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A Handbook of

SELECT ESSAYS

For Civil Services Examination



**Includes a Comprehensive Strategy on
What, Why and How of Essay Writing**

A Handbook of Select Essays for Civil Services Examination



Drishti Publications

(A Unit of VDK Publications Pvt. Ltd.)

641, First Floor, Dr. Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-110009

Telephone: 011-47532596, 8750187501

Website

www.drishtipublications.com

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Essay Writing

What, Why and How?



*“Reading maketh a full man; Conference a ready man;
and Writing an exact man.”*

These words which emphasise on the importance of writing in the making of a man, belong to Francis Bacon, one of the greatest essayists of English language. The “essay” has been defined by him as “dispersed meditations”, while Samuel Johnson has referred to it as “loose sally of the mind”. The style of essay writing has evolved over the years since the time of the likes of Bacon and Montaigne of the 16th centuries. The style, presentation and content of essays vary as per the purpose and targeted audience.

Essay writing is an important component of various competitive examinations. However, we will focus our strategy on the kind of essay which is to be written in the Essay paper of the Civil Services Main Examination conducted by the UPSC. It will also be of help for aspirants who are appearing for other competitive exams like State PCS, CAPF, etc.

What is an Essay?

An essay is a short piece of writing that sheds light on any given topic. M.H. Abrams, the American literary critic, notes that the essay is “Any short composition in prose that undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, or persuade us to accept a thesis on any subject.” Essay is a comprehensive analysis of a given topic while taking a particular view/stand on it. It takes into account various aspects of the topic along with its critical appraisal.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of essays - *formal and informal*. In the UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE), one is concerned with the formal essay. The formal essay is relatively impersonal, the author writes it as an authority and such essays tend to be less emotional. Formal essays can also have factual elements in it, like quoted statistics from a government report, etc. The form of a conversation and first-person references should generally be avoided in the normal flow of the essay and one should seldom get intimate with the audience. In short, a formal essay has a certain degree of seriousness attached to it.

Essay Writing for CSE

For the CSE essay paper, two essays have to be written in 3 hours in the 1000-1200 word limit for each. Each essay carries 125 marks for a total of 250 marks. The essay paper is divided into two sections - A and B, each carrying a choice of 4 essays, and the aspirant has to choose only one essay from each section.

The instructions in the syllabus are clear in what is being expected from the aspirant. The syllabus of the essay paper states, *“Candidates may be required to write essays on multiple topics. They will be expected to keep closely to the subject of the essay to arrange their ideas in orderly fashion, and to write concisely. Credit will be given for effective and exact expression.”* The underlined keywords are important because along with the content of the essay, these are the exact parameters on which the essay will be evaluated.

Keywords in the Essay Syllabus

- **‘Closely’**: Any deviation from the topic will be tolerated only up to a certain point. One must, therefore, as a rule stick as closely as possible to the topic at hand. Any example, quote, anecdote or reference must be on the topic or related closely to it.
- **‘Arrange’**: The essay must be in an arranged form. The aspirant is supposed to plan ahead and form a structure of the essay before actually writing it down.
- **‘Orderly’**: The ideas or arguments put forward in the essay must follow an order. A haphazard essay that does not flow sequentially, must be avoided at all costs.

- **'Concisely'**: The essay and the matter discussed therein must be expressed as precisely possible. Clarity of thought and brevity of expression is what is looked for in the CSE essay.
- **'Effective'**: The essay must be written in a language that makes a strong impression. Thus, one needs to be conveying a point with every sentence and paragraph. Flowery language should be avoided.
- **'Exact'**: Exactness is required in all forms of writing, including answer writing, but in the CSE essay one must be extra careful to check that all individual sentences in the essay are making sense. Also, paragraphs as a whole must convey a clear and well thought out exposition on the theme of the essay.

Why Essay Paper?

Essay paper is an important part of the Civil Services Main Examination. The primary question that lingers in one's mind is, "Why essay paper?". The answers to the question might be many and can be answered in varied ways. An essay, in general, is a piece of writing that gives the writer the freedom to express his arguments. The knowledge of the candidate is measured by the General Studies and Optional papers, but the Essay paper is unique in certain ways. The essay written by a candidate is the key to his mind.

