



**FORTUNE  
IAS ACADEMY**

9 YEARS  
OF TRUST  
**300+**  
RESULTS

# BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO UPSC PREPARATION

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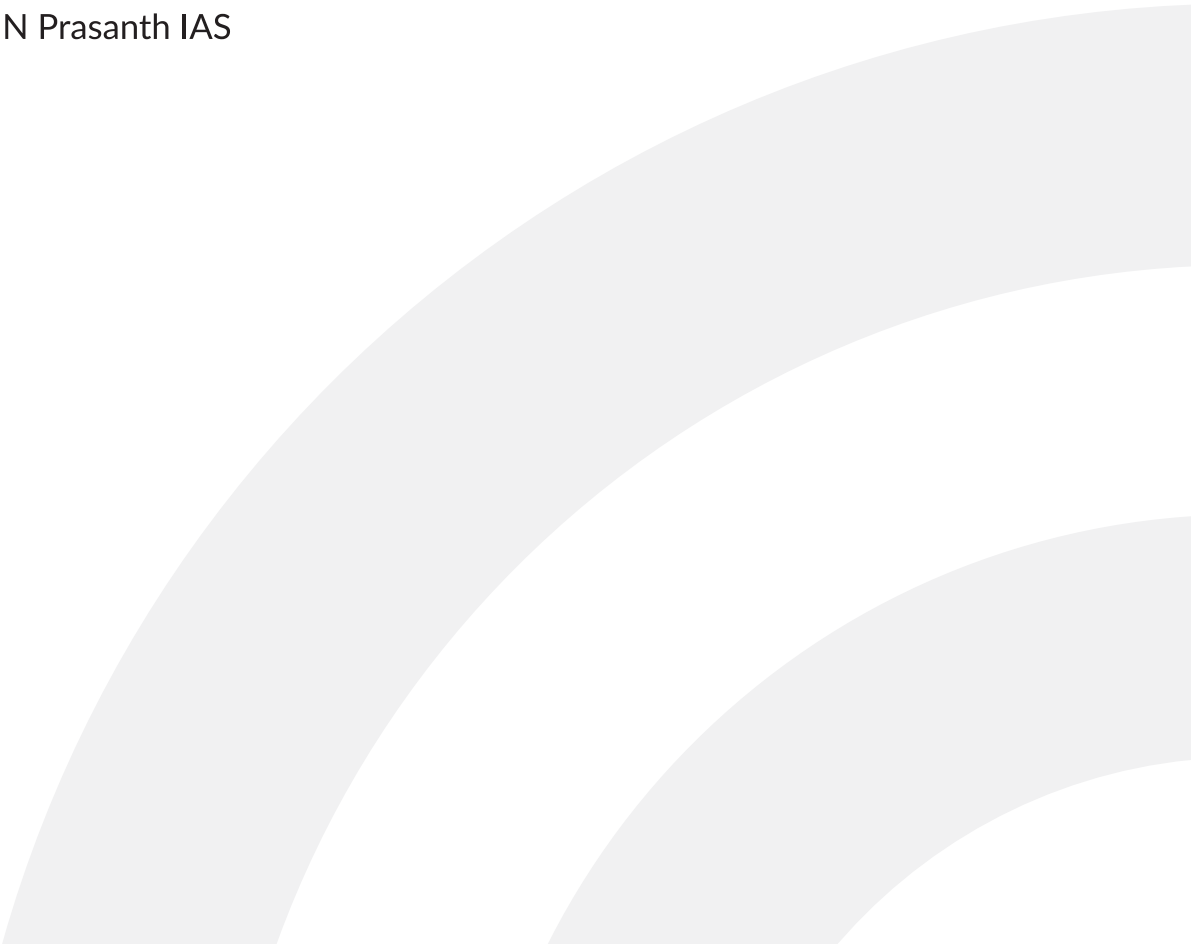
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# Section A

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- 

# Preface



**Sylesh Fernandes**  
Academic Director  
Fortune IAS Academy

**D**ear Aspirant,

Congratulations on taking the decision to pursue Civil Services as a career. A career serving our nation and its people the which will give both professional and personal satisfaction.

The first step towards this coveted career is the UPSC Civil Services Examination. The past few years has seen a great deal of dynamism in the examination but arguably the best part of the examination remains the fairness of the process. It gives an equal opportunity to all aspirants irrespective of their backgrounds to hold prestigious posts in the Indian administration. Any beginner to Civil Services Examination would be faced with various choices – Which optional should I choose? How should I go about my preparation? Etc.

This booklet is Fortune IAS Academy's attempt to give a clear picture about the Civil Services Examination and provide guidance for those who are beginning their preparation – in short, a Beginner's Guide!

Hope it would be of help to you in easing your path towards Civil Services.

”

The past few years has seen a great deal of dynamism in the examination but arguably the best part of the examination remains the fairness of the process.

**T.K.A. Nair IAS (Retd)**

Former Principal Advisor to the  
Prime Minister of India, Former Chief Secretary of Punjab  
Head of Advisory Board, Fortune IAS Academy

Civil Service as a career has become far more attractive and hence competitive today than in the past on account of a number of socio-economic factors which form part of our developmental processes. Coming from diverse background from all over India cutting across barriers of language, religion, caste and family status, several lakhs of brilliant young women and men are aspirants to a few hundred vacancies in the Civil Services. Stiff competition amongst them is therefore inevitable, leading to the mushrooming of Coaching Centres across the country.

Against this background the Fortune IAS Academy at Thiruvananthapuram with which I have been associated in an honorary capacity, has done well in bringing out a 'Beginners' Guide to UPSC preparation which serves as a road map to Civil Service aspirants.

The handbook contains syllabus and rules of the examination, inspiring words from senior bureaucrats and success stories of recent toppers including a suggested booklist for preparation. Besides guiding the aspirants how to plan a strategy for the examination, it also motivates them to strive hard to achieve their goal.

Needless to stress, aspirants to the civil service are motivated by different considerations. You should be honest to yourself about what drives you to aspire for Civil Services as your chosen

”

Being honest to  
ourselves, cultivating the  
spirit of service to  
society and the  
humility to learn from  
others with an open  
mind, are to my mind  
the hallmark of a  
successful civil  
servant.

career. Power or status associated with it should not be your main attraction towards the Civil Services in our present context. Being honest to ourself, cultivating the spirit of service to society and the humility to learn from others with an open mind, are to my mind the hallmark of a successful civil servant. The advent of internet and coaching centres like Fortune IAS Academy has helped many youngsters from Kerala crack the UPSC exam in the recent past. On the platform of Fortune IAS Academy, I have interacted with several successful aspirants from across Kerala who have had the benefit of its teaching and guidance. Based on my experience with the Fortune IAS Academy, I am confident that our students are qualified and well motivated with the potential to become successful civil servants.

Let me hope, the Fortune Beginner's Guide will dispel the many doubts and myths associated with the Civil Services Examinations & preparations for it, which still persists in the minds of many prospective aspirants.

“Well begun is half done”.

Best wishes to the many aspirants for their success and a satisfying career in the service of our country.

”

Fortune IAS Academy at Thiruvananthapuram with which I have been associated in an honorary capacity, has done well in bringing out a 'Beginners' Guide to UPSC preparation which serves as a road map to Civil Service aspirants.



**N. Prasanth. IAS**

You should enjoy the UPSC preparation journey: IAS 'Collector Bro'

**B**efore we start out on any journey it is important to have a roadmap as to how to reach the destination. You need to study the exam before you study for any examination. Often beginners are at a loss to understand the how and what of the exam. The "Beginner's guide to UPSC preparation" published by Fortune IAS academy can serve as a roadmap to a civil service aspirant.

It is also important to enjoy the journey if you have to reach the destination. UPSC preparation is often seen as a very gruelling and stressful process by many aspirants. I understand that the competition is tough but I believe it is the people who are able to enjoy the process that ultimately become winners. All work and no play makes Jack a dull, inefficient and ineffective boy! Hence a bit of humour and openness is what I would recommend as traits to imbibe during the preparation stage. It would be advisable to carry such an attitude into your job also, once you become a civil servant. In India, the phrase 'work is worship' is taken so seriously that people tend to exhaust decades of their lifetime toiling in a work environment devoid of fun and enjoyment. The idea that one's working place can only function properly if there is extreme order and hierarchical reverence is something that is unquestioningly practised in India in all Government offices and most private concerns. Good humour is the best medicine to beat dullness at work. Not only does

”

I understand that the competition is tough but I believe it is the people who are able to enjoy the process that ultimately become winners.

this open up doors for cordiality and directness in an organisational structure, but it also helps dissolve the hierarchical gap that has always remained between higher and lower echelons. Not only have I received some of the best feedback and advice throughout this process, but I have observed that our workspaces showcase better productivity and happier staffs. A similar approach would be worthwhile in an exam like UPSC where one needs to connect different subjects and also have a broad view to things around you.

