will not determine your first stage success, they will only be considered by institutes during the Interview stage of the selection process – which probably means you will have one more chance (during the interview) to prove

your GK-worthiness just in case you do not do too well in the XAT GK section. Note: I am not suggesting that you should therefore ignore this section while preparing for XAT.

More “General” than “Specific” – As per the XAT authorities, what this means is that the GK section will only have questions on Current Affairs and not on Static GK.

Questions in Current Affairs are expected to be based on the current political, business and economic environment in India as well as the world. Additionally, you could also expect questions from topics like Books & Authors, Awards, Sports & Sportspersons and Personalities in the News. Find below a few sample questions that have appeared in past papers.

1. India – Politics, Economy, Business, Events & Issues

Which of the following statements is correct about Union Budget 2014?

- A. Current Account Deficit was around 5% of GDP.
- B. Current Account Deficit was around 6.2% of GDP.
- B. Current Account Deficit was around 3.5 % of GDP.
- D. Current Account Deficit was around 1.7% of GDP.
- E. Current Account Deficit was around 0.5% of GDP.

How many smart cities have been announced in India?

- A. 50
- B. 60
- C. 70
- D. 80
- E. None of the above

From which of the following space stations was *Mangalyaan* launched?

- A. Sriharikota
- B. Balasore
- C. Thumba
- D. Wheeler Island
- E. Mahendragiri

2. International – Politics, Business, Events and Issues

Consider the following statements about the Syrian crisis:

- i. It was initially related to Arab spring.
- ii. Many Syrian refugees flee to Jordan and Lebanon.
- iii. Bashar Al Assad is involved in Syria crisis.
- iv. There has been a single party political government in Syria for over a decade.
- v. Syrian crisis is not related to Tunisia.

Which of the following options does not contain false statement pertaining to Syrian crisis?

- A. i, ii, iii, iv
- B. i, ii, iv, v
- C. i, iii, iv, v
- D. ii, iii, iv, v
- E. i, ii, iii, v

‘Hudhud’, the name of recent cyclone, is associated with:

- A. National bird of Israel
- B. Malaysian pet dog
- C. Bangladeshi fowl
- D. Telugu language
- E. Mandarin

3. Authors and Awards

Which of the following Indian movies did not get nominated for 'Academy Awards' in the 'Best Foreign Language Film' category?

- A. Lagan
- B. Mother India
- ☒ C. Salam Bombay
- D. Swadesh
- E. Water

Which of the following authors has not been awarded Pulitzer prize?

- A. Paul Harding
- B. Donna Tartt
- C. Adam Johnson
- D. Jhumpa Lahiri
- E. Arundhati Roy

4. Sports and Sports-persons

Which of the following is the correct list of sportspersons awarded gold medal at Incheon Asian games?

- A. Jitu Rai, Yogeshwar Dutt, Tintu Luka, Mary Kom
- B. Saurav Ghoshal, Mary Kom, Sania Mirza, Krishna Punia
- C. Krishna Punia, Rajat Chauhan, Saurav Ghoshal, Mary Kom
- D. Seema Punia, Vikas Gowda, Sania Mirza, Jitu Rai
- E. Sania Mirza, Vikas Gowda, Yogeshwar Dutt, Rajat Chauhan

5. Personalities in the "News"

Christine Lagarde is:

- A. a famous tennis player of yesteryears
- B. an American stage and screen actress
- ☒ C. the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund
- D. the Chief Executive Officer of Nestle
- E. a British political activist

Which of the following education institutes was Mr. Rajat Gupta, the former McKinsey chief associated with:

- A. XLRI Jamshedpur
- B. ISB, Hyderabad
- C. IIM Ahmedabad
- D. JBIMS, Mumbai

How to prepare for XAT GK?

Taking note of the above examples, and with one month to go for the exam, I would suggest the following preparation strategy for the GK section of XAT (note – this preparation will also aid your preparation for other tests containing GK)

1. Go through the archives of any National Newspapers/Magazines for relevant articles –start with the latest and go backwards as much as you can (maybe covering events that have occurred in the last 1 year or so).

- Alternatively, you could access monthly compilation of current affair topics provided by various GK resources like IMS GQuest or Manorama Yearbook. ibef.org is also a good resource for facts and figures pertinent to the Indian economy.
- Make notes as you read – this should help you retain facts and figures. Organise what you read into the various heads as mentioned above for quick reference later on as this could also serve as a source for quick revision, closer to your exam date.
- Engage in group study – Creating questions and challenging each other in a group is a fun way of learning GK (which can sometimes get drab and boring).

General Knowledge does not have a fixed syllabus – so you will never have a sense of completion to your preparation. But go ahead, and do as much as you can – and who knows you might just about crack this section.

XAT Essay Writing Section

The Essay writing section is another reason why the XAT is unique by itself. While the Essay is not used to shortlist the students for the second stage of the selection process – the quality of essay written could make or break your chance of converting your interview call to a Final Admit. A bad essay will only make things harder when you appear for your interview. So, it's imperative that you sharpen your essay writing skills before the D-Day. Rest assured that this will also go a long way in aiding your performance in the WAT/GD round of IIMs and other top B-Schools as well. Find below the list of topics that have been asked in the last few years:

Test	Topic
XAT 2015	Listening is a dying art. We hardly listen to understand, we only listen to refute or reply
XAT 2014	The most beautiful thing can neither be seen nor be touched but can only be felt
XAT 2013	Corruption is the root cause of economic slowdown in India
XAT 2012	Select one of the statements and then justify the same and substantiate it with the help of relevant examples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poverty is a big menace in India. Due to its complexity and magnitude, most of the government initiatives fail. Poverty is a consequence of failure of government policies due to the governments not targeting the root causes.
Source: Academics Team, IMS www.imsindia.com	
XAT 2011	Analyze the following Argument The statesman who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals would not load himself with the most unnecessary attention but assume an authority which could safely be trusted to no council or senate whatever, and which would nowhere be so dangerous in hands of man who had folly and presumption enough to fancy himself fit to exercise it.
XAT 2010	Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed
XAT 2009	The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of riches; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries
XAT 2008	Gender Imbalance would lead to Third World War
XAT 2007	Economic growth without environmental damage – a mirage or a reality
XAT 2006	India has one of the largest pools of talented manpower, but few innovations and patented products
XAT 2005	More than one billion Indians: A gigantic problem or a sea of opportunities
XAT 2004	Asked at the age of 83, as to which of his project would he choose as his master piece, Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect answered, "The next one"
XAT 2003	To give real service, one needs to add something that cannot be bought or measured, like sincerity and integrity

How to prepare for Essay Writing?

A good essay is characterized by a structured display of a coherent thought process wherein the arguments put forth are backed by relevant examples/evidence. The language used can be simple but must be effective to communicate your ideas. While it is needless to say that the essay should look organized with an Intro-Body-Conclusion structure, being well-read and informed can go a long way in improving the quality of your essay. Do not make too many grammatical or spelling mistakes – as it will only

take away from an otherwise well-written essay. The topics assessed, if you notice above, are abstract or general in nature. So, write as many essays as you can on a collection of topics and get them assessed by experts whenever possible. Watch out the blog of Mr Tony Xavier for posts on not only how to write good essays but also how to do well in the WAT-GD-PI stage of the selection process. (imschennai.in/blog/)
With this, I end my post on XAT – test analysis and preparation strategy. Hope, all of you do well in the XAT. All the Best!!K

How to allocate your time on XAT 2016

It is a different world altogether when one moves from a CBT with sectional time-limits such as the CAT to a PBT with no sectional time-limits such as the XAT. While on the face of it both with test concepts (not necessarily the same) at a fundamental level they end up testing something very different.