The primary idea behind having an Essay paper in the exam, is to test the candidate's competency to express himself/herself in an organized way. This paper seeks to evaluate the candidate's ability to draw arguments bringing out both the positives and negatives along with conclusive remarks on the issue. The candidate is examined for his/her ability of elaborating on an issue in simple and comprehensible language, which is understandable even by a common man.

How to Write an Essay?

Writing an Essay in the examination hall is a challenging task. Before we elaborate on some basic steps that should be followed to write an essay, we will discuss the basic structure of an Essay.

Basic Structure of an Essay

It is difficult to divide the essay into different parts as it conveys the views of its writer on a particular subject in a holistic manner. However, in order to understand the basic structure of an essay in a simplified manner, the essay can be divided broadly under the following heads:

- Introduction (~10-15%)
- Main Body (~80%)
- Conclusion (~5-10%)

The most common method of structuring an essay is breaking it up into paragraphs. In this technique, besides the introduction and the conclusion, there will be body-paragraphs. In these body-paragraphs, the aspirant will have to fit in all his content.

Body-paragraphs can broadly be supportive, critical or narrative. Ideally, one can start any argument in an aptly phrased narrative paragraph which describes the topic in some detail and then move on to a supportive paragraph containing a few positive facts/ideas on the topic. Though critical paragraphs look best when they are placed last, there are no such rules, and for some topics it can be used as the opening paragraph for the topic.

The most important part of the essay is perhaps the introduction. First impressions are very important, and a well thought out introduction will definitely make a positive impression on the examiner. Similarly, the conclusion is where one can score additional marks if done properly.

The 7 Step Approach

Some of the essential points which one should bear in mind while writing an essay are:

- **Step 1:** Selection of the topic
- **Step 2:** Brainstorming on the chosen topic
- **Step 3 :** Organising/Outlining of Ideas
- **Step 4 :** Writing the Introduction
- **Step 5:** Writing the Main Body
- **Step 6:** Writing the Conclusion
- **Step 7:** Revision of the Essay

Has the Time come to Abolish the Reservation System?



In India, the people are socially differentiated through class, religion, region, tribe, gender, and language but caste has been one of the most dominant bases for this differentiation. The Indian caste system is considered as a closed system of stratification, which means that a person's social status is obligated to the caste they are born into. There are limits on interaction and behaviour of people owing to their belonging to a particular caste. The said limitations on interaction and mobility in Indian society created cultural and social backwardness of some sections of society, and created a social divide. Post independence, the framers of the constitution adopted a policy of reservation to rectify and undo the wrong. Thus, reservation, as a policy, in Indian system has been a unique and noble idea.

Reservation is the process of facilitating a person-education, scholarship, and jobs. It is a form of quota-based affirmative action. It is the highest form of special provision, while preference, concession and exemption are lesser ones. Constitutional scheme, in general, and Article 16(4) of the constitution, in particular, reflect the larger concept of reservation taking within its sweep all supplemental and ancillary provisions, and at the same time maintaining the efficiency of administration as mandated under Article 335. This affirmative action concerning the claims of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes have been in practice since adoption of the constitution.

The journey of reservation policy to achieve its goal of equality has been full of ups and downs. During the time period of more than six decades, since its inception, time and again there has been demands to review the policy and rectify its shortcomings. On one hand, there had been demands to expand the coverage of different castes under

reservation, and on the other hand, people have been demanding to scrap the very policy of reservation. Legitimacy and constitutional validity of the reservation policy has been upheld by the honorable Supreme Court of India in a series of cases. Initially the reservation was meant to upgrade the socially and educationally backward Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Mandal Commission of 1979 extended the reservation criteria to Other Backward Castes (OBCs) on the basis of social, educational and economic backwardness.