The 'Compassionate Kozhikode' initiative, which had innovations like 'Operation Sulaimani' and 'Tere Mere Beach Me', wouldn't have been possible without the collective brain-storming effort of the entire team. When we launched 'Operation Sulaimani', the name inspired by the Malayalam film, 'Ustad Hotel', we harped on an iconic dialogue from the film, "Every Sulaimani needs a bit of Mohabbat in it. When you sip, the world should slow down and pause here."

This is precisely how anything in life should be undertaken - with a bit of Mohabbat. So why not emulate the same in one's preparation strategy and work?

”

“Every  
Sulaimani  
needs a bit of  
Mohabbat in it.  
When you sip,  
the world  
should slow  
down and  
pause here.”



FORTUNE IAS

**TOPPERS IN TOP 100**



**MEERA K**  
RANK 6 (2021)



**SIDHARTH**  
RANK 15 (2017)



**DILIP K KAINIKKARA**  
RANK 21 (2022)



**HAMNA MARIYAM**  
RANK 28 (2017)



**SREELAKSHMI RAM**  
RANK 29 (2019)



**ANAND**  
RANK 33 (2016)



**ARYA V M**  
RANK 36 (2023)



**SAFNA NAZARUDEEN**  
RANK 45 (2020)



**RENJINA MARY V**  
RANK 49 (2019)



**DR. ARUN S NAIR**  
RANK 55 (2020)



**ALFRED O V**  
RANK 57 (2022)



**HARI KALLIKKAT**  
RANK 58 (2018)



**APARNA M B**  
RANK 62 (2021)



**DHEENAH DASTAGEER**  
RANK 63 (2021)



**AKHIL V MENON**  
RANK 66 (2022)



**ARJUN MOHAN**  
RANK 66 (2019)



**MALINI S**  
RANK 81 (2023)



**DEVI NANDANA**  
RANK 92 (2020)



**ARCHANA P P**  
RANK 99 (2020)



**KIRAN P B**  
RANK 100 (2022)

## Section B

### UPSC CSE Exam Details

- » Is Civil Service exam only for IAS/IPS?
- » Eligibility - Age Criterion
- » Eligibility - Educational Qualification
- » Number of Attempts
- » Examination Cycle
- » Examination Structure 3 Stages
- » Preliminary Exam
- » UPSC Prelims Syllabus
- » Trend Analysis Prelims
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- » Personality Test
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- » How To Select The Right Optional
- » Optionals Offered at Fortune IAS Academy

Note: This is a concise form of UPSC notification. Kindly refer to the notification for more details.



# Is Civil Service exam only for IAS/IPS?

The Civil Services Examination (CSE) is a nation wide competitive examination in India conducted by the Union Public Service Commission for recruitment to various Civil Services of the Government of India, including the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and many more. It's a misnomer that it is called as the IAS exam since there are many services for which the recruitment is done through the same exam. The entire list of services is given below:

[www.fortuneias.com](http://www.fortuneias.com)  
[fortuneiasacademy@gmail.com](mailto:fortuneiasacademy@gmail.com)



**Fortune**  
IAS Academy

## TOPPER'S CHOICE

“ Fortune IAS academy made a huge difference in improving my mains marks and interview score. The systematic practice, Quality Improvement Program (QIP) under Muni sir helped me maximize my mains score. Thank you Team Fortune ”

**Sreelakshmi R IAS**  
RANK 29- UPSC CSE 2018-19



Fortune IAS Academy, Upper Meridian Road, Near Kuravankonam Junction,  
Kowdiar PO, Trivandrum 695003

## ALL INDIA SERVICES

- (i) Indian Administrative Services (IAS)
- (ii) Indian Forest Services (IFoS)
- (iii) Indian Police Services (IPS)

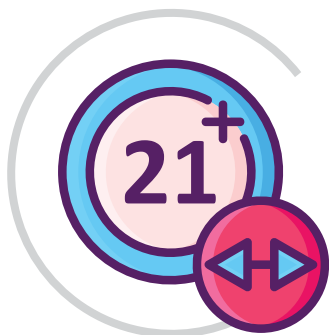
## GROUP 'A' SERVICES

- (i) Indian Foreign Service (IFS)
- (ii) Indian P & T Accounts & Finance Service
- (iii) Indian Audit and Accounts Service
- (iv) Indian Revenue Service (Customs and Central Excise)
- (v) Indian Defence Accounts Service
- (vi) Indian Revenue Service (I.T.)
- (vii) Indian Ordnance Factories Service (Assistant Works Manager, Administration)
- (viii) Indian Postal Service
- (ix) Indian Civil Accounts Service
- (x) Indian Railway Traffic Service
- (xi) Indian Railway Accounts Service
- (xii) Indian Railway Personnel Service
- (xiii) Post of Assistant Security Commissioner in Railway Protection Force
- (xiv) Indian Defence Estates Service
- (xv) Indian Information Service (Junior Grade)
- (xvi) Indian Trade Service
- (xvii) Indian Corporate Law Service
- (xviii) Indian Revenue Service (CBEC)

## GROUP 'B' SERVICES

- (i) Armed Forces Headquarters Civil Service (Section Officer's Grade)
- (ii) Delhi, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli Civil Service
- (iii) Delhi, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli Police Service
- (iv) Pondicherry Civil Service
- (v) Pondicherry Police Service

# Eligibility - Age Criterion



**Age: Aspirants between 21-32 years in the general category can attempt the exam.** Upper age and lower age limit is calculated based on the cut-off date Aug 1. This means if the candidate is appearing for 2025 prelims, he/she should be below/above the mentioned maximum/minimum limit by Aug 1, 2025. The age restrictions for each category is mentioned below:

	General	OBC	SC/ST	PH
Minimum Age	21	21	21	21
Maximum Age	32	35	37	42

## SAFNA NAZARUDEEN IAS

**RANK 45, 2020**  
**YOUNGEST MALAYALEE**  
**IAS OFFICER**

I joined Fortune IAS Academy immediately after my graduation and did my entire civil services preparation there. I am indebted to Nitin sir and Anand sir for all the guidance throughout my mains and interview preparation. My heartfelt thanks to Sherin sir, Anton sir, Muni sir, Sylesh sir and every one at Fortune for being my guiding light and instilling the confidence in me that I will clear the exam.



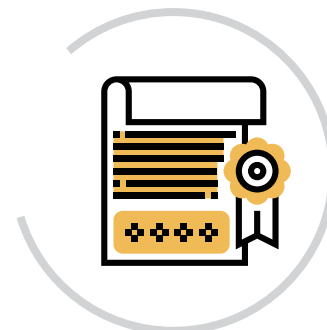
[www.fortuneias.com](http://www.fortuneias.com)



# Eligibility - Educational Qualification

**Educational Qualification:** The candidate must have at least a bachelor's degree from a recognised university to take the UPSC exam.

Even those candidates who have written the final year exams of the qualifying exam (bachelor's degree) and are awaiting results can apply. Also, candidates who would write the final exam are also eligible to apply for the IAS prelims exam. But, these candidates must produce the proof of passing the exam while applying for the IAS mains exam.



## Number of Attempts

Category	Number of Attempts
General	6
OBC	9
SC/ST	No restriction
Physically Handicapped (General)	9
Physically Handicapped (OBC)	9
Physically Handicapped (SC/ST)	No restriction

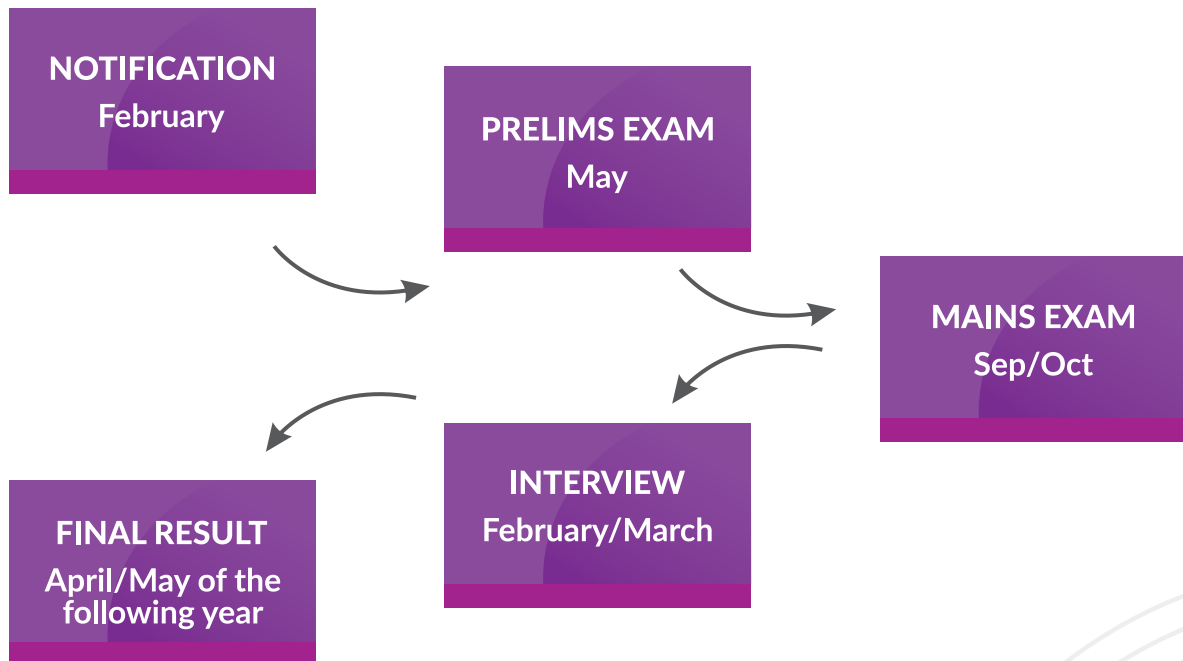


Best IAS Academy  
in South India Award  
at Education Conclave,  
Delhi





# Examination Cycle



Please refer to this year's UPSC notification for exact dates.