A test of competence versus a test of strategy

A test with sectional time-limits is primarily a test of competence — how many questions can you answer in 60 minutes? It does not matter if you can solve the section under the given time-limit or if given 10 minutes more you can clear the cut-offs.

The moment it becomes a PBT test-takers have to perform more like managers — maximise the return they get from their resources. Many test-takers prefer sectional time-limits since they feel the stress of time and resource management goes out of the window. But the really good ones would know that a PBT with no sectional time-limits gives them more control of the test.

For example, on the CAT this year I could finish the Verbal Ability section in 45 minutes at a leisurely pace and was twiddling my thumbs, re-checking my answers. If the same paper was given without sectional time-limits I would have pushed the pedal on Verbal, solved one more set on DI-LR and another 5 questions on Quant. I am sure many of you would have also gladly taken 5 mins each from Verbal and Quant and given it to DI-LR to ensure that you clear the cut-off.

What You Need To Manage — Not Just Time But Also Unpredictability

What is the biggest apprehension that most test-takers have as they await the CAT 2015 results? Have I done enough to clear the DI-LR cut-off?

So what you know by now is that the test can throw up a few surprises in terms of level of difficulty that you need to handle and ensure that you do well enough to clear all sectional cut-offs.

The XAT, especially the Verbal section of the test, has always thrown up novel question types. Also Decision Making can be unpredictable as there are only broad patterns into which the cases fall.

Your first goal on a PBT is to ensure that you clear all the sectional cut-offs.

You should allocate your time in such a way that you have the flexibility to deal with any unpredictability and not let it jeopardise your ability to clear the sectional cut-offs.

Small Is Efficient

We always do well when we have limited resources because we then maximise every penny. And on the XAT, as on any other test, the most important resource is time.

So does it make sense to divide your 170 minutes into three big blocks, one for each section? Most test-takers would be looking at a 50-50-70 division for each of the three sections VA-RC, DM and QA-DI respectively.

I don't think it is a great idea to go with one block of time for each section. It is better to break down your test into smaller time units and build in scope for flexibility into system.

How To Divide Your 170 Minutes on XAT 2016

I would suggest a division 45 minutes for each section and a buffer of 35 minutes — 45-45-45-35

What does such a division ensure?

Ensures That You Clear Sectional Cut-Offs

To ensure that you clear the sectional cut-offs for each section you should aim to score at least 12 marks on marks. This would mean an attempt of around 15-16 questions in each section with high accuracy.

So your task in the first 45 minutes is to pick out the easiest 15-16 questions so that you clear the sectional cut-offs. Use the A-B-C before solving any question — Now, Later or Never.

Remember the paper can be easy, so do not stop the moment you reach 15 questions; maximise the number of questions you can solve in 45 minutes.

Incase you find that you have not done enough to clear the cut-offs you know that you can come back and do a few more since you have budgeted some buffer-time.

Ensures That You Do Not Miss Out On Easy Questions

How many times have you gone back home and analysed a SimCAT only to find that there was an easy set or question that you could have done but did not since you did not really read it. This division ensures that you take a look at all areas and pick out easy questions from them.

Ensures That You Can Gauge the Difficulty Level of Each Area

If you use this strategy in all your SimXATs, come test-day you will be able to gauge the difficulty level of the section-based on the number of attempts at the end of the defined time-limit.

Ensures Timely & Better Performance Tracking

It is quite common for test-takers to realise towards the end of a test that their performance on a section was below par. This is not because they performed poorly towards the end of the test but because they did not keep track of the deficits that were building up during the course of the test.

By measuring yourself over smaller time slots with specific targets, you will be able to clearly know how your test is progressing and formulate your strategy in stages depending on your performance in the previous time-slot.

Why The Buffer

Firstly, the buffer is to help you deal with test-day uncertainty. Anything can happen on test-day, for some reason an LR Set you might have otherwise done might pose a stubborn problem, something that you would have faced on the CAT.

Quant might throw up more questions than usual from your least favourite area, Geometry or P & C. How do you deal with this? Can you allow these minor setbacks to jeopardise your entire test?

If you have ensured that in the regular time of 135 minutes you have done enough to clear sectional cut-offs, then the buffer will help you really make a run for the overall cutoff.

A score of 40+ on the XAT usually nets you a percentile in excess of 99 and a call from XLRI. This year the number might be slightly higher because of the extra 30 minutes. An overall score of 45+ should thus get you into the 99 percentile range.

Suppose you have ensured that you will score at least 12 in each of the 3 sections then you know that in the last 35 minutes you need get another 9-10 questions from all B category questions left unsolved.

Since you would have gone through all three sections you would have a clear idea as to where you can get those marks from.

Incase your performance is lopsided — you do well in 2 sections but not on the third one — you can use the buffer time first to ensure that you clear the cut-off in the section that did not go well and then to go after the overall cut-off.

It is that safety net at the end of 135 minutes that helps you ensure that to you clear sectional and overall cut-offs despite any setbacks during the 140 minutes.

You can customise the plan by changing the time-limits here and there by 5-10 minutes but you should not let your buffer time go below 20 minutes. More importantly you should stick to the plan.

What order should you attempt the questions in?

As long as you stick to the time-limits any order should suffice. But this works best when you have almost equal ability on all three sections.

But if your ability across the three sections is varied then one of the two orders below is advisable:

- **Strongest – Weakest – Average**
- **Weakest – Strongest – Average**

What is crucial is that you do not end up spending more time on your strongest section and thus end up not having enough time to clear the cut-offs on the other sections.

The year I cleared the CAT, we had 150 questions, 120 minutes with 50 questions from same three sections as there were in CAT 2015.

I started with Verbal, my strongest section and stopped at the end of 30 minutes having solved around 30 questions. I then ensured that I spent enough time to clear the QA and DI-LR cut-offs. If I spent another 10 minutes on Verbal I could have solved another 10-15 questions but at that point I had cleared the first hurdle — clearing the sectional-cut-off.

In the end I had another 5-10 minutes left and I came around and knocked off the easy VA questions that remained (I did the RCs in the first round).

Fine tune this strategy on the SimXATs

Take the 7 SimXATs with the same focus that you would have on test-day. Execute the timing strategy till you get a proper hang of; it will not fall into place with one Sim.

Do browse through the SimXATs to just check out XAT questions. To do that look a previous years' XAT papers. If you don't take the SimXAT seriously, you are not serious about taking the XAT.

As discussed keep benchmarks of 12 of sectional scores and 45 for overall score to measure your performance.

I will do two more posts one on DM and one on things to watch out for on XAT-day.

And yeah, do not bother about the -.05 for every unanswered question beyond the 13 questions you can leave. You need to skip 33 questions to earn a negative of -1 ,making it inconsequential. So take the test as if this rule does not exist.

It is almost as if they cannot rest till they tweak something or the other!

How to crack XAT Decision Making – Part I

One of the most tedious and inscrutable sections that you will find across all management entrance tests, Decision Making has been the nemesis of many a XAT-aspirant. A lot of factors contribute towards DM possibly being the biggest stumbling block on the XAT. But none is bigger than the fact the amount of time any test-taker would have spent preparing for DM when compared to any other section is minuscule. This coupled with the dislike and unease most aspirants have towards reading and the extremely subjective nature of questions ensures that DM ends up becoming the deal-breaker as far as the XAT is concerned.

Decision Making is not Reading Comprehension

It is as long as RC it is as boring as RC, it must be RC!

The first thing that every test-taker should remember is to remove his/her Reading Comprehension sunglasses before preparing for or approaching DM.

The ability to crack a puzzle has a lot to do with understanding the kind of thinking that the puzzle is testing and orienting your mind to approach it from that direction. So you need to approach DM with more than the ammunition you take for RC, the default setting for which is usually — *I think I have read this somewhere*.

