Sure With IAS Institute

The majority of competitive exams in the world are Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ)—it's smart to have certain tricks up your sleeves to battle the chaos around MCQs. Don't you think? It's not a secret that solving MCQs can come easy to some and very difficult for others, even after having the same knowledge of theory portion.

So, where do we lack?

What makes the difference?

Let's try to figure out where we lack in solving MCQs and how can we fix it.

Most importantly, Prelims Test Series can help you figure out your lacking areas and answer evaluation and discussion sessions after each test and help you improvise and thus increase your chances of success in UPSC Prelims exam. Click Here to know more

Few things to keep in mind

- **All questions carry equal marks**: Start by attempting easy questions and do not waste more time on any particular questions.
- **Helpful for the borderline students**: If you need to stretch for a few extra marks—then this is for you.
- **Negative Marking is good for you**: Always remember that there is negative marking, so don't blindly attempt all the questions.
- **Always keep the cut-off in your mind**: Last 10-years cut-offs were somewhere between 105-110 marks, and analyzing that pattern — always aim for 10+ from the cut-off.
- **A minimum number of question attempts to qualify**: It's advisable to attempt at least 80-85 questions depending on the accuracy level.
- **Time allocation per question**: Time per minute/ Total Questions
- **Do not predict anything about the question paper**: Neither the difficulty level nor the pattern of the answers should be guessed by students to safely attempt all the questions.

What is Elimination Method?

The process of elimination is a method to identify an option of interest amongst multiple choices by excluding the unfavorable options based on your available knowledge.

Note:

- With the help of elimination—you can attempt majority of the questions, even if you have never heard of the question.
- The entire trick depends on the context, perspective, familiarity, and options.
- The multiple options decide the difficulty level of the question—not the vice-versa.
- On the contrary, the difficulty level of an essay type question is determined by the question and the word limit.

How to calculate the odds with the help of Elimination Method?

The entire method hangs on how many options can you eliminate and on basis of that, concluding whether you should attempt the question or not.

- If you have eliminated 0 options, you have 0% probability to get it correct —then you should clearly not attempt the question.
- If you have eliminated 1 option, you have 33% probability to get it correct —then you should not attempt the question unless you are borderline.

For e.g. – Let's take a question from **UPSC – 2013.**

Consider the following liquid assets:

1. Demand deposits with the banks
2. Time deposits with the banks
3. Saving deposits with the banks
4. Currency

The correct sequence of these assets in the decreasing order of liquidity is

1. a) 1-4-3-2
2. b) 4-3-2-1
3. c) 2-3-1-4
4. d) 4-1-3-2

Answer: **d**

Explanation: In the above question, **common sense** tells us that currency is not the least liquid option. Hence, it cannot be at the on the 4th sequence. So we can easily eliminate **option C**. Now, you can choose between option a, b and d which have at least 33% of probability to be correct.

> If you have eliminated 2 options, you have 50% probability to get it correct—then you should attempt the question to shoot for an extra mile.

For e.g. – Let's take a question from **UPSC -2003**

Which one of the following Bills must be passed by each House of the Indian Parliamentary separately by the special majority?

1. a) Ordinary Bill
2. b) Money Bill
3. c) Finance Bill
4. d) Constitution Amendment Bill

Answer: d

Explanation: In the above question option 'a' can be eliminated, as the ordinary bill does not require a special majority, this can also be inferred from the word 'ordinary'.

Also, option 'b' can be eliminated as Money bill requires an approval from Lok Sabha.

> If you have eliminated 3 options, you have 100% probability to get it correct—then obviously, you should attempt the question.

For e.g. – Let's take a question from UPSC – 1998

The banks are required to maintain a certain ratio between their cash in hand and total assets. This is called:

1. a) SBR (Statutory Bank Ratio)
2. b) SLR (Statutory Liquid Ratio)
3. c) CBR (Central Bank Reserve)
4. d) CLR (Central Liquid Reserve)

Explanation: In the above question, options a, c and d can easily be eliminated as there are no such terms in use in banking and finance. Hence option b can be easily obtained by elimination method.

Before the exam, have a very clear picture of how you are going to handle the questions. You must acknowledge that battles could not be won without a proper strategy. Knowledge of theory part is a tool that you can use in the

examination but, one must work on his strategy—ahead of revising the theory portion. Also, make a habit of practicing as many MCQs as possible before the exam.