**MALINI S**  
**IFS**

**RANK 81, 2023**

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Fortune team for standing behind me and always extending their helping hand. From Muni sir's regular words of encouragement to Shylesh sir's last minute pep talk right before my interview, they did an extraordinary job in guiding me. I would also like to thank Anton sir, Nithin, and Sherin for their genuine support throughout. You guys are awesomesauce!



[www.fortuneias.com](http://www.fortuneias.com)

# Examination Structure

## 3 Stages

### Stage 1 (Preliminary Exam)

Usually conducted in May. Prelims is objective in nature (MCQs). There are 2 papers.



### Stage 2 (Mains Exam)

Usually conducted in September/October. The Mains Exam (descriptive) is applicable only for those who qualify prelims. There are 9 papers.



### Stage 3 (Personality Test)

Usually conducted during February-March. The interview round is applicable only for those who qualify Mains. The duration of the interview would be around 30 minutes.

# Preliminary Exam

UPSC Prelims Exam Pattern	General Studies I	General Studies II or CSAT
Number of questions	100	80
Negative Marking	Yes (1/3rd of the maximum marks for the question) -0.66 marks for every incorrect answer	Yes (1/3rd of the maximum marks for the question) -0.83 marks for every incorrect answer
Duration of exam	2 hours	2 hours
Language of exam	English/Hindi	English/Hindi
Maximum marks	200	200
Cut Off marks	Cutoff varies every year.	33% qualifying criteria (66 marks)

**Prelims is a Screening Test:** Only those who manage to score more than the cut off declared by the UPSC for that particular year will be summoned for the next level of examination. However, the marks scored in Prelims will not be counted for arriving at the final merit list. Hence it is a screening test to select the students for the further selection process.



Fortune IAS- 300+ Results

# UPSC Prelims Syllabus

## General Studies Paper-1

- Current Events
- History of India and Indian National Movement
- Indian and World Geography
- Indian Polity and Governance
- Economic and Social Development
- Environmental Ecology Biodiversity and Climate Change
- General Science

## CSAT/General Studies Paper- II

- Comprehension
- Interpersonal skills including communication skills
- Logical reasoning and analytical ability
- Decision-making and problem solving
- General mental ability
- Basic Numeracy (Class X level)
- Data interpretation (Class X level)

Please refer to UPSC notification for detailed syllabus.

[www.fortuneias.com](http://www.fortuneias.com)  
[fortuneiasacademy@gmail.com](mailto:fortuneiasacademy@gmail.com)



**Fortune**  
IAS Academy



## TOPPER'S CHOICE

“

Fortune is where I realized my UPSC dream. I was fortunate that helped in my mains preparation. Special thanks to Muni sir, Thomas sir and Sylesh sir for guiding me towards my dream.

”

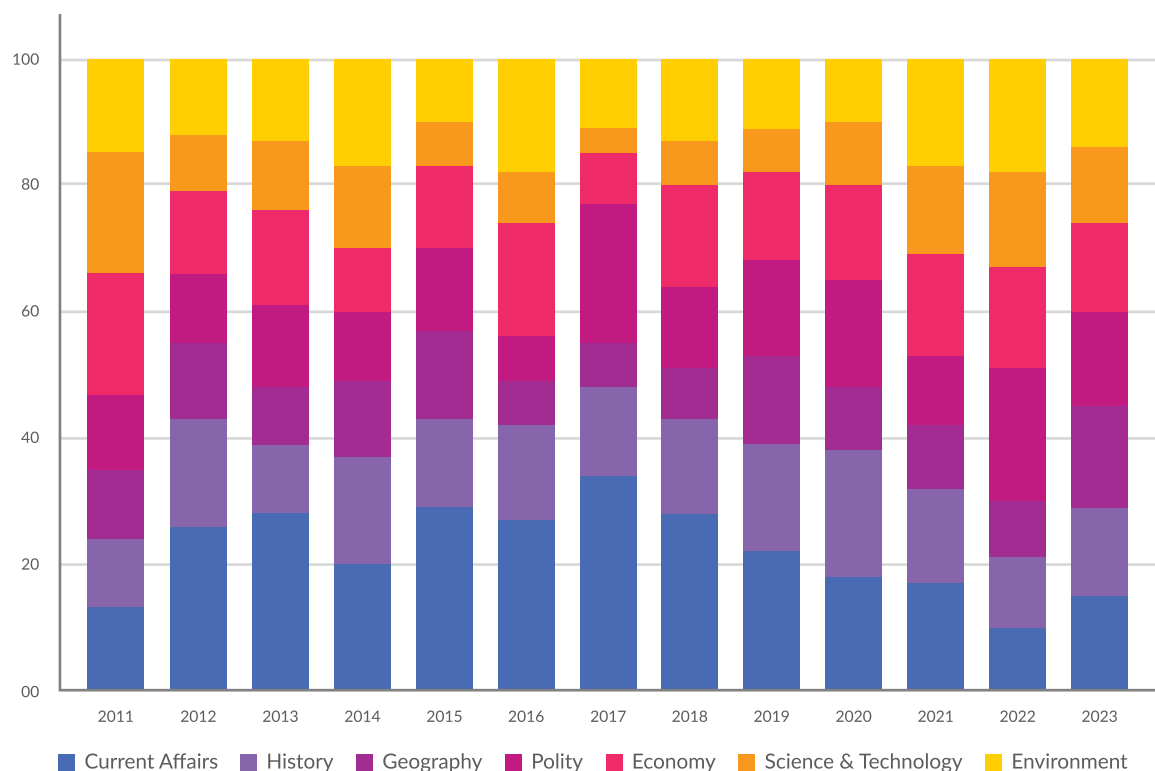
**Sreedhanya Suresh IAS**

RANK 410- UPSC CSE 2018-19

Fortune IAS Academy, Upper Meridian Road, Near Kuravankonam Junction,  
Kowdiar PO, Trivandrum 695003



# Trend Analysis Prelims



Year	Current Affairs	History	Geography	Polity	Economy	Science & Technology	Environment
2011	13	11	11	12	19	19	15
2012	26	17	12	11	13	9	12
2013	28	11	9	13	15	11	13
2014	20	17	12	11	10	13	17
2015	29	14	14	13	13	7	10
2016	27	15	7	7	18	8	18
2017	34	14	7	22	8	4	11
2018	28	15	8	13	16	7	13
2019	22	17	14	15	14	7	11
2020	18	20	10	17	15	10	10
2021	17	15	10	11	16	14	17
2022	10	11	9	21	16	15	18
2023	15	14	16	15	14	12	14

# Mains Exam

Mains exam comprises 9 descriptive type papers:  
1 Essay Paper, 4 General Studies Papers, 2 Optional Papers (of your choice to be selected from the Civil Services Exam Optional Subjects), 2 Language Papers (marks scored in language papers will not be included to arrive at the final ranking order – however, candidates need to score at least 25% in each paper in order to qualify).



## Civil Services Exam Pattern For Mains

Papers	Subjects	Marks
Paper A	One of the Indian languages (Listed in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India) mentioned below to be selected by the candidate (Qualifying)	300
Paper B	English (Qualifying)	300
Paper I	Essay	250
Paper II	General Studies I (Indian heritage and culture, history and geography of the world and society)	250
Paper III	General Studies II (Governance, constitution, polity, social justice and international relations)	250
Paper IV	General Studies III (Technology, economic development, biodiversity, environment, security and disaster management)	250
Paper V	General Studies IV (Ethics, integrity and aptitude)	250
Papers VI, VII	Two papers on subjects to be selected by the candidate from the list of optional subjects below (250 marks for each paper)	250
Sub Total (Written Test)		1750
Personality Test (Interview)		275
Total Marks		2025

# Personality Test

Personality test, commonly known as the interview is the final round in the Civil Services Exam selection process.