The first challenge in Decision Making – choosing the right set

Before I started writing this post, I decided to take a XAT Decision Making section in its entirety and put myself in exactly the same shoes as test-takers. Well, it was not an enjoyable experience.

The section is titled *Decision Making & Analytical Reasoning* but only one set can be classified as a pure reasoning set, the rest are all DM.

One cannot choose a DM set based on judgement, the way one chooses a DI or an LR set —

- read the set
 - classify or map it to a pattern
 - estimate the complexity of the information
 - and decide whether to attempt or to leave
- Firstly, there is really no pattern. There are broadly three types of cases
- number-based decision-making involving a business/revenue situation
 - information-based decision-making involving a strategy situation
 - information-based decision making involving an HR situation
 - analytical reasoning

Secondly, identifying the pattern though does not translate into any strategic advantage as each set in any category is very different from the rest.

Thirdly, unlike DI & LR the information itself can never tell you how difficult or easy the set is going to be. All sets seem to be easy and straightforward.

You can assess the difficulty level only at the last stage, after you have read the question and the 5 options.

Lastly, the difficulty level varies vastly from question to question within a set — you are unlocking a question and not a set!

So, not like RC, not like DI-LR, should you approach it like individual Quant questions?
Yes.

The second big challenge on Decision Making — *you cannot be on auto-pilot*

One has to concentrate harder than one does on any other section one has done so far. The reason for this is that there are very few situations where you will be executing something you have already done, even at micro-level.

Every question is so unique that you will have to be switched on throughout the process of solving a question — something that will tire you out and take up a lot of a time.

If the paper is of the same difficulty as the previous year, it is going to be tight-rope walk, making a score in excess of 10 a real challenge.

So how do we go about it? The devil is always in the details so let's dissect last year's sets to understand how to approach Decision Making both at a question-level and at a section-level.

For best results, exit this post now, do the Decision Making section on last year's XAT and return.

SET 1: ANALYTICAL REASONING

Answer questions on the basis of information given in the following case.

Bright Engineering College (BEC) has listed 20 elective courses for the next term and students have to choose any 7 of them. Simran, a student of BEC, notices that there are three categories of electives: Job-oriented (J), Quantitative-oriented (Q) and Grade-oriented (G). Among these 20 electives, some electives are both Job and Grade-oriented but are not Quantitative-oriented (JG type). QJ type electives are both job and Quantitative-oriented but are not Grade-oriented and QG type electives are both Quantitative and Grade-oriented but are not Job-oriented. Simran also notes that the total number of QJ type electives is 2 less than QG type electives. Similarly, the total number of QG type electives is 2 less than JG type and there is only 1 common elective (JQG) across three categories.

Furthermore, the number of only Quantitative-oriented electives is same as only Job-oriented electives, but less than the number of only Grade-oriented electives. Each elective has at least one registration and there is at least one elective in each category, or combinations of categories.

On her way back Simran met her friend Raj and shared the above information. Raj is preparing for XAT and is only interested in Grade-oriented (G) electives. He wanted to know the number of G-type electives being offered. Simran replied, "You have all the information. Calculate the number of G-type electives yourself. It would help your XAT preparation". Raj calculates correctly and says that there can be *possible answers*.

Which of the following options would best fit the blank above?

1. 3
2. 5
3. 8
4. 9
5. 11

On the face of it, the set above seems like a straight-forward Venn Diagram involving three sets.

So test-takers are usually tempted to go for it; the *known* is usually considered safer than the *unknown* but a closer look will reveal that it is closer to a *known devil*.

The total number of electives is given as 20. The intersection of the three sets is given as 1. These are the only numbers involved. The rest of the data can be represented in three variables.

Also, if you look at the first question, it will be revealed that there are many possibilities, which means you cannot use equations to crack the set and get a precise answer. There are three more questions in this set along the same lines.

If we use the A, B, C classification then this question set should be classified as a B, definitely not an A. The temptation to do this set will be high since it is a pure AR set but you can always come back to it.

It would have taken about 3-5 minutes to read the set and take this decision.

SET 2: Decision Making — HR Set

Answer questions on the basis of information given in the following case.

Mr. Dipangshu Barua, a young IT professional, came early to office to assist his boss in the preparation for an important client presentation. When he switched on his computer, he saw an email from Mr. Patel. The email was as follows:

Dear Mr. Barua,

This email serves as a follow-up of my conversation with you on December 1, 2014. I have already conveyed need for improvement in your behaviour as desired as desired by your project leader and colleagues. They are yet to notice any visible improvements. I am apprehensive that your failure to act may warrant further action leading to dismissal. I will continue to monitor and assess your performance over the next three months to determine whether improvements meet the expectations. At the same time, I would like to re-affirm that you are very valuable for our organization.

Best Wishes,

Mr. A. Patel

HR Director

Initially, the e-mail distracted Dipangshu but he decided to focus on the job. Which of the following options might best explain his decision to do so?

- (1) Mr. Patel would soon be transferred to another department.
- (2) Last week, Mr. Dipangshu has been assigned to a new team in the same project.
- (3) Three days back, Mr. Dipangshu has been assigned a new project similar to his final year engineering project.
- (4) His friend has been hospitalized for the last three months.
- (5) Failing to perform in the client meeting might further complicate things.

Well, this set is pure an HR set and one of the easier ones of the lot.

Every Decision-Making question is framed from a particular point of view or maximising the positives for a particular stakeholder.

The stakeholder can be

- the employee
- the organization
- or both at the same time

You need to read the question properly to ensure that you identify the stakeholder properly.

The question above is straightforward. The stakeholder is the employee and it is asking you why he decided to focus on the job at hand. Option (5) is the obvious answer that needs no explanation.

The scheduled presentation went off smoothly. Back in his cabin, Dipangshu read Mr Patel's e-mail once more and pondered over it. During the last meeting, he tried hard to put forward his explanation but Mr Patel had not allowed him to speak. Dipangshu was thinking of meeting Mr Patel once again but was doubtful that would help. Incidentally, he had a job offer from a start-up with a comparable salary. If

Dipangshu was to join the new job, he had to accept the offer within the next two weeks. However, he cannot think of a life without a job. Dipangshu was confused! Which of the following options would be the best move for Dipangshu?

- (1) Talk to Mr. Patel and highlight the initiatives he has taken but at the same time start applying for other jobs.
- (2) Reject the offer from the start-up. Use the next three months to find a better job, but continue in the present job.
- (3) Resign from this organization right now.
- (4) Accept the offer, only if the start-up gives a salary hike, else keep prospecting.
- (5) Accept the offer with a request to give him a 10% salary hike.

By the time it comes to the second question it gets tougher. What is the best option move for the employee?

If you read through the options then it is not easy to make up your mind without pausing and evaluating each option. I am sure there are at least 3 options (1), (4) & (5) in the running.

The best way to tackle decision-making question is to

- define the situation
- identify set the criteria
- list and evaluate options

Situation

- Dipangshu's position is very shaky (team and boss are unhappy and HR has sent a letter threatening termination, do not get fooled by the last sentence — *At the same time, I would like to re-affirm that you are very valuable for our organization*)
- HR not open to listening

Criteria

- Cannot NOT have a job

Option

- Start-up with comparable salary but need to accept within two weeks

If you now evaluate the options, elimination becomes easy.

Remember since these questions are not logical reasoning questions you have to rank order options based on how much they are meeting criteria and choose the one that meets all criteria.

(1) Low-return option – HR refused to listen to him first time around and sent a letter after that as well

(2) Violates Criteria — Cannot consider since it deprives him of the back up and his current position is very shaky.

(3) Violates Criteria — Cannot consider since he will be without a job, it does not state whether the should take up the start-up job or not.

(4) Medium-return option should consider but is still risky since he is the conveying to the start-up that he will not join unless his demands are met thus not ensuring job security, which is his sole criteria.