I recommend looking at the answers and not at the order in which they are provided. Very little is gained by trying to figure out a pattern there, especially when the most relevant information is right there in the potential answers. It's easy to randomize the order of the answers, but it takes more effort for the author of a test to avoid providing any implicit information or falling into common habits for test writers.

None of these rules is set in stone. In fact, if a test writer puts in a lot of effort, they could probably thwart most of these strategies deliberately; the fact simply is that they usually don't!

Other Techniques to help you battle the MCQs

Flashback Method: Self Examination and recall

It is a scientifically proven method, one can relive the moment just by closing their eyes and going back to the time when your teacher, friend or anyone for that matter taught you that particular information. Try to grasp the mental image of classes, books or notes, and then attempt to eliminate at least one option from the information you have just recollected. Follow it by the elimination method.

Finding Answer in the Question Paper itself

There had been a lot of cases in which certain questions can give you the hint for solving other questions. There are 100 questions which in itself provide one with a lot of facts and information. One should also take great precautions to not attempt the questions on the very first go if they aren't sure of the answer. This might lead to a wrong answer which you could have cracked after reading the entire paper. One should make use of that and try to eliminate at least one option——followed by the elimination method.

Suppose there are two questions in the same paper as follows

Q5. **Convention on Biodiversity 2012 was held at?**

1. a) Hyderabad, India
2. b) New York, USA
3. c) Berlin, Germany
4. d) London, UK

Ans: a

Consider the following statements regarding Convention on Biodiversity Hyderabad, 2012:

1. It focused majorly on Ocean and Marine Diversity
2. India pledged $50 million for biodiversity conservation.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. a) 1 only
2. b) 2 only
3. c) Both 1 and 2
4. d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: c

Explanation: Here the answer for Q5 can be obtained from the question statement of Q65.

Extra Detailing

Shift your focus to the Language of the options and questions. After analyzing thousands of MCQs, one can figure out a pattern of the language used in the correct answers.

- If any authoritative terms like '100%', '0%', 'Always', 'Absolute', 'Never'— appears in the option, it's more likely to be incorrect.
- Following the similar approach, if the options or questions have terms like; 'Rarely', 'Can be', 'Maybe',' May not be', 'Shall be', 'More often than not', 'Most of the time'—it's more likely to be true.
- Above method is particularly true for Humanity subjects: Geography, Economics, Polity, History etc.

Read questions and options carefully to find the above-suggested terms— accompanied by eliminating at least one option on the basis of above method. After expulsing one option, one can proceed with the help of elimination method.

Let's take two example from UPSC;

Example 1

Consider the following statements:

1. Every state has at least one tiger reserve.
2. Tiger is protected under wildlife protection act.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

1. a) 1 only
2. b) 2 only
3. c) Both 1 and 2
4. d) Neither 1 nor 2

Ans: b

Explanation: Here, the **extra information** given by two keywords 'every' and 'at least' helps you in identifying the option as for right or wrong.

Example 2

The SEZ Act, 2005 which came, into effect in February 2006 has certain objectives. In this context, consider the following: *[UPSC – 2010]*

1. Development of infrastructure facilities.
2. Promotion of investment from foreign sources.
3. Promotion of exports of services only.

Which of the above are the objectives of this Act?

1. a) 1 and 2 only
2. b) 3 only
3. c) 2 and 3 only
4. d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: a

Explanation: In this question, the keyword 'only' used in option 3 helps you in elimination. The word ' only' describes this statement in absolute terms and hence it is easy to identify whether the statement is right or wrong. In the above question, the statement is wrong which helps in eliminating 3 options (b, c, and d). Hence the answer is option 'a'- 1 and 2.

Borrowing the Examiner's Lens

One should always take a note of the examiner's perspective and his approach to distract students from the right choice. Once you draw a pattern and understand the psyche of examiners—you escalate your game and get better at solving MCQs and eliminating options.

Facing AOA and NOA

At least 20-40% of the questions have 'All of the above' (AOA) or 'None of the above' (NOA) option. Empirically, in both the cases, the chances of being correct is 25%.

This method should only be used if you haven't marked enough questions or if you doubt qualifying the exam due to its difficulty level.