Only those candidates who manage to clear the mains exam cutoff are allowed to attend the interview.

The candidate will be interviewed by a Board (5 members) who will have before them a record of his/her career.

Purpose of the interview is to assess the suitability of the candidate to the Civil Services.

The interview is out of 275 marks.

Marks scored by the candidate in the interview will be added to the marks scored by him/her in the mains exam for arriving at the final merit list.





# **3 NATIONAL INTERVIEW TOPPERS IN PAST 5 YEARS**



**RAMIT  
CHENNITHALA IRS  
(2018)**



**ARYA R NAIR IRS  
(2019)**



**KIRAN P B IPS  
(2022)**



**FORTUNE  
IAS ACADEMY**

# KIRAN P B IPS

**RANK 100, 2022**

**D**espite a hectic schedule of balancing IT work and civil services preparation, I could successfully clear the UPSC examination due to the guidance of Munidarsan sir and training imparted by him at Fortune IAS Academy.



[www.fortuneias.com](http://www.fortuneias.com)





# Final Ranking



The Final Rank is calculated by adding the marks secured in Mains (out of 1750) and the marks secured in the Personality Test (out of 275).

Analyzing the last 5 years trends, it can be seen that toppers score only 50% of the total marks.

You will be allotted final service like IAS, IPS, IFS etc based on your preference (filled out in the Detailed Application Form), rank, and category.

If you need to improve your rank or service, you can attempt the exam again. However, you would need to start right from the first stage - ie. Preliminary Exam.



Combined Study Partners- Hari Kallikat (IAS) and Ramit Chennithala (IRS)

# Reference Booklist

SUBJECT	BOOK LIST
Polity	<b>Fortune Success Series</b> , NCERT 9 - 12, Indian Polity - M. Laxmikanth
Geography	<b>Fortune Success Series</b> , NCERT 6 - 12, Certificate Physical & Human Geography, Majid Hussain, Orient Longman Atlas or Oxford Atlas
Ancient Indian History, Art and Culture and Medieval India	<b>Fortune Success Series</b> , Old NCERT: Ancient India, Old NCERT: Medieval India, Class XI NCERT – Introduction to Fine Art (part 1), CCRT website: <a href="http://ccrtindia.gov.in/index.php">http://ccrtindia.gov.in/index.php</a>
Modern India	<b>Fortune Success Series</b> , Old NCERT : Modern India by Bipin Chandra, India's struggle for Independence – Bipin Chandra
India Economy	<b>Fortune Success Series</b> , 11th NCERT : Economics: Indian Economic Development, 12th NCERT : Economics: Macroeconomics, <a href="http://www.arthapedia.in">www.arthapedia.in</a> , Economic Survey
Ecology & Environment	<b>Fortune Success Series</b> , NCERT Biology 12th – Unit 10 (Chapter 13, 14, 15 & 16), NCERT Chemistry 11 th (Part II) – Chapter 14, ICSE Environmental Education 9th & 10th
Current Affairs	<b>Fortune Success Series</b> , The Hindu Newspaper, PIB, Frontline, <a href="http://upsc361.com">upsc361.com</a> , India Year Book
General Science	<b>Fortune Success Series</b> , 6-12th NCERTs (11th and 12th Only Biology is important)



# Booklist for UPSC Mains

## GS Paper I

### Fortune Success Series - GS Paper I

Art & Culture – Spectrum on Art and Culture, An Introduction to Indian Art (Class XI NCERT)

Modern India and Freedom Struggle – Old NCERTs (Class VIII and XII) by Bipan Chandra

Post-Independence Consolidation – NCERT- India Since Independence

World History – NCERT Xth (Story of Civilisation), NCERT XIIth (Arjun Dev), Norman and Lowe specifically for decolonisation topics

Indian Society – Yojana, Kurukshetra magazines, NCERT (XI and XII)

Geography – NCERT (6 – 12), GC Leong

## GS Paper II

### Fortune Success Series - GS Paper II

Polity – Laxmikanth, The Hindu and AIR news analysis

Governance – The Hindu, Yojana and Kurukshetra

International Relations – Challenge And Strategy : Rethinking India's Foreign Policy – Rajiv Sikri, News Analysis, India and the World (Rajya Sabha TV)

Gist of 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission Reports

\*There are little textbooks from which you can prepare Paper II for Mains. General awareness helps.

## GS Paper III

### Fortune Success Series - GS Paper III

Economic Survey of the Relevant year

Budget of the relevant Year

PIB Documents, The Hindu

Internal Security – IDSA website

Science & Technology, Biotechnology and Environment – The Hindu, Frontline/Outlook

## GS Paper IV

### Fortune Success Series - GS Paper IV

Lexicon of Ethics

Learn About PESTEL, Stakeholder Analysis, Value Chain, SWOT and Pro-Con

IGNOU material on Attitude, Social Psychology

Ethics and Governance – 4th report of 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission

# How To Select The Right Optional

## 1. Possibility of scoring High Marks

The bottom line in Mains examination is the marks you score. Optionals which help you score high are in great demand as it usually increases the probability of you getting into the top services.

Analysis of past 10 years UPSC marks shows that subjects like Mathematics, Physics, Engineering subjects and the Literature of Regional Subjects are those which fetch the absolute premium marks.

However, except the Literature subjects every other subject also comes with the risk of “hit or miss”, i.e. in subjects like Mathematics or Physics you may score really low as well. Public Administration and Geography are two subjects which usually return high scores as well.

Both also have the same issue of “hit or miss” as certain years the papers were tough.

Political Science and International Relations, Anthropology have also been doing well in the past 2 or 3 years.

Economics did very well for a couple of years (2012 and 2013) but has been under the radar now mostly.

Sociology is one optional which may not always touch the real high marks but is always a stable subject.



## 2. Overlap with GS Syllabus

Certain optionals have very high overlap with GS syllabus which will help with the preparation for General Studies in Prelims, Mains and even Interview. This overlap can greatly reduce the overall load on the student during preparation.

Public Administration is the subject which overlaps maximum with GS syllabus. Starting with polity topics Public administration is present in all four GS papers and will definitely help with personality test/interview as well.

Political Science and International Relations has an overlap especially with General Studies Paper II in mains. It also covers polity topics which are important for prelims. It covers various topics which come for Personality Test as well.

Sociology and Anthropology have good linkages with mains and also is helpful for personality test or interview

Geography has overlap with Paper I and III of General Studies mainly and would be really helpful if you also want to try for Indian Forest Service exam.

History is another subject which would be helpful in Paper I (and a bit of Paper II/III) and in personality test/interview. Philosophy and Psychology would be a tiny bit helpful in General Studies Paper IV i.e. Ethics.



### 3. Availability of Guidance and Material

The major subjects like Public Administration, Geography, Sociology, History, Political Science etc. have tonnes of free material and guidance available in the internet. However, it is still advised that you go to a proper course for these topics in case you choose one of them.

Economics and science subjects are taken up at specialized institutes in Delhi only.



Make your Parents Proud!



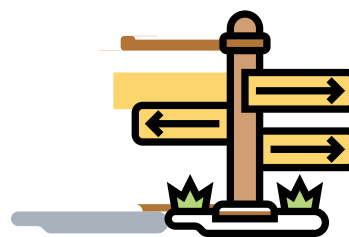
### 5. Your Interest

This perhaps is the most determining factor in deciding the optional. Even the toughest optional for the majority can be easy for certain people with an aptitude for it.

If you are good in Physics or Maths you can take it and clear with it. There are people who take Agriculture and clear as well. With all these aspects in mind, you must do soul searching and decide on the topic after reading essential material, conversing with the people who have cleared with the respective optional and also look up good institutes for the same.



Yes You Can - Sreedhanya IAS



### 4. Number of people who cleared with an optional

As per data from UPSC annual reports over the past 10 years, Public Administration is the optional with maximum number of selections. The annual average has been ranging between 15 pc to 35 pc in final selections

Geography comes second with an annual average ranging from 9 pc to 32 pc in final selections. Political Science and International Relations is one optional which has had good number selections and also a very good conversion ratio of about 10 pc.

Sociology has a maintained a stable number in most years in final selections over the past 10 years. Literature of Malayalam Language and Anthropology has had excellent results and good conversion ratio.



# Optionals Offered at Fortune IAS Academy

Sociology

Public  
Administration

Malayalam  
Literature

Political Science &  
International  
Relations

Geography



## AKHIL V MENON IAS

**RANK 66, 2022**  
**PRESENTLY POSTED**  
**AS ASST COLLECTOR,**  
**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM**

I am indebted to Fortune IAS Academy for the relentless support extended to me. Sylesh sir is not just a teacher but more like an elder brother who extended all help in my journey. Special gratitude to Nitin sir who mentored me throughout my journey, going through each aspects of my answer. Thank you Team Fortune.