(5) High-return option Ensures job security which is his main requirement.

So option (5).

After a couple of weeks, Mr. Patel came to know that Dipangshu's project leader Mr. John, a very competent senior executive, may have wilfully influenced his team members to file a wrong complaint against Dipangshu. Mr. John may have done it because Dipangshu has refused to tow John's line. Mr. Patel also came to know that Dipangshu was thinking of quitting this job. He felt regretful about his letter to Dipangshu. He wanted to resolve the complicated situation. He was contemplating following five actions in his mind.

I. Talk to Mr. John about Dipangshu and convey to him that losing a bright employee would cost the organization dearly.

II. Catch up with Mr. John during coffee break and convey that Dipangshu has a very good track record.

III. Chat with Dipangshu during coffee break.

IV. Catch up with Dipangshu during coffee break and convey that the organization values him.

V. Arrange a meeting among Mr. John, Dipangshu and himself to sort out the difference.

Which of the following is the best sequence of actions for resolving the problem?

(1) I, III, V

(2) II, III, V

(3) I, II, IV

(4) I, IV, V

(5) III, IV, V

Who is the stakeholder here? The HR Director Mr.Patel.

Whenever the question involves a sequence of actions or choosing between statements it is best to proceed by elimination. Do not ever go by selection.

Statement III is ruled out since unlike IV it does not mention about what the HR Director should chat about with Dipangshu. This eliminates options (1), (2) and (5)

So we are left with options (3) and (4).

Statement I and IV are there in both so the choice is between II and V.

This is where DM gets really tricky! How do you choose between the two? Never try to choose, instead try to eliminate.

In I & IV, the HR Director is already talking to John and Dipangshu respectively. II calls for a chat with the John again which is already completed in I. Hence it has to be V.

The three questions will easily take 10 minutes to read and solve. So including the first set, you should have spent 15-20 minutes and gotten 3 marks.

I think we have done enough to kickstart the DM prep.

I am sure some you did not stop reading the post and continued without solving last year's DM section. Go ahead and solve the rest of the sets I will take them up in part – II of this post.

How to crack XAT Decision Making – Part II

we discussed how Decision Making can be the undoing of XAT aspirants and tried to understand the nature of questions that come up on the section.

We took up two sets from the Decision Making section of the last year's XAT and discussed a structure to answer DM questions. In this post, we shall look at the remaining questions from last year's paper.

SET 3: Information + Number based Business Set

Answer questions on the basis of information given in the following case.

A few years back Mr. Arbit and Mr. Boring started an oil refinery business. Their annual earning is currently just 50,000 million rupees. They are now exploring various options to improve the business. Mr. Xanadu, a salesperson from Innovative Technology Solutions (ITS), is trying to sell a new oil refinery technology to Mr. Arbit and Mr. Boring. This technology could potentially enhance their annual earning to 150,000 million rupees within a year. But they have to make one-time investment of 100,000 million rupees to implement the technology. If the technology is not successful, the investment would be lost. Mr. Arbit and Mr. Boring are discussing about possible risks of the investment.

Mr. Arbit is enthusiastic about this investment idea but Mr. Boring is a little sceptical. This impasse makes them approach a consultant. The consultant makes some observations. Which of the following observations, made by the consultant, might reduce Mr. Arbit's enthusiasm for the new investment idea?

1. Investment is warranted only when benefits outweigh costs.
2. Technology investments give higher earnings in future.
3. Investment in technology leads to reduction of costs in the long run.
4. Technology risks can be controlled.
5. Business is all about taking risky decisions.

If you just read the case and go into the first question you will be left with two options. But before that who is the stakeholder from whose perspective the options need to be evaluated? It is Mr. Arbit.

Arbit is enthusiastic about the investment we must choose an option which will dampen it.

(2), (3) & (4) highlight positive sides of the investment and hence will not dampen his spirits. We are left with (1) and (5). Unless we go back to the case we are better off tossing a coin at this point.

This is a business case but with very few numbers. Just so that the understanding is clear

- one-time cost – 100,000 million guaranteed to be incurred
- annual increase in business – 100,000 provided it is successful

So for the first year cost is equal to increase in revenue. From the next year onwards the annual increase in revenue is 100,000. But only if it is successful.

(1) will affect Mr. Arbit's enthusiasm adversely since it points out that investment should be done only if benefits outweigh costs. In this case for the first year it is a no profit, no loss situation but only if the business succeeds.

Since there is no probability given about the chances of the business succeeding this option should cast a doubt in Mr. Arbit's mind. Also the statement is phrased negatively – *warranted only if*.

(5) is something that Mr. Arbit is aware of and given his enthusiasm he might be willing to take the risks since the statement is phrased positively – *business is all about taking risks*.

In order to sell the technology to Mr. Arbit and Mr. Boring, Mr. Xanadu is thinking of five possible sales pitches. Which of the following sales pitches would reduce uncertainties the most for Mr. Arbit and Mr. Boring?

1. All other competitors are aggressively investing in risky technologies.
2. If the technology succeeds, the annual earnings would grow 3 times from the next financial year and they would be able to recover the invested money within 1 year.
3. Preliminary studies indicate that success rate of the technology is 85%.
4. The R&D team of ITS is working to counter any possible downside of the technology.
5. Business is all about taking risky decisions.

The biggest uncertainty is not about the benefits but about the probability of success.

Option (3) is clearly giving the success rate from which we can calculate that for Year 1 the net return will be $100000(.85) - 100000 = -15000$ million. But from year 2 onwards it will be +100000 million.

While (1) can be considered it still does not reduce uncertainty the way (3) does.

Mr. Arbit and Mr. Boring did not invest in the new technology, but the new technology is a big success. Repentant, they are now estimating the additional amount they would have earned (i.e. forgone earnings) had they invested in the new technology. However, the two owners differed on expected lifespan of the new technology. Mr. Arbit expected lifespan to be 5 years, whereas, Mr. Boring expected it to be 2 years. After the technology gets out-dated, the earnings from the business would drop back to 50,000 million rupees.

What would be the difference between two expected foregone earnings after 5 years of the technology investment, if yearly earnings are deposited in a bank @10%, compounded annually?

Note: Forgone Earnings = (Earnings from business with new technology) – (Earnings from business without new technology)

1. 231,200 million rupees
2. 331,000 million rupees
3. 400,510 million rupees
4. 431,000 million rupees
5. 464,100 million rupees

It might be tempting to quickly assume that solving this question will involve a lot of calculation and hence letting it go. But as we discussed during our CAT sessions always try to visualize how the calculation will pan out.

They are asking you to calculate the difference between Mr.Arbit and Mr.Boring's projections at the end of 5 years.

There will not be any difference till the end of two years since both are projecting the same numbers.

The difference is from Year 3 to Year 5 when Mr.Arbit is projecting the annual increase of Rs.100000 million to continue whereas Mr.Boring is not, which is nothing but 300000 if we do not calculate interest.

Even if we do it will still remain in the 300000s. Hence, (2).

This would have taken another 10-15 minutes or at the end of 30 minutes you should have 5-6 marks.

You should know that at this point you are halfway there. In the next 10 minutes you need answer another 3-4 questions and move on to another section.

SET 4: Business + HR Set

Answer questions on the basis of information given in the following case.

Life saving Pharmaceuticals (LSP) is India-based Pharmaceuticals Company. Their business mostly revolves around a couple of generic drugs and a few patented drugs.

LSP operates in 30 odd countries and more than 50% of their sales volume is from outside India.