The main bone of contention in reservation policy has been on inclusion and exclusion in the list of reserved castes and its criteria definition. Implementation of reservation for OBCs saw an unprecedented level of cry and violence at pan India level. A series of cases were filed in the Supreme Court challenging its validity and constitutionality. Supreme Court held the reservation as constitutionally legitimate and valid, with a rider of creamy layer and limiting the percentage share upto 50%.

The debate on reservation has been an unending one, as time and again it has taken the central stage in social and political arena. This is evident from the recent demands for inclusion by the Jats from Haryana, Patidars from Gujarat, and Martha community of Maharashtra. On the other end of the picture, we have those who are demanding for creation of special class among the forward caste based on economic criteria. There is also a third group according to which the policy of reservation has outlived its utility and it needs to be scrapped from the statues and constitution.

The social set up of India is so intricately complex that reservation as a policy is both a boon and bane. On one hand, it is an enabler creating opportunity for the disadvantaged whereas on the other side, it is creating a set of disadvantaged people.

In last seventy years, India has progressed politically, economically, and socially. This progress has created new changes in the society, where people are becoming more aware, assertive and most importantly the historical caste definitions and barriers are diluting. But at the same time, new political and economic classes have taken up the baton and are asserting their demands. Recently the Union government, via 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 2019, has

provided for 10% reservation to the economically weaker section of the general category, in addition to the existing 50% reservation for SCs, STs, and OBCs.

To tell whether the time to abolish reservation is now or not, needs to be viewed rationally. According to one group of people reservation has its impact on the meritocracy, thus causing inefficiency not only in the field of administration but also in different sectors which demand high level of intellect and precision of work. Premises to the argument lies in the idea that by reservation we induct less meritorious people in higher education and jobs, thus discarding more deserving and suitable candidates from reaching the position. It is argued that this idea of meritocracy is having a narrow view of the problem. As efficient functioning of the system is a prerequisite for stable and well flourishing system, but one must not forget that the other half of the social system had been at the receiving end of the discrimination and atrocities.

Taking a leaf from the argument of meritocracy and discriminated half of the society, the affirmative action to uplift the SCs, STs, and OBCs is based on the principle of equality and rule of law. According to this, equality entails the aspects of the equal behaviour among equals and unequal behaviour among unequals. The whole idea is to support and provide a helping hand to the discriminated half of the society, thus bring in front the meritorious lot of the SCs, STs, and OBCs. By this the state is acting as a facilitator and enabler to bring the backward lot on equal footing with the general populace.

As the time passed by, beneficiaries of reservation came out of their slog and became capable of enjoying the benefits available in the society. Emancipation of the backward section of the society brought in fore the issue of repeated beneficiaries. This section of repeated beneficiaries received the fruits of their previous generation from the very early stage and also redeemed the benefits provided by the reservation. This phenomenon created a horizontal divide within the caste, which is clearly evident from the group of backward section within the same caste where certain number is well ahead of backwardness.

To a certain extent, reservation has been successful in creating a level playing field in the society but at the same time it has created

horizontal backwardness and new class of backwards. This new class of backwards in the society are mainly because of economic hardships. Due to this economic backwardness, this section of the society is facing challenges to reach the level playing field.

Along with this, there is other section which include women, persons with disability, children and old age who have special need. They require support from the state and the people. People must share this responsibility of the society, along with the state. Reservation in its idea of providing affirmative action in education and jobs is really necessary for women and persons with disability.

“Reviewing and rectifying a policy is not bad in administration and policy making. One needs to look beyond self to realise the beauty of reservation, as any affirmative action in society is mainly tilted towards minority and backlash of majority is an obvious outcome.”

Reservation, as an issue of debate, is more of political nature if not completely political. A dream to turn into a reality needs greater hard work and time. Removing deep rooted discrimination and inequality in the society needs a greater vision, hard work and time. Reservation is only one such step to realise this goal. This step has created mayhem in social and political discourse but rather than creating a fiasco over this, one needs to look into it with the perspective of social and national well being. Reservation with all its nobility and virtue has been in bad names because

of some clamouring for the merit and efficiency.