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## Section C

- » Success Stories for Fortune Students- How They Did It
  - Siddharth Babu (IFS)
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  - Anand Mohan (IAS)
- » Our Courses



# Success Stories



**Siddharth Babu IFS**  
 AIR 15, 2016

## 1. To whom and to what do you credit your success?

Complete and unconditional backing offered by my family - especially my mother and grandfather. Help from my closest friends' mentors and teachers. I was able to write the exam in a relatively tension and stress free environment.

## 2. Why did you choose Civil Services as a career?

I had an interest in international relations. I realized that being a career diplomat is the most suitable and effective way to work in this space. I was also brought up in an environment where patriotism was a cherished value. Serving the nation is something I dreamed about. These two factors coincided in the Indian Foreign Service.

## 3. When did you consciously start your preparation for this examination?

January 2015.

## 4. When should one ideally start the preparation process?

I think 12 months of effort before mains should be enough, if done in a diligent way.

## 5. It is said that the Civil Services examination is one of the toughest nuts to crack. It requires constant and sustained hard work. How did you keep yourself constantly motivated? What was your source of inspiration?

I used to watch a lot of YouTube videos and documentaries on topics which had something to do with IR and security issues. I also reached out to former diplomats and listened to their experiences while in services. These two things kept reassuring me that I am pursuing my dream job. My friends also played an important role in keeping me emotionally happy. My family also ensured that I was never burdened

with any household chores so that I spend my time away from studies the way I wanted.

**6. In your opinion how crucial is the selection of Optionals for success in the examination?**

I think it is perhaps the most important decision every candidate makes once he/she has decided to write the exam. I chose Political Science and International Relations because of my interest in IR and political theory. It was because I was passionate about the subject I was able to put in long hours. If I had chosen a subject I did not love I would have struggled to study the subject well.

**7. What should be the criteria for selecting them and how should one go about it? Should one opt for the subjects studied at college or go for new ones?**

Love for the subject is the key determinant. If the candidate loves the subject he/she has studied in college, it would be the best bet for him/her.

**8. How should one prepare for Prelims, Mains and Interview?**

(Please give a separate account for each)

**My strategy is as follows Prelims** - breadth is the key here. I had covered prelims from a wide variety of sources like newspapers, NIOS, standard books like NCERT, Laxmikanth and Shankar. Focus is on facts.

**Mains** - keeping preparation simple is the key here. Stick to syllabus. Use standard books to cover the syllabus. Connect important stories that come in newspapers with syllabus to anticipate responses if questions come. Nowadays GS questions are very dynamic - so spending too much time referring to static portions may not help.

**Interview** - I think each person will have to identify strengths and weaknesses of his/her personality. Attending mock interviews is a good way of doing this. The DAF must be filled in a manner that one must be able to show a demonstrable interest.

**9. How can one score well in Essay, GS and Interview?**

GS and interview - already covered above Essay - It is important to practice full length essay tests before going for the examination. This will give candidates the opportunity necessary practice of time distribution.

**10. What are the areas in GS Paper I and II in the Main examination in which the candidate can score marks easily?**

There is no single area where it is easier to score marks. Question

papers are very dynamic these days.

**11. Did you commit any mistake during your preparations?**

Mistakes and corrections I made are as follows GS 1,2,3 - did not stick to syllabus and connect syllabus with newspaper reading in first attempt - corrected this mistake GS 4 - in first attempt I did not refer to model answers and answers of toppers after mock tests. So I could not improve my answers. In second attempt, I compared my answers with that of toppers. Incorporated their ideas and approaches in order to make mine better.

**12. How many hours should one devote for the preparations regularly?**

It may sound cliched but making the hours count is more important than counting the number of hours.

**13. Besides text books what newspapers, magazines, novels and books of general interest should one read? How one should read newspaper?**

Connect the newspaper with the syllabus. Whenever a very important issue connected with syllabus is being covered in newspaper, think of possible questions that may come.

**14. What is more important for this exam, intelligence or hard work?**

Hard work is absolutely necessary. Intelligence is also important. But it's more personal. Every candidate must channelize his/her intelligence to achieve targets they set for themselves.

**15. Do candidates with a technical background have an advantage over general students?**

Not at all, the playing field is level.

**16. In the course of preparation one is faced with many problems, queries and difficulties, where should one go for help, especially the students staying in remote areas?**

A support system built around the candidate can help him or her overcome the many challenges that the exam poses. This could be family, friends, mentors from coaching classes. This will be very candidate specific.

**17. Do coaching institutes help? If yes, how should one select, when there are so many of them?**

Coaching institutes help in giving candidates a structure to go about their preparation. There is not one size fits all solution. Location, fee, support for optional paper are some of the important factors that a candidate must look at.

**18. In which stage should one ideally opt for coaching?**

One year before the mainstream a candidate is targeting.

**19. Do you think that with increasing levels of competition, the preparation for Civil Services is getting too expensive?**

Each candidate has to find his or her path. For some it could be expensive, others it may not be so. There are people who manage expenses quite well by staying in their hometowns, using freely available resources on the internet etc.

**20. Could you suggest some ways of cutting down on expenses?**

This is not something I managed quite well. My expenses were on the higher side and I couldn't bring them down. I may not be able to give relevant suggestions.

**21. Seeing the stiffness of the competition, is this exam meant for everyone who takes it?**

There are people with average or below average academic record prior to writing this exam cracking it every year. And many people from prestigious institutions like IIT and IIMs do not crack it. Hence, it's possible for anyone to cross the frontier.

**22. Is UPSC really unpredictable?**

Yes, there is an element of uncertainty. This keeps the playing field level.

**23. What all do you think is needed to make it to the top?**

Hard work, dedication and perseverance. Ability to find out one's own path to prepare effectively.

**24. How would you rate luck as far as success in Civil Services is concerned?**

If candidates have the humility to understand that after putting in hard work, luck is an important factor in the exam. The risk is same for everyone. So do not be intimidated by numbers like 4.5 lakhs.

**25. How was the atmosphere during your Interview?**

Board was extremely cordial and friendly. Atmosphere was pretty soothing.

**26. What do you think is the right way to face interview board confidently?**

A senior civil servant once told a group of aspirants (of which I was a part) that one has nothing to lose by being tense, but had a lot to gain by being calm.



**27. What types of questions did the Board ask? (Bio-data/Optional/Current Affairs)**

Bio data for the most part, and a bit from optional. There was no question from current affairs.

**28. What is the most important thing, one should keep in mind, while facing the Interview Board?**

Make sure that candidate is well prepared on his or her DAF. Don't get too worked up and respond in a cool and even-handed manner. I think the board is looking at responses and not answers. So even if one does not know answers to questions, it's perfectly okay to say "I don't know" and move on to the next question.

**29. During the Interview, did the board member(s) ask you any tricky question(s)?**

No. Questions were straightforward.

**30. How do you foresee your future as an administrator?**

In the Next 20-30 years, India's footprint in the world will increase manifold. I am excited to be part of the team in the Indian Foreign Service that would lay the foundations for India's rise as a great power.

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### TOPPER'S CHOICE

A big thank you to the team at FORTUNE IAS ACADEMY for guiding me through interview process. While the panels and the feedback was amazing, what helped me even more was the individual attention I got from Sylesh Fernandes Sir and Munidarsan Sir. They helped me make very important refinements in my personality which had made a world of difference in my approach to the interviews. I cannot be more thankful!

”

**Sidharth IFS**  
RANK 15, IAS CSE 2016-17

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**Hari Kallikat IAS**  
AIR 58, 2017

## Preparation Strategy

### Every journey is unique

Suppose, you are on a journey with thousand other people. All of you are travelling in the same vehicle, thus tracing the very same path. Your starting points may be different, but craving for the same destination. Irrespective of the very same journey, with very same destination, the world outside as seen from the vehicle for everyone will be different. This is the apt briefing for Civil Service preparation since one should have own plans and strategies while preparing for Indian Civil Service Exam (ICS).

Everyone should have his/her strategy while preparing for this exam because, it is the originality/genuinity of your views or analysis or answers that fetch marks in ICS. To achieve it, what is needed is to develop basic ideas about all the static portions in the syllabus and follow newspapers regularly. But the million dollar question is how to achieve this originality? Answer is very simple, originality lies in 'your' answers.

### My Journey From 58 To 58

When did my civil service preparation start...? Although the institute based preparation started during the last year of my graduation, the real preparation started years before. The real preparation implies, the interaction with people around me, with my friends, in school, in college and the socio-political activities during those days. All those activities and the knowledge accumulated alongwith them helped me significantly in my preparation.