If more than 50% of their sales volume is from generic drugs, which of the following options is definitely correct? (Note : All percentages figures are with respect to total sales volume)

1. If sales volume of patented drugs in India is 43%, the sales volume of generic drugs in India will be less than 43%.
2. If the sales volume of generic drugs in foreign countries is at least 24%, the sales volume of patented drugs in India will be above 24%.
3. If the sales volume of patented drugs in India is 54%, the sales volume of generic drugs in foreign countries will be above 54%.
4. If the sales volume of patented drugs in India is 29%, the sales volume of generic drugs in foreign countries will be above 29%.
5. If the sales volume of generic drugs in India is at least 60%, the sales volume of patented drugs in foreign countries will be above 60%.

This is not a tough question but a tricky one. Even if one understands logic it can get confusing to do it over 5 options.

It becomes easier if one visualises the whole situation as a 2 by 2 matrix

India Foreign

Generic	> 50
Patented	< 50
	< 50 > 50

Each option provides one piece of information and infers another. Even so the conditions in some options violate the conditions given in the question and the information preceding it. It would be better to let this question go. I am sure about the answer as well (comment and let me know if there is a precise answer, both 1 and 4 seem valid)

Mr. Sinha, a senior executive of LSP, observes that their business in India is not vibrant. LSP faces stiff competition from Indian and global players, except in rural areas. Interestingly, most of their sales in the rural area are from cough syrup, used as sedatives by teenagers. Mr. Sinha is planning the following actions to improve business in the long run.

I. Invest in development of new drugs.

II. Increase sales of cough syrup in the rural markets.

III. Try and cut costs.

IV. Recruit more medical representatives in the rural areas.

Which of the following sequences is best arranged in the descending order of appropriateness?

1. I, III, II
2. II, I, III
3. II, III, I
4. IV, II, III
5. IV, III, I

Situation

- rural sales promising
- cough syrup sales promising
- rest of business in India is not promising

Criteria

- improve business in the long run

None of the options has all four statements. As discussed earlier it is best to go with the elimination approach.

Measure each statement for its direct impact on the criteria based on the situation. Statements II & III are related to capitalising on the positive rural markets and the product that is doing well there.

Statement IV is related to reducing costs and improving profitability.

Only I talks about investing, a cost, when the overall situation is not positive. Hence, (4).

While it looks straightforward for this perspective it still has areas that might trick you. For example, cough syrup sales when the bulk of it is used for the wrong purposes. In that case option (5) makes sense.

When it comes to a DM question, when in doubt it is always best to leave.

Mr. Rastogi, HR head of LSP, is contemplating of transferring MR. Jose, from India to their Luxembourg office. Mr. Jose's wife is also with the HR department of LSP. The couple is expecting their first child within next four months and hence they want to be together. Mr. Rastogi is wondering whether Mr. Jose would accept the transfer. If he doesn't, Mr. Rastogi would have to send a less competent person for this job as early as possible. The office in Luxembourg is very important for the company's future. It is at its nascent stage and does not yet have an HR department. Hence, it is not possible to transfer Mrs. Jose to Luxembourg.

Which of the following options would be most appropriate, from the organization's perspective, to resolve the issue?

1. Giving a salary hike to Mr. Jose with a promise to transfer Mrs. Jose to Luxembourg in the near future.
2. Giving Mrs. Jose option to work from home while in Luxembourg so that she can be with Mr. Jose.
3. Giving Mr. Jose option to work from India for the time being so that he can be with Mrs. Jose in India.
4. Giving a salary hike to Mr. Jose to compensate for Mrs. Jose's salary so that she can join Mr. Jose at Luxembourg, even with loss of pay.
5. Asking Mr. Jose to accept the offer right now but give him up to six months to join Luxembourg office.

As you can see this is a set where the data is not given upfront but is incrementally presented in every question, making it really tough to choose or leave the set without going through the question in entirety. One has to hence do the situation analysis for each question.

In such cases it is best to directly write put down the criteria:

- Jose should go there
- Jose needs to be here for the next 4 months

As you can see there are two stake holders in this case:

- Jose
- Firm

So the decision should maximise the return for both stakeholders.

1. Does not meet Jose's criteria: his concern is not money but being here for the birth of his child hence this option can be rejected.
2. Does not meet Jose's criteria: while his wife can work there later it still does not answer the important issue of him having to be here for the birth of his child
3. Does not meet the firm's criteria: the decision on who will go to Luxembourg remains undecided
4. Does not meet Jose's criteria: his concern is not money but being here for the birth of his child hence this option can be rejected.

Only the last one meets both the criteria and hence is the best course of action.

Mr. Khan used to work as the Vice President of LSP India. However, he had resigned from LSP India for a better job in New York. In the meantime, his wife was promoted to head the HR of LSP India. Mrs. Khan had struggled hard to reach this position and was quite popular and respected within the organization. Mrs. Khan was contemplating whether she should give up her career and join him in New York. Mrs. Khan is considering the following actions:

- I. Take a break for the time being and focus on personal life. Given her reputation, she can always get back to the same job, if required.
- II. Go to New York, on leave without pay for two months to help Mr. Khan settle down. After that she can come back and resume her responsibility in LSP India.
- III. Request Mr. Khan to look for an equivalent job in India.
- IV. Resign from LSP India, join Mr. Khan in New York, and look for a similar job there.
- V. Request LSP India for a similar position in LSP USA and follow Mr. Khan to New York.

Which of the following sequence of actions can be immediately taken by Mrs. Khan to maintain her work-life balance?

1. I & II
2. I & III
3. I & IV
4. II & V
5. III & V

The main stakeholder in this question is Mrs. Khan so every option should be evaluated from her perspective of achieving work-life balance.

Criteria:

- Has to be with her husband
 - Does not want to leave this role that she has earned
1. Does not meet work-life balance criteria since she will remain apart from her husband.
 2. Does not meet her work-life balance criteria since she will be taking a break but not really solving the problem
 3. Does not meet the work-life balance criteria since she is giving up a good role.

Options 4 and 5 can both be in the consideration set. How does one break the tie?

In option 4 the problem will be solved only if

- company agrees to transfer her to the USA

In option 5 the problem will be solved if one of the two things happens

- Mr. Khan finds a job here
- company agrees to transfer her to the USA

So in terms of probability option (5) is better.

As a set this one is a toughie. It is a tough call whether this needs to be done or left. Since you would have already answered 5-6 questions, it is best to not attempt tricky questions and quickly move on to hunt for easier questions.

If you took a proper shot at this set you would have exhausted your 45 minute time-limit for DM, which we had discussed in this post.

SET 5: Information-based Business Set

Answer questions on the basis of information given in the following case.

Mohan's was a popular fast-food joint at Connaught Place, Delhi. Initially Mohan handled his business alone. His sons, Ram and Kishan, joined the business after graduation from college. Ram was entrepreneurial in nature. Subsequently, another branch of Mohan's was opened in Panipat. Mohan had chosen Ram to head the Panipat branch. Though Ram increased sales in short time, he had stopped using premium quality organic vegetables, the speciality of Mohan's. Mohan and Kishan were not happy with his way of doing business.

Now, the foremost challenge for Mohan was to sort out this issue with Ram. Mohan knew that replacing Ram with Kishan was difficult as Kishan did not want to leave Delhi. However, giving a freehand to Ram might have long term negative consequences. Mohan was confused about the future of course of actions.

The case like other ones is easy enough to comprehend and seems ripe to take a shot at. Remember most cases will evoke the same reaction.

Do not psychologically commit to a case. Move ahead on a question to question basis rather than a case-to-case basis.