However, reviewing and rectifying a policy is not bad in administration and policy making. Reservation needs to be rationalised rather being abolished from the policy books. One needs to look beyond self to realise the beauty of reservation, as any affirmative action in society is mainly tilted towards minority and backlash of majority is an obvious outcome.

Rationalisation of reservation policy was first seen in Indra Sawhney case where the Supreme Court propounded the principle of creamy layer. According to this the newly created reservation for OBCs including the existing reservation was capped at 50% and within the

OBCs, a criteria to decide the well off section was made—the creamy layer, and the same were excluded from the reservation. In M Nagraj case, the Supreme Court held that States need to have quantifiable data on inadequate representation of the SCs and STs in jobs to provide reservation in promotions. But, recently the Supreme Court clarified that the inherent backwardness of SCs and STs is sufficient ground to provide reservation in promotions and the requirement of quantifiable data is not necessary for the same. Further, the recent 103rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 2019 provided for 10% reservation for economically weaker section in the general category. This 10% reservation is beyond the existing 50% reservation in education and jobs.

Recent developments and concerned changes made by the state are positive steps in the direction of the rationalisation of the reservation policy. Rationalisation process cannot be fully completed without the efforts from the masses. The recent campaign of '*give up LPG subsidy*' is worth learning and same can be used to mobilise the beneficiaries to "*give up reservation*" in favour of those, who are still backward and are in dire need of it. On the other hand, principle of creamy layer can also be a way to rationalize the reservation of SCs and STs, to reduce the horizontal divide existing in the said communities.

Any society to develop and realise its goal of being developed cannot dream of realising the same with a section of society being socially, educationally and economically backward, and the other section being well prosperous. Any idea of such lopsided development will be a mere fiction and not reality. In the words of honorable Supreme Court of India, "*Whole object of reservation was to see that backward classes of citizens move forward so that they may, 'march hand in hand with other citizens of India on an equal basis.' This will not be possible if only the creamy layer within that class, bag all the coveted jobs in the public sector and perpetuate themselves, leaving the rest of the class as backward as they always were*". Abolishing reservation, presently would go more against the backward section than being a social equaliser.



Truth is Lived, not Taught



Nobel laureate Hermann Hesse in his final novel 'The Glass Bead Game', wrote: *"There is truth, my boy. But the doctrine you desire, absolute, perfect dogma that alone provides wisdom, does not exist. Nor should you long for a perfect doctrine, my friend. Rather, you should long for the perfection of yourself. The deity is within you, not in ideas and books. Truth is lived, not taught."*

The debate over truth and its realisation has been the centre of discourse for centuries. To start with, the foremost question is -"What is the Truth?". Lexicographers have defined truth as something which conforms to reality, fact, or actuality. But this adds up to the problem because new question arises as to what is 'fact', 'reality' or 'actuality'. Philosophers and teachers for centuries have tried to explain the truth and its significance to the people. The discourse on truth has been like the ping pong ball game of classical Newtonian Physics where the ball bounces back to half the distance every time, yet in an infinite sequence, it never stops bouncing.

A classic example, *"The Problem of Six Blind Men"*, about the nature of truth in Jain philosophy presents a varied version of truth based on varied points of view of the observer. According to the analogy, six blind men who never knew what an elephant is, described the elephant as a thick snake, pillar, wall, rope, etc., by touching different parts of the elephant. They appear wrong in their judgment from the point of view of non blind person but are correct in their own individual analysis of truth which they felt.

Untangling the threads of perception of 'truth', Mahatma Gandhi professed that, *"The word Satya (Truth) is derived from 'Sat' which*

means 'being'. What may appear as truth to one person may appear as untrue to another person. But where there is an honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different forms of truths or different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree." So, can it be said that the Jaina philosophy of non-violence, Marx's pro-poor unshackling of chain theories, 'white' men's burden of imperialism to civilise the world, avarice of capitalism for maximum profit and proposition of war and destruction by Islamic State in the name of religion, are all the leaves of same tree? Certainly not in all the cases, even though the followers do honestly believe in these ideologies, as much as they readily give away their life upholding what they believed to be true.