But, entering the field of Civil Service competition opened unexpected surprises and a totally unfamiliar world. A lot of 'myths' regarding this exam revolving everywhere around us misled me too. It was Visakettan (Sreevisakh R K, IRS-IT, 2014 batch), who guided me into the realities of ICS. His approach (which I adopted later) was highly 'utilitarian'. As per his advice, I started my preparation with 'Syllabus'. I took a printout of UPSC ICS syllabus and this became my holy book during the entire period of my

preparations.

I started reading basic texts, finishing one subject after other as per syllabus. Following are the basic texts which I referred.

- Indian polity - Indian Polity by Laxmikanth
- Economy - Indian Economy by Shankar Ganesh
- Geography - NCERT's of class 6,7,9,11
- History - Modern India by Bipan Chandra
  - Spectrum for Modern India
  - NCERT class 6,7
  - Tamil Nadu class 11
  - Fine arts NCERT class 11 for art & culture
- Ecology - NCERT class 12 biology, last 4 chapters
  - Shankar's Environment text

### **Current affairs – Vision monthly magazine and InsightsonIndia daily quiz**

Along with these basic texts and materials, I regularly followed “THE HINDU” newspaper. Because of my 'love' towards “THE HINDU”, it was possible for me to skip other magazines, including 'Yojana' and 'Kurukshetra'. Back to preparation plans, after completing syllabus and basic texts once, I started preparing with previous year question papers (of new syllabus, post 2013). Here starts the 'utilitarian' part of preparation. At that point, I had finished basic texts once and had good idea of syllabus. From this point, I started revising texts on the basis of previous year question papers. The areas from which questions were asked more frequently was revised more intensively, for both prelims and mains. With such strategy and intense preparation for 2/3 months and good score in CSAT, I cleared prelims in very first attempt itself, in 2014. And for mains, I got good marks in GS and optional papers. However, my essay score was one of the lowest score secured by anyone from Kerala .i.e. 58. In that attempt, I was stopped by that 58 and hence a beautifully framed strategy and plan thus ended there.

In second attempt, I failed to clear prelims itself (since CSAT became qualifier). It was the result of some level of over-confidence. I had the confidence of clearing the prelims with 2/3 months in 2014. So, I thought of clearing 2015 prelims with much ease. But, the over confidence factor back fired. From that point, I again started preparing for 2016 attempt. Again the 'utilitarian' preparation and intense hard work started. Completed static subjects and current affairs, revised well, attempted around 75-100 mock tests, I was again at the peak of confidence when I attended my 2016 prelims. I cleared that prelims with much ease. Right after the prelims, I was pretty confident that this was going to be my year. I thoroughly prepared on subjects, studied harder and harder. Cleared mains that time and attended my first UPSC personality test. On the result date, I was confident that I will be in the list somewhere. After all it was karma playing again. I failed to make that 'royal' entry in 2016.

After that failure, I started evaluating myself and the fact “why I failed?”. The most important task in front of me was to clear prelims that time since I got

only 18 days after the results for prelims preparation. I solved 18 comprehensive papers within that short period, revised current affairs and polity and attended prelims with reduced confidence. Till the results were out, I was not completely confident about prelims. But, immediately after prelims, I started preparing for mains. The plan was not to widen the knowledge base, but error rectification. I thought of the errors that led to last year's 'failure'. I will say it is that failure, which led to the success of AIR 58 in 2017 CSE.

I identified the mistakes that I did in 2016. There was no writing practice, so, along with "Fortune Test Series", I started writing sessions along with Ramit Chennithala, Achuth and Siddharth Varma. And till the very end, because of the compulsion of Ramit, I wrote a number of model papers and corrected within us. He is such a hard working person, and carried me along with him, on the last two months before mains. We shared ideas, discussed and debated on a number of topics, where were considered important. A companion like him was a blessing during such a mentally weak period.

Along with the writing practice sessions, I attended polity and governance classes. GS2 was generally a weak paper for me, even though I was pretty confident on IR. The classes helped me to improve the basic understanding of the subjects. Similarly, I brushed geography for GS1. These are parts of the syllabus that I focused on content enrichment. Along with these approaches, I changed the answer presentation strategies. Earlier, I wrote GS mains answers in bullet points but in 2017, I shifted to multiple presentation ideas.

In order to avoid redundancy, I used paragraph models, bullet points, bubble presentations, tables, graphs, maps... and thus made the answers more presentable and made sure that the valid points virtually projecting outwards from the paper towards the evaluator. When I adopted such a strategy, what I had in mind was the views of the person evaluating my paper.

He/She may not be interested in picking points from my paper, which was scattered all over the pages. Instead, it is my responsibility to make sure the valid points are catchy. With such a viewpoint, I presented answers diversely (to reduce redundancy of approach) and with more attractiveness (to make points appealing). It is these error rectification plans which helped me to improve by mains GS score by around 20+ marks. The writing practice also helped me to improve my optional score by 30+ marks. Also, essay scores increased by 15+ marks with the same.

I believe error identification and rectification are very crucial in civil service preparation. It will help every aspirant to increase their score by a small margin, which ultimately become too crucial. For this, test series and a second person's advice is needed, or at least that helped me a lot in my preparation. I consider mock tests and proper, regular feedbacks as the key to crack prelims and mains. Write, write, write... When you are tired, take a break, do something that makes you happy and regain the lost energy and momentum, and continue writing... Even when your preparation on static subjects is incomplete, don't skip tests. Attend tests with whatever you know. What is



more important for Mains GS is writing practice and the ability to rise according to situations. Even when you don't know the answer, you should be able to give a logical reply to the question. Such an attitude should be developed. Only with this attitude one can attend all the questions in GS.

What is needed is not the knowledge about all the things in the universe, but the ability to arrange what you know when the situation demands. Information nowadays is available at the fingertip for all of us. So, testing your memory is not a requirement in 21st century. What is needed is to check the logical nature of candidates. Be logical, presentable and develop the capability to identify errors. These strategies helped me to finish my journey towards AIR 58, which I was once halted just because of another 58. So, be confident about yourself, patiently wait for the success to embrace you and till the date she embraces, work hard and smart with proper plans and strategies.

Thank you!!!

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### TOPPER'S CHOICE

“ My Alma mater in civil service preparation. The role played by Vishakhettan & Munichettan during all the years of my preparation is unmatched. Abhaychettan helped me in volumes for mains & interview preparation in short. Fortune was the source of inspiration and guidance which helped me in converting my dream into reality. ”

**Hari Kallikat IAS**  
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**Ramit Chennithala IRS**  
AIR -210, 2017  
All India UPSC Interview Topper-206/275

## Prelims

The UPSC Syllabus mentions 7 topics to be covered for Prelims such as History, Geography, Current events, General science et al. To clear prelims, we need to understand the kind of questions that UPSC asks. Understanding the question paper has to be the first task of every civil service aspirant. Though UPSC does change the examination pattern once in a while, it has remained somewhat the same for the past three to four years. And hence, one must begin by going through the previous year UPSC question papers, understand the pattern and then start reading. This exercise must be done even once actual studies have begun so that we get a concrete picture of what UPSC “expects of us”. This is because our objective is not to learn “everything under the sun”, as the popular perception among the general public goes as far as civil service examinations are concerned, but to clear the examination based on the syllabus provided. It might seem very vast, but once you start studying, we realise that it's very much under our control provided we remain 'disciplined' in our studies. There are certain focus areas for every prelims which must not be missed and I shall state them here:

1. International Organisations – reports and indices released by them
2. National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries – basically Ecology and Environment (arguably 'the' most favourite area for UPSC!)
3. India Year Book, Budget, Economic Survey – and similar government reports and materials
4. Government Schemes

In order to do “smart learning”, one need not try to read all the government schemes released. This remains a never-ending list. Instead what one must do is to cover them priority wise – first finish the schemes given in India Year Book and other government materials and then move on to other compilations. This way we can increase the 'probability' of us encountering a question, in the actual UPSC prelims, that we have learnt.

Prelims remains the toughest examination compared to the Mains and

Personality Test. This is primarily because the chances of even 'genuine' aspirants, i.e. those who have put in sincere effort towards the examination, not clearing Prelims is always there. Prelims is about the following strategies:

Remembering a lot of facts – say for instance, under which Ministry does Swachh Bharat Abhiyan scheme fall under, through which National Park does river Brahmaputra flow, how much would one have to cover to travel from Shillong to Kottayam et al.

CSAT (Paper 2): though it has been brought down to the level of a mere 'qualifying paper' where one needs to score only 33% i.e. 66 out of 200, the toughness level has been scaled up accordingly since the reform was made in 2015. Besides, there are always rumours that Paper 2 marks are taken into consideration when hundreds of people score the same in Paper

1, say for e.g. if the cut-off happens to be 110 in Paper 1 and if there are 2,000 people on that mark then UPSC would choose to check their Paper 2 marks to avoid selecting too many to pass through Prelims. Rumour or otherwise, it is better we do not undermine the CSAT exam and prepare for Comprehension and Mathematical questions accordingly.