Mohan sought the help of five consultants, who give the following opinions:

- I. Organic vegetables might be a big success at Connaught place but awareness about organic vegetables is low among Panipat customers.**
 - II. The Connaught place model can be implemented in Panipat provided the business is prepared to face the consequences.**
 - III. Many high end restaurants in Panipat use organic vegetables. So, using organic vegetables will not be a differentiating factor.**
 - IV. Selling prices of their dishes in Panipat are significantly lower. Using organic vegetables will bring down profits.**
 - V. Premium quality organic vegetables are not easily available in Panipat.**
- Which of the following set of options would support Ram's argument of not using organic vegetables?**

- 1. I,III,IV**
- 2. II,IV,V**
- 3. I,III,IV,V**
- 4. II,III,IV,V**
- 5. All of the above**

The stakeholder in this question is Ram and the criteria is that the statement support his decision to not use organic vegetables.

Statements IV & V are most supportive since they provide business reasons for not using organic vegetables — lower margins and poor supply — and hence should be present.

I & III both highlight the fact that using organic vegetables is not going to give them any edge over their competitors, hence even these should be present.

Only II does not give any reason and is very generic in nature. Hence (3).

Mohan sought feedback from a few of his businessmen friends, who were familiar with both the branches. Here is what they said:

Businessman 1 : Customers of Connaught place and Panipat are very different.

Businessman 2 : Customers in Panipat are extremely happy with Ram's behaviour.

Businessman 3 : Panipat branch does not use the same quality of ingredients but maintains good hygiene and taste.

Businessman 4 : Who knows, tomorrow the customers of Panipat might also appreciate what Connaught place customers appreciate today!

If Mohan thinks all these are valid concerns, which of the following actions would be best for the business?

- 1. Training Kishan to replace Ram in a few months.**
- 2. Not worrying about ingredients as long as business grows.**
- 3. Bringing Ram to Connaught place branch.**
- 4. Naming the Panipat branch as 'Ram's', and changing it back to Mohan', when needed.**
- 5. Asking Kishan to run the Panipat branch.**

This is a tricky question and would take up time. Options (1), (3) and (5) are not viable as it would seem to punish Ram who apart from not using organic vegetables does not seem to have out a foot wrong. Between (2) and (5) it is tough to choose. On test-day I would rather skip this question.

After discussing with a few customers, Mohan realised that compromising on the quality of ingredients at Panipat branch may not be good idea but at the same time he also realised that Panipat branch had grown fast. He was contemplating following five actions.

Which of the following actions would be the best for the future of his business?

- 1. Creating awareness campaign for organic vegetables in Panipat.**
- 2. Mohan himself should look after the Panipat branch.**

3. Close down the Panipat branch.
4. Send Kishan to Panipat branch and bring Ram to Connaught place permanently.
5. Hire a new person to run the Panipat branch.

Another tricky question; options (3), (4) & (5) are ruled out since it would create a HR problem since Ram is doing well.

Between (1) and (2) the latter is a better option but still on test-day better left alone or marked for later.

We had discussed that reading speed is going to be crucial to cracking XAT and this section clearly highlights why. It is not possible to leave sets without reading individual questions.

We have already done 5 sets and there are two more to go. We will take up the remaining two sets in the next post and wrap up this series on Decision Making with a round up of how to approach the section.

How to crack XAT Decision Making – Part III

This piece on Decision Making has really expanded and I hope as I begin to write this post that this will be the closing piece that concludes [this](#) and [this](#).

SET 6: Information + Strategy Set

Answer questions on the basis of information given in the following case.

MBA entrance examination comprises two types of problems: formula-based problems and application-based problem. From the analysis of past data, Interesting School of Management (ISM) observes that students good at solving application-based problems are entrepreneurial in nature. Coaching institutes for MBA entrance exams train them to spot formula-based problems and answer them correctly, so as to obtain the required overall cut-off percentile. Thus students, in general, shy away from application-based problem and even those with entrepreneurial mind-set target formula-based problems.

Half of a mark is deducted for every wrong answer.

ISM wants more students with entrepreneurial mind-set in the next batch. To achieve this, ISM is considering following proposals:

I. Preparing a question paper of two parts, Parts A and Part B of duration of one hour each. Part A and Part B would consist of formula-based problems and application-based problems, respectively. After taking away Part A, Part B would be distributed. The qualifying cut-off percentile would be calculated on the combined scores of two parts.

II. Preparing a question paper comprising Part A and Part B. While Part A would comprise formula-based problems, Part B would comprise application-based problems, each having a separate qualifying cut-off percentile.

III. Assigning one mark for formula-based problems and two marks for application based problems as an incentive for attempting application-based problems.

IV. Allotting one mark for formula-based problems and three marks for application-based problem, without mentioning this is the question paper.

Which of the following proposal (or combination of proposals) is likely to identify students with best entrepreneurial mind-set?

1. II
2. I & II
3. I & III
4. II & III
5. II & IV

Just to reiterate, you should always start a DM question by listing the criteria as precisely as possible:

- test should be geared towards making aspirants attempt application-based questions
- Please note that in the above question defining the goal as selecting those with entrepreneurial skill will make it broader than necessary, it is end and not the means. The case revolves around the means.

The next thing you need to remember, always go by elimination.

I & II revolve around sectional cut-offs and III & IV revolve around the differential marking system. So to maximise the chances of meeting the criteria it makes sense to choose one from each, since you will be implementing two different things.

Between III & IV, the latter can be ruled out since there is no point if test-takers do not know about the differential marking existing in the first place! So III has to be there, reducing it to a choice between options 3 and 4, which is nothing but a choice between I and II.

Between I and II it is better to choose II since it specifies sectional cut-offs. Hence, (4) *ISM conducts a common entrance examination every year. This year, the question paper would comprise 60 questions with an equal mix of formula-based problems and application-based problems. All questions would carry equal marks. Balaji is appearing for the examination. Before, appearing for the examination he gets the following information from coaching institutes:*

I. Application-oriented problems take more time to solve in an examination hall.

II. Chances of silly mistakes would be low in application-based problems.

III. ISM would assist the students with bank loans to start a new venture.

IV. Options are generally confusing for formula-based problems.

V. 'Practice makes a man perfect' can apply only to formula-based problems.

VI. Students get very good campus jobs.

Based on above information, which of the following options would help him to be better prepared for the examination?

1. I & II
2. I, II & V
3. II, III & VI
4. IV, V & VI
5. I, II, IV & V

This is an easy one. As mentioned in the previous post it is best to go in with a one question at a time approach than one set at a time. So if the previous one seemed tricky it makes more sense not to attempt but to move on to the next one.

This one needs no explanation, III & IV are not related to the test preparation. Hence, (5).

SET 7: Information + Strategy Set

Answer questions on the basis of information given in the following case.

The Disciplinary Committee of Nation Political Party (NPP) is meeting today to decide on the future of two of their party members, Mr. Loyal and his son Mr. Prodigal. Mr. Prodigal is the prime accused in the brutal murder of Mr. Victim, an opposition party leader. Mr. Prodigal is in police custody and his appeal for bail has got rejected. Mr. Loyal claims that his son is innocent and Mr. Victim's death was the result of internal rivalry in the opposition party. Though Mr. Loyal is not accused in this case, his weakness for his son is well known. The media is blaming him for influencing key witnesses to protect his son. Severe criticism of his father-son duo, both by the media and some social activists, is damaging the image of the party. However, Mr. Loyal has significant followers within the party and is considered an asset to the party. Any harsh decision against Mr. Loyal would adversely affect the future of NPP and could even lead to a split in the party. This would benefit the opposition.

Which of the following actions would adversely affect both NPP and Mr. Loyal, the most?

1. Take no action against Mr. Loyal.
2. Suspend Mr. Prodigal from the party with immediate effect.
3. Expel Mr. Loyal from the party with immediate effect.
4. Ban Mr. Loyal from entering party premises till completion of court proceedings.
5. Initiate an internal inquiry to find the truth.

In all caselets, questions brought in additional information. Hence do not define the situation and set criteria before reading the question.

This is an easy one, option (3) hurts both the most.