Everybody has his own limitation regarding the perception of truth as this truth is only the part that he could manage to perceive. One can see an elephant through a keyhole, but the elephant itself cannot see or pass through the same. Truth depends on perspective and there can be many forms of truth. On one side, all might appear or be true and also at the same, none may be true at all. So, everything we hear is somebody's opinion and everything we are made to believe is someone's perspective but not the absolute truth. This is the reason why Buddha said, "*Att dipo bhavo*", meaning '*Be thy own light*'.

Story of civilization is that of improvisation. We keep on testing what is already known to us and persistently add to the knowledge based on our learnt wisdom. These lessons can be taught and the teachers can be in a variety of forms; such as teachers, books, nature and real-life experiences. For sure, lessons can be taught and are also learnt. Long after the origin of script, we have been learning the same set of alphabets generations after generations. Walking to the left side of the road in India, and that to the right in the USA have been inculcated in inherent reflexes of the respective residents. It must have been hard, but native Germans, brainwashed with ultra-nationalism proposed by Nazism were induced and taught the lessons of democracy in their society and now the scenario is such that Neo-Nazism is a taboo in the same society.

For all practical purposes of mortals, the vanity of truth is narrowed down to the interpretation and intent of the act. And what is truth is

not one single element, but a chosen way of life having non-conflicting co-existence like universal values of honesty, compassion, self-respect, freedom, social justice, peace, forgiveness, morality, humility and discipline.

“It is a human tendency to accept the things better when perceived by our own senses. Any learnt matter can be forgotten, but the things that have occurred in our life cannot be wiped out easily, be it the adolescent heartbreaks or road-accidents.”

Lessons of truth which define life and set the course of it are eternal realization and can be lived only. Love for human being has been taught in biblical sermons as customary practices, but realized and truly lived by very few like Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther Jr. The great king Ashoka could abjure violence only after the realization of humane duty of the king and since then he lived his realization and worked for the welfare and well-being of his

subjects by practicing non violence and *Dhammaghosha*. Truth is the very basic foundation of any relationship between two entities ranging from persons to nations, because it begets trust and faith in oneself and the other. Such a truth can only be professed by inculcation. The strength or weakness of such an individual entity is determined by the conviction to live the truth one believes in. For instance, post-independence, when the world was taking sides of the capitalist or socialist camp, India carved out a place for itself, when she embarked upon Non-Alignment. Standing by its resolve, India and other NAM countries helped in diluting the concentrated stress of the Cold War to a great extent. Even in times when the US hegemony was established beyond doubt, India stood against the Nuclear Nonproliferation Pact of USA and other ‘Nuclear weapon states’, being a strong proponent of universal and non selective nuclear disarmament. Continuing the legacy, aspect of shared but differential liability of environmental degradation could find a place in the policy formulation owing to India’s strong resolve to adhere with the truth tested in time and this only resulted in other developing countries to follow the lead of India.

Sometimes, truth is covered up with patches or decorations of lies. But as time passes by, it gets revealed as the patches wear out and decorations fade away. So the best way out is to live the truth along with life, and not to present it different from life, for others to follow. Mahatma Gandhi dared to instruct only what he practiced and perhaps this is what made him acceptable among already established elite political class and popular among the common deprived people of the time.

There is an instance from the life of Mahatma Gandhi which emphasises on “preaching only the truth which one lives”. Gandhi returned a woman several times, when he was asked by her, just to say to the kid not to eat sugar. Finally, after weeks, when he instructed the kid not to eat sugar; the woman asked Gandhi that he could have said the same thing the very first day. To this Mahatma Gandhi replied that before instructing the kid against consumption of sugar, he had to make sure, he too get rid of the habit of eating sugar himself.