This is a list of a books/materials I covered for prelims:

History	
Ancient	: NCERT
Medieval	: NCERT
Modern	: NCERT, Bipan Chandra, Spectrum (by Rajiv Ahir)
Geography	: NCERT, Atlas
Economics	: NCERT, Ramesh Singh
Ecology	: Fortune IAS Academy notes
Polity	: Laxmikanth, NCERT India Year Book
Union Budget, Economic Survey	: Fortune IAS Academy gist
Current Affairs	: Regular Newspaper reading

Towards the last two to three weeks just before the Prelims, one must minimize the study-time and instead attempt as many questions as possible. Fortune Prelims test series helped me a lot in this. The idea to understand is that the same bit of knowledge may be asked from a number of different perspectives. For e.g. think of the river Godavari. The questions may range from, which is the longest river to flow completely within India to the ascending order of rivers in the Indian Peninsula to through which all states of India does the river Godavari flow through. Tackling maximum number of questions helps us to understand this.

Remember, our objective is to merely 'Clear Prelims' since it is just a qualifying examination and not to score the highest. Hence, do not pressurise yourself too much even if you do not come in the top most ranks mock prelims test series. Let me give some examples:

2017 Rank #1 Anudeep Durishetty: Prelims Paper 1 score 108 (cut-off 105)

2015 Rank #1 Tina Dabi: Prelims Paper 1 score 96 (SC cut off 94)

Even the toppers were aware that merely clearing prelims is enough!

## Mains

Mains is centered on two words – 'answer-writing'. Whatever knowledge we gain, unless

we convert them into words and present it on our answer booklet, we won't score marks. With this philosophy in mind, I used to write as many answers as possible, on a regular basis. Fortune Mains Test series really helped in this. Knowing my weaknesses, my strength and fine-tuning them accordingly. Even Essay, which is our first examination for Mains, has to be practiced once in a week. Websites such as "insightsonindia.com" post practise questions on a daily basis. Following them religiously helped me refine my writing ability to a great extent.

But all of this has to be accompanied with constant reading. Random reading will not help. Instead, read according to the syllabus at hand. This way we can ensure two things, one that we have not missed out any portion and two, it boosts our confidence knowing that we have covered the syllabus completely.

### **I covered, at the least, the following books for mains:**

**GS 1:** Bipan Chandra (Modern Indian History), India After Gandhi (Post Independence Indian History), NCERT (Geography), Newspapers & Weekly Magazines (Outlook) (Society)

**GS 2:** My optional being Public Administration, I did not have to refer to anything beyond what I already had prepared. For others, "From Government to Governance: A Brief Survey of the Indian Experience" by Kuldeep Mathur can give a good start.

**GS 3:** Newspapers, 'Evernote' (app) note making

**GS 4:** as Dr. Babu Paul (Former Additional Chief Secretary, Kerala) once said in an article, ethics and morality is what you have 'within'. Go through all previous year questions and analyse how they can be answered. GS 4 lately has become a make-or-break-career examination but one need not worry too much about it provided we write 'ethically sound' answers and not make any blatant errors.

**Essay:** practise essay-writing once every week. Reading and writing makes one's skills better. It's not the diction that they looking for, using high-sounding "Exasperating Farrago of distortions" kinda-words would not help much. It is the content of the Essay that matters which can fetch us marks.

### **Public Administration**

Paper 1: Mohit Bhattacharyya, IGNOU materials (available online for free)

Paper 2: Arora and Goyal, Bidyut Chakrabarti, Newspaper

Class notes of Mr. Muni Darsan

### **Personality Test (Interview)**

Perceptions may differ, but for me, this was the comparatively easiest part. For one, here you get to speak out your mind. Two, it is a psychological game that we must play with the UPSC. My Personality Test preparation revolved around two things:

1. Know about myself – covered my DAF (Detailed Application Form - which is like one's resume that we submit once we clear prelims) from knowing the origin of my school to the history of the district I come from (just to give you an idea, in my case I had to cover Delhi since I was born and raised there, Alappuzha (father's native), Idukki (mother's native) and Thiruvananthapuram from where I graduated and been preparing for civil service.



2. Read a lot of books – novels, fiction, non-fiction almost anything and everything I could lay my hands on! I am a voracious reader and this was my exercise to keep my mind occupied.

What one must understand is this that it is okay if we are unable to answer who the current President of say, Nauru is (it is a Pacific island by the way!), but it is unpardonable if you do not know the name of your great-grand parents! This might sound ridiculous but the truth is many of today's "youth" do not know this even this much about one's own family lineage (this is not to assume that the UPSC panel members are sitting there to know our family lineage but just an example of sorts to make one understand how much we must know of ourselves). What UPSC expects from us is 100% sincerity, honesty, integrity and even the ability to say "I don't know". Yes, that is an ability because most take a step back when the need arises to admit one's lack of knowledge. As the UPSC itself claims, what they are looking for is not a 'walking encyclopedia', but a person who can 'fit the shoes of a civil servant'! That is why it's officially called a Personality Test and not an Interview.

### Some Additional Personal Pointers:

Try to spend at least half an hour a day reading a book – it could be a novel, non-fiction any genre you like – make reading and writing a habit and you would very soon realise how your personality has grown. This reading habit should be beyond your syllabus-oriented reading i.e. do not confine yourself to the books necessary for the examination alone. Joining a library would help. I have the habit of reading a lot of detective novels and historical fiction books. This is not a 'must-to-do' requisite, but it can help us be a better our personality.

Read the newspaper religiously – be an "intellectually inquisitive" personality wanting to 'know' what is happening around us – in our city, in our state, in our society, in our world. Know your enemy better than your friends! Understand every bit and part of UPSC exam pattern – the rest seems cake walk.

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**Fortune**  
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### TOPPER'S CHOICE



“ My journey in civil services preparation begins & ends with fortune. I became part of the Fortune family & as a family they gave 360 contribution towards my achievement of my results, only 1% belongs to me, the rest 99% is purely thanks to Fortune. ”

**Ramit Chennithala IRS**  
RANK 210, UPSC CSE 2017-2018

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Excellence Award to  
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First Chief Information Commissioner, Wajahat Habibullah (IAS Retd)  
leading our interview panel



Former Principal Secretary  
TKA Nair sir leading  
our interview panel in Delhi



**Anand Mohan IAS**  
AIR 472, 2017

### Preparation Strategy

I would like to share my detailed preparation strategy for Prelims, Mains and Interview with all of you with the hope that it would be of use to at least a few of you.

First of all let me burst some myths by narrating my preparation story. Unlike many people, Civil Services was not my childhood dream, which means that I did not start my preparation from my school days or my college days. In fact I had not read farther than the sports page until I started my preparations. So the first myth that should be wiped out is that one needs to start young to clear this exam.

I was never an extra ordinary student. I never topped in any of my classes (school and college included). I was a good student, that is all. So the second myth to be discarded is that you need to be brilliant and extra-ordinary to be able to clear this exam. The very fact that I was able to clear this exam, and that too in my first attempt should make this amply clear to all of you.

Another misconception among the candidates regarding preparation is that only voracious readers can clear this exam. This again is false. Personally I am not the bibliophile that you would expect a civil service topper to be. I like reading, but I don't read much. Given a choice between a book and a movie, I would always pick the movie. The key in civil service preparation is focused reading and not voracious reading. Targeted and multiple reading of select sources would be much more beneficial than very wide reading for civil services. So even if you are a lazy reader like me, civil services is still within your reach. The reason for such a long introduction, was to tell you that the people who make it into the coveted PDF file is no different than you. We are all the same, people with some skills and a lot of failings. But the things that do make a difference is having the right attitude, working in the right direction, working smartly and most importantly working in a way which the exam demands of you. I hope that the preparation strategy that I detail below would help you take a right turn

when you are at crossroads in your preparation journey.

### **Prelims**

I started my preparation in July 2016, which meant I had 11 months before I gave my first prelims in June 2017. When I began I was absolutely clueless as to where to begin and how. My general knowledge was next to nil, I hardly had any acquaintance with any of the static subjects. Which meant that I was badly in need of guidance if I had any chance of clearing the exam in the first attempt. So I enrolled in Fortune IAS Academy. I followed the classes at Fortune regularly and it gave me a solid foundation for my preparation.

For the first 4-5 months, my preparation consisted of, spending 3 hours in the classroom, 3 hours reading the newspaper and 3-4 hours revising the topics covered in the class. Also there were fortnightly tests based on NCERT text books, so I covered most of the NCERT texts in the first 4-5 months.