At the Disciplinary Committee meeting, members came up with the following suggestions. Which of the following suggestions would harm the party, the least?

1. Maintain status-quo

2. Expel Mr. Prodigal from the party with immediate effect to maintain party's clean image
3. Initiate an internal inquiry to find the truth.
4. Suspend Mr. Prodigal from the party with immediate effect but announce that he will be taken back if the court declares him innocent.
5. Suspend both Mr. Loyal and Mr. Prodigal from the party with immediate effect.

The criteria in this case

- decision should not be too harsh on Mr. Loyal so that party does not lose his support.
 - decision should also show the party taking an action against the crime and not prevent the image of the party being dented further.
1. violates the second criteria
 2. does not fully satisfy the first criteria
 3. does not fully satisfy the second criteria
 4. satisfies both
 5. violates the first criteria

Mr. Opportunist, a veteran member of the NPP stakes his claim to be nominated as an NPP candidate in the upcoming election. Mr. Opportunist presented the following arguments in favour of his candidature to the NPP Executive Committee.

I. Mr. Loyal's candidature in the upcoming election will adversely impact NPP's chances. Hence, the party should not nominate him. II. The party should call a press conference to disown Mr. Loyal. This would enhance the party's image. III. The party would not be able to take any strong disciplinary action against Mr. Loyal, if he gets re-elected. IV. I have a lot of goodwill and significant followers in the constituency.

V. None of my close relatives are into active politics.

Which of the following combinations would best strengthen the claim of Mr. Opportunist?

1. I & III
2. I & IV
3. II & III
4. III & V
5. IV & V

The criteria for this question

- a strong reason to select Mr. Opportunist for his capabilities rather than the situation I, II & III are not reasons FOR Mr. Opportunist but AGAINST Mr. Loyal. Hence, (5). *The Disciplinary Committee has decided to suspend Mr. Loyal from the party because they felt he was influencing the judicial process. However, Mr. Loyal feels that the committee is biased and he is being framed. Now, election has been announced. The last time, Mr. Loyal had won with a majority on account of his good work.*
- Which of the following options is most likely to resurrect Mr. Loyal's immediate political career?

1. The main opposition party has invited Mr. Loyal to join the party and contest the election. Chance of winning is high.
2. Not participation in the campaign and instructing his followers to stay away from the campaigning process.
3. Ask his followers to support the NPP nominated candidate and display his loyalty to NPP.
4. Mr. Loyal should contest as an independent candidate. But because of a split in votes, his chances of winning would be low.
5. Influence the nomination process through his followers within NPP, to get one of his close associates nominated.

The stake holder is Mr. Loyal and the criteria for this question

- turnaround/resurrect immediate political career
- Options (2) and (3) will have no immediate effect both are effective tactics to buy time. Option (4) is ruled out since chances of winning are low. (1) & (5) can be considered and (1) is best since it says chances of winning are high.

Remember, you are supposed to maximise chances for Mr. Loyal and not necessarily looking at a politically correct/moral/ethical solution!

It is one of those questions where you can't but help attempting and you might go ahead and mark (3) and pick a negative but it highlights the need to follow the process of defining the stakeholder and listing criteria precisely.

SINGLE-QUESTION SET: Information + Strategy

Innovative Institute of Business (IIB) has decided to be the first green campus in India. IIB Administration has advised all campus residents to reduce carbon footprints. IIB faculty members did a brainstorming and came up with the following suggestions:

I. Replacing electricity source for street lights with solar panels.

II. Replacing the existing buildings with environment-friendly buildings.

III. Organizing a seminar on 'Towards a Sustainable Future' involving all students, staff, and experts from around the country.

IV. Introducing a compulsory course on sustainability to increase awareness among students.

V. Conducting an initial energy audit to explore where IIB can reduce carbon footprints.

Which of the following options would be the most preferred sequence of actions to reduce carbon footprints on campus?

- 1. II, IV, V**
- 2. IV, V, III**
- 3. V, I, II**
- 4. V, I, III**
- 5. V, III, I**

The goal is to reduce carbon footprints.

The sequence should ideally start with V followed by I since I will result in a direct, immediate reduction. This reduces the choices left to (3) and (4).

All other options should be evaluated in terms of their direct impact on reducing carbon footprint. While all the rest can be executed, you need to choose the one that will have the most direct impact. II is the one that will have the most direct and immediate impact. Hence, (3).

How to approach the Decision Making section

1. Choose 12-15 safe questions to attempt instead of sets

Over the course of the three posts we have seen how the difficulty level of a DM question can only be ascertained after you read the question and all the 5 options. So choosing sets based on the outline of the case is not a wise idea. Go in with this in mind and try to pick out 12-15 safe questions.

2. Accuracy can be really low if you do not follow the process

Decision making as we discussed earlier is unlike any other section you have done. You might mark an option and think it was absolutely right but if you arrived at that without following the process your chance of getting it right is no more than 20%. So if you want to ensure that your XLRI dream is realised then please follow the process for every question – define criteria and eliminate options.

3. Always go by elimination instead of selection

The process outlined above is to define criteria and eliminate options that do meet criteria. The normal way of doing it would be to read all options without defining any

criteria and looking to select an option. Do not do this. On decision making elimination is the only way to go.

4. When in doubt leave or mark for later

Given the amount of reading and the trickiness of the questions, you will be operating with very little margin for error. So even after following the process you find yourself caught between two options, do not choose one randomly, mark it and come back later if you are unable to find enough questions to solve.

Whenever we read a case we tend to miss or rather ignore a few sentences, when we come back to questions we tend to notice these sentences.

You will have the 7 IMS SimXATs and the previous years papers to master the approach to Decision Making. For more questions you can get yourself the IMS Decision Making book with 100 questions.

As we discussed earlier, XAT is there for the taking for those who take SimXATs the way they took SimCATs. The more focussed and better prepared will win out.

Your task is cutout — a test every day from today!

How to ace XAT Essay Writing

Well, once you were done with school you would have never imagined having to write an essay ever again. But here you are a few weeks away from the XAT and not exactly looking forward to writing essays on topics that vary from the *political, social, ecological* to the outright *esoteric*.

So it makes sense to start with a classification of the topics that have appeared over the years.

- **2015:** *Listening is a dying art. We hardly listen. We listen only to refute or reply* – SOCIAL
- **2014:** *The most beautiful thing can neither be seen nor be touched not can only be felt* – ESOTERIC
- **2013:** *Corruption is the root cause of economic slowdown in India* – POLITICAL/ECONOMIC
- **2012:** *Select one of the statements and then justify the same and substantiate it with the help of relevant examples*
- **2011:** *Poverty is a big menace in India. Due to its complexity and magnitude, most of the government initiatives fail*
- **2010:** *Poverty is a consequence of failure of government policies due to the governments not targeting the root cause* – POLITICAL/ECONOMIC
- **2009:** *Analyse the following argument: The statesman who should attempt to direct private people in what manner they ought to employ their capitals would not load himself with the most unnecessary attention but assume an authority which could safely be trusted to no council or senate whatever and which would nowhere be so dangerous in hands of man who had folly and presumptions enough to fancy himself to exercise it* – POLITICAL/ECONOMIC
- **2008:** *Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed* – SOCIAL/ECOLOGICAL
- **2007:** *Gender imbalance would lead to third world war* – SOCIAL
- **2006:** *The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of riches and the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries* – ECONOMIC
- **2005:** *Economic growth without environmental damage – a mirage or reality* – ECONOMY/ECOLOGY
- **2004:** *India has one of the largest pools of talented manpower, but few innovations and patented products* – ECONOMY
- **2003:** *More than one billion Indians: A gigantic problem or a sea of opportunities* – SOCIAL/ECONOMIC
- **2002:** *Asked at the age of 83, as to which of his projects he would choose as his master piece, Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect answered "The next one"* – LATERAL
- **2001:** *To give real service, one needs to add something cannot be bought or measured like sincerity and integrity* – SOCIAL

A run through the topics will reveal that topics have broadly tended towards politics-economics-society-ecology matrix.