Moral is the driving force for all the conscious decisions which is revered truthful, but it is impossible to teach moral values, because it is subjective. The truth to which everyone concurs is that no religion professes violence. But the most violent acts in human history has been and continues to be in the name of religion. Mahatma Gandhi in ‘My experiments with truth’ says, “*But you can wake a man only if he is really asleep; no effort that you may make will produce any effect upon him if he is merely pretending sleep.*” Thus, truth and the driving force behind truth is subjective. The validity of subjective ideas are realized not by teaching but by living it.

Ideally, truth to many is objective and it is not dependent upon the believers or practitioners of truth. This idealism is like the horizon in infinite space. It can only be sought after, never realized. On the other hand, realism is the will to walk to reach this utopian destination of the horizon. Among all odds, truth is the mean to have a vision of the reality. It is not out of the blues, when Mahatma Gandhi claims that pursuit of truth brought him into the politics. He appealed for cessation of hostility, for that is the true nature of relationship, instead

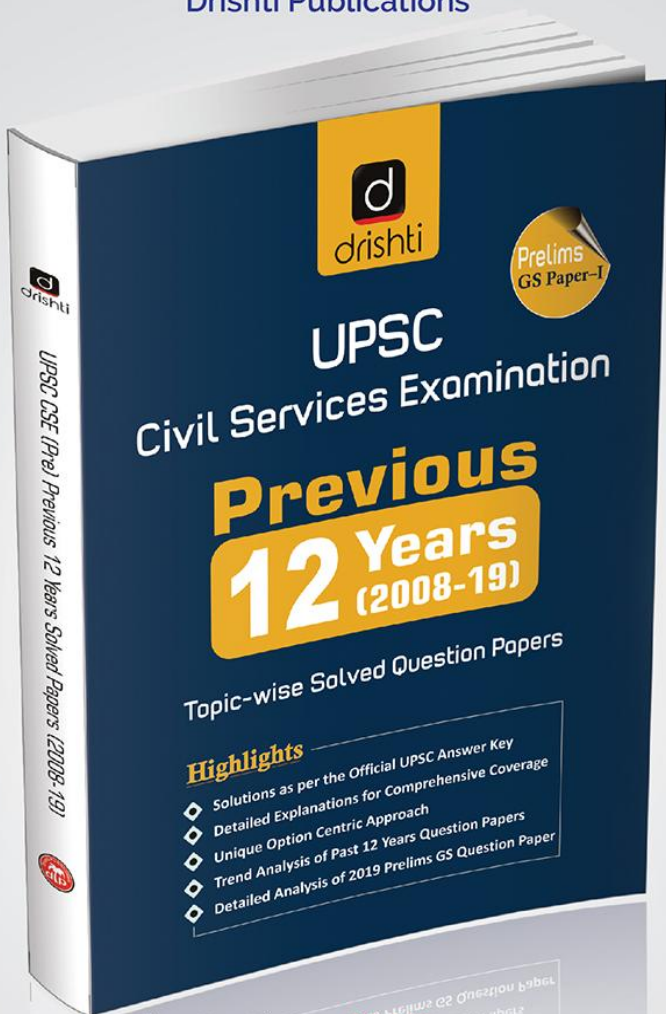
of winning it over in a war, because even if the war is won, the truth of relationship is still that of animosity. So, he claimed that hate could not be defeated by *quid pro quo*.

The importance holds on how the truth is wholeheartedly accepted, when taught or lived? It is a human tendency to accept the things better when perceived by our own senses. Any learnt matter can be forgotten, but the things that have occurred in our life cannot be wiped out easily, be it the adolescent heartbreaks or road-accidents.

A taught lesson may end up being a prized possession of knowledge and intellect, but the lived truth is organic. Person evolves along with the perception of truth itself. Death is one truth according to various philosophical schools. What could be livelier way to die than that of former President APJ Kalam, who took his last breath giving lecture to students; and that of Socrates, who drank hemlock as a punishment for his struggle to achieve freedom of speech, thought and action for all individuals in democratic Athens? Centuries after Socrates still lives and so shall Dr. Kalam. such is the power of living the truth and this truth cannot be taught better.



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ISBN 978-81-941403-5-1



9 788194 140351

Price: 220/-