By December I had completed the static portions at least once. Starting December I enrolled in the Prelims Test Series offered by Fortune, and I divided my time between preparing Mains and Optionals with the weekly sectional mock tests. I never stopped reading the newspaper and continued to spend at least 2 hours on The Hindu and also made notes. Since I was a little tensed about clearing prelims I devoted 90 days from March, April and May for focused prelims prep. In that period I made a time table so that I would be able to cover all the major portions including current affairs in 60 days' time. In the last 30 days before prelims, I did nothing but revise. Which meant I had nothing in front of my eyes in the last 30 days that I hadn't read before.

I combined my own notes from Newspapers and Vision Current Affairs compilation into very short written notes, I was able to reduce this one year's worth of notes into two 100 page notebooks. I read and re-read these two books multiple times in the last 30 days before prelims.

### **Mains**

There was no special preparation for Mains GS as such. Almost all the data that is required to write a good answer has been amassed on course of the year's preparation. My main focus was on answer writing practice. I had started writing answers very early. Me and my friend used to pick questions from "Insights Secure" and answer them in specified time. Then we would exchange our answers and review one another. This helped me immensely. Also I had kept three notebooks separately for each of the GS papers and I noted down important events, news, trivia and incidents relating to each paper in the respective notebook. So I had a treasure of unique points which I could use in my answers.

After prelims, answer writing was intensified. I again enrolled in Fortune Mains Test Series which was a game changer for me. This helped me immensely improve my writing skills. I strongly recommend joining a



reputed Mains Test Series. I also tried to write as many essays as possible and get it corrected by seniors as well as faculty members. I also attended classes for Mains at Fortune. Governance classes were particularly useful. For Governance portion in GS 2, I read nothing more than the class notes.

I had completed the portions for Optionals once (though not conclusively) by Dec. After prelims I used to spend 3-4 hours on the Optional subject again. The stress here too was more on answer writing than rote learning.



IAS in First Attempt - Anand Mohan

## Interview

This is the part where I enjoyed the most. I basically had the freedom to do the things I always wanted to do. I began to read the newspaper so extensively that some days I spend 5-6 hours on the newspaper alone. I did not make any notes, I just googled something interesting and then clicked another link from there, I just let the inquisitiveness of my mind run wild. The only thing I prepared was the DAF. I researched a lot about the hobbies that I had given, tried to develop my hobbies further and also prepared on my graduation subject. I also made it a habit to watch the "The Big Picture" on Rajya Sabha TV and also watched a lot of Al Jazeera for the World News.

The most important aspect in interview preparation is to be as much vocal as possible. Form a discussion group and discuss current affairs topics or some topic you think is relevant. What matters more is that you communicate well. Giving Mock Interviews are good, but don't try to do a lot. Pick and choose good panels and do not try to incorporate all the suggestions that are thrown at you in a mock interview. Only accept those suggestions which you think are relevant. Make sure to read the paper on the day of the interview. Go with a smile. Be yourself and just dazzle them. That is almost it. This is what I did as far as preparation is concerned. DO not try to mimic anyone's preparation strategy, it won't work. Try to incorporate facets of toppers' strategies that would be relevant to your mode of preparation.

Wish you all the very best!!!



**Arya VM IAS**  
AIR 36, 2023

### **What was the feeling after securing such a brilliant rank of AIR 36?**

I felt a sense of relief when I saw the result. I never expected a two-digit rank. I had only hoped that I would make it into the list somehow. The first thing that came to my mind when I saw the result is that I don't have to write the exam again.

### **A brief introduction about your background?**

I hail from Balaramapuram in Trivandrum, my parents are retired government employees. I studied English literature for my BA and MA.

### **What was your motivation to pursue a career in Civil Services?**

When I was in 8th standard. I saw a lot of littering around the streets. When I asked around about who could fix these issues, I was informed that the collector could help. A dream was instilled in me that day.

When I was in 11th standard, I attended a foundation class by Sylesh sir. It gave me the direction to pursue my dream.

### **Did you have any insecurities when you started seriously preparing for the exam?**

From the beginning, the civil services dream is one that has kept me awake at night for so many days, I had a lot of insecurities. The truth is that at every stage of the exam, I thought that I wouldn't clear it. I hadn't fully backed myself. The UPSC journey is filled with uncertainties. I had come through all these insecurities. My biggest confidence was the effort that I had put in. I backed myself to give my 100%.

### **What was the difference between your first and second attempt?**

Presence of mind was the key. I still consider my first attempt to be the one where I've studied the most. But I hadn't kept my calm and that led to my failure in my first attempt. During my second attempt, I worked on my



presence of mind during the actual exam and that helped me very much.

### **Did you join any programs for your second attempt?**

I had joined Fortune's prelims cum mains Booster program. I had diligently followed the program and that helped me a lot.

### **How did you manage your time daily?**

I'm more of a night person. My day starts with the newspaper. I used to study a new portion after that and would revise the earlier portions during the evening. On average, I used to spend 6-8 hours daily on studies.

### **Did you attend all the lectures at fortunes?**

I had tried to attend all the lectures that were part of my classes. Looking back, attending classes religiously was one of the main reasons which helped me clear this exam.

### **How did you prepare for current affairs?**

I used to selectively make notes from the newspaper on important topics. I followed the monthly compilation of only one academy throughout my preparation. The newspaper helped me a lot throughout my preparation.

### **Dilip Kainikkara was your mentor during the mains exam at fortune. How did the interaction with him help you in shaping your answers?**

Dilip sir gave me flexibility to work on my answers. The space he gave me helped me improve my answers.

### **What was your support system during your preparation?**

The role my friends played throughout my journey is very important, both technically and emotionally. I had a strong peer group at fortune and that helped me so much in my journey.

### **How did you prepare for your optionals?**

English literature was my post-graduation subject. I had referred to previous year questions on every topic before studying them. That helped me cover the topics holistically. I was okay with the content part but I had struggled with answer writing. My friends at fortune who had the same optionals helped me in evaluating my answers.

### **How did you prepare for the Personality Test?**

I didn't think that I would clear mains. So, when I got the interview call, I was grateful. The interview stage is the most enjoyable process in this journey. The interview stage is not a knowledge test, it's more of a personality test. The actual board is very cordial. The mock interviews helped me a lot.

### **A message for the new aspirants?**

This is going to be a long journey. Self-realisation and understanding the exam are key to cracking this exam. Trust yourself and keep on trying.



**FORTUNE  
IAS ACADEMY**

**ARYA V M  
IAS**

**RANK 36, 2023**

**M**y quest for civil services got a direction when I joined a foundation course headed by Sylesh sir when I was in 11th standard. Later I joined the full time Prelims cum Mains batch at Fortune IAS Academy. Here I got the support from Nitin sir, Anton sir, Anand sir, Nandagopan sir, Achuth sir and Imthiyaz sir for the mentorship provided across prelims, mains and interview stages. Most importantly, the peer group I could gather at Fortune played a pivotal role in whatever I could achieve.



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**Meera K IAS**  
AIR 6, 2021

### **How was your journey to the IAS?**

My mother encouraged me from my childhood to pursue Civil Services. I had a good ecosystem in my college and that helped me too. My mentor Munidarsan sir guided me to Fortune IAS Academy which kickstarted my preparation for UPSC.

### **How did you handle the failures along the journey?**

For the majority of the people on this path, failures are a part of their journey. We aren't superheroes. I have gone through failures so many times but even then, the support from the people around me motivated me. For those times when you're sad and believe that the same cannot be handled by ourselves, you can use that as an opportunity for introspection and to rectify the shortcomings in your strategy.

The other times I would take a break from the preparation. That helped me a lot to not sulk over my failures. Own up your mistakes, rectify them but don't be too self-critical.

### **What are the changes that you made in your current attempt from your first attempt?**

I did not have much time in my first serious attempt. So, I resorted to covering the basics of all the essential topics. I couldn't cover some of the important parts in economy. I had also missed some NCERT's in that attempt. These are some of the things I rectified in my next attempt. I also made syllabus wise notes for my mains.

### **Tell us about the changes that you made in your optional preparation?**

The main changes I made in my optional preparation is that I made sure that I had in depth understanding of the topics this time. In my first serious attempt I only had the knowledge from attending classes at fortune and I had only started preparing sociology properly after clearing the mains. So,

this time I made sure to join a proper test series and have a structured studying of my optional subject.

### **What were the changes you made in your interview preparation?**

In my first interview, I had many gaps in covering many aspects of the DAF and current affairs. This time, I put in much more effort and covered my mistakes from my first attempt. I prepared on each and every single word in my DAF. I also focused much on current affairs this year. I think this helped me improve my marks.

### **What made you choose Sociology as your optional subject?**

There are two important factors in choosing an optional. Interest and practical aspect. I had a keen interest on Sociology and that helped me put in consistent hours into it. It is also a well scoring optional with abundant