But the last two years have sort of broken this pattern, something possibly stemming from not wanting to repeat topics and not get too specific as well. This year has already thrown up enough general issues such as the intolerance debate and climate change summit. We need not be surprised if one of the two turn up. A topic on social media might not also be totally ruled out.

In this post we will look at the way one should go about writing an essay irrespective of the topic at hand.

Why are they asking for an essay?

It always makes sense to try to tease out the underlying causes/motives/motivations behind things since it will help us approach them with the right attitude.

As you know the test is common for both HR as well BM. With this being the case it is imperative that they test both your communication skills both written & oral . The former is tested through the *Essay Writing* while the latter through the *GD & PI*. Most importantly they want to select candidates who know and have in them something beyond VA,RC, QA, DI & LR.

The structure of an essay

It goes without saying that the XAT Essay or the WAT is not about piling your thoughts on to the blank sheet in front of you.

You are required to organise, present and cogently articulate your views.

So every essay needs to have a structure, one that you are very familiar with — Introduction, Argument 1, Argument 2, Conclusion.

Opening Overtures rather than an *Introduction*

Let get the word *introduction* out of the way since it results in 2 or 3 sentences that just blindly restate the topic and perform a purely ornamental function.

Most topics that you will encounter will be based on or will be a reflection on specific events that have transpired in the past year or large scale trends in society.

Your first paragraph should be 2-3 sentences long and should offer your opening remarks on the topic.

Do not waste time your time and that of the evaluator's by

- restating the topic — they gave it you, so they would know it
- writing stock phrases such as — in this essay I will argue that etc.
- trying to come up with a quote

Let us take a few topics from the list above and try to understand what I mean by *Opening Overtures*

Listening is a dying art. We hardly listen. We listen only to refute or reply.

Nothing could describe our times now better — noise has replaced debate, name-calling has replaced understanding and going by the ratings of news channels, the biggest bully wins.

Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed.

The topic is particularly relevant in light of the two movements that have captured a lot of our attention — *sustainable development* and *colonising Mars*.

The most beautiful thing can neither be seen nor be touched but can only be felt.

If sublime beauty cannot be perceived through the senses or rather if what is perceived through the senses is not the most beautiful then what we discussing is the very nature of beauty — is it something that moves our senses or is it something that moves our spirit?

As you can see from the snippets above, you can

- **agree with the topic, as in the first one**
- **connect it to the current events or trends**
- **examine the statement**

Unless you have a very strong opinion about a topic and can substantiate it do not take sides in the introduction.

It is similar to making opening remarks in a debate (the proper formal ones not the Times Now ones). Even if you have strong views you are not supposed to front load them, just provide the context for expressing them later.

Build an argument using examples

One of the reasons essay writing becomes a tough proposition is because aspirants try to focus too much on the topic in isolation alone without evaluating it in a real-life context.

You cannot write an essay without using the right examples to substantiate your arguments.

You do not need to litter it with facts but you have to draw on the world around you to make your point. Otherwise you will find yourself repeating the same points.

Separate arguments into paragraphs

Given the time constraints you cannot make more than 2-3 main arguments in your essay, even two well-argued positions will suffice. This portion will form the crux of your essay so you have to

- **present each argument in a separate paragraph or paragraphs; the people evaluating your essays can read longish paragraphs so you do not really split an argument into multiple paragraphs but if you feel the need to, you can do it.**
- **add minor but related arguments in the same paragraph if necessary or move it into a different paragraph; whatever makes for better organization.**

Let us take one of the topics above and see how arguments should be constructed.

Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed.

The topic is particularly relevant in light of the two movements that have captured a lot of our attention — *sustainable development* and *colonising Mars*.

While few decades ago, development in itself was a goal worth pursuing, today the word is usually prefaced with the word *sustainable*. This in itself is an explicit recognition that the bounty of the Earth is not infinite and that our actions are excessive enough to endanger the planet. A new mining project might add to the GDP and provide jobs for a few but it also removes the forest cover, adding to adverse consequences of climate change.

Development brings about rising incomes and rising incomes make people move from needs to wants and wants to greed. From Roti, Kapda & Makaan we move to making choices that deplete the planet such as choosing electrical appliances that consume more power (fans to ACs) to polluting vehicles.

The responses to the realisation that our way of life is endangering the planet have taken two paths. One is the move towards putting the environment in the forefront of policy-making. Recent examples include, the Delhi government's curb on diesel vehicles, the climate-change summit and the usage carbon credits. Other related but niche movements include the embracing of a more minimal lifestyle, growing and eating seasonal and organic food and rejection of GM seeds which focus on greater yields than normally possible. Some firms such as Tesla Motors are trying to change the face of the automobile industry by making electric cars a viable alternative to regular cars.

The second movement is towards exploring life on other planets, most notably Mars. Firms like Space X and Mars One are trying to be the first ones to profit from colonising Mars. The significance of this movement is also reflected in popular culture such as the movie *Interstellar* that raises pertinent questions about our role on this planet — are we supposed to be caretakers of the planet for the generations that will succeed us or are we explorers? While the explorer theme casts the whole endeavour in a positive light, it side-steps the fact that our greed might not spare the new planet as well. It is interesting to note though that Elon Musk is pioneering efforts in both directions — electric cars and colonising Mars.

Closing remarks not conclusion

One of the things about Essay Writing is that you can look at it as a way to explore a topic. It is about looking at the topic from all sides. There need not be correct answer to a topic.

So you need not make your conclusion emphatic and take a position. You can conclude by

- presenting a direction that to be taken
- spelling out the key issues that need to be tackled going ahead or
- stating your position

Let us continue the previous topic to look at one of the ways of concluding.

Perhaps this is where the views of Mahatma Gandhi about the futility of model based on purely on excessive consumption becomes most relevant. We don't need more man-

made natural disasters to alert us about the impact of our choices. We will be better off trying to first move from greed to wants and from wants to needs.

Use the rough sheet to map out your essay

One of the things that you should without fail is to map out your essay on a rough paper before you start.

Do not start writing straight away. You will end up starting one essay and ending with another.

Think about it, can you write a full-fledged essay after thinking about it for a 1 minute?

In the first 30-60 seconds you will only come up with one or two of the most obvious points that everyone else would have come up with.

So this is what you should do for the first 5 minutes

- **roughly compose the introduction in your head**
- **jot down the main arguments on a the question paper or rough sheet**
- **start composing the body of each paragraph in your head, look for examples; jot them down on the rough paper next to the arguments**

Start writing only after this exercise. It is not different from what we used to discuss during our CAT sessions do not jump to put pen on paper!

Write at least 3 essays before the XAT

Writing an essay is one thing but writing in a straight line is an entirely different thing! Especially for working professionals who would have swapped the writing pad for the keyboard.

So before the 4-Jan ensure that you write at least three essays using the process outlined in this post.

The importance of reading

By now you would have realised that *Essay Writing* on XAT like the *WAT & GD* tests how well-read you are and how aware you are about the world around you.

There is no other shortcut to becoming well-read except reading! The [previous post on WAT-GD-PI](#) gives you a list of websites that you should follow.

In the sample essay I had mentioned a firm called *Mars One* — it intends to send a team of explorers to Mars who will never return, those who have applied to be part of the team are going in fully aware that they are not going to come back and guess what, a young Indian is part of that team.

Read this article about him and the endeavours around finding life on Mars — Home of the brave

Remember, the more you read the greater the probability that something you have read turns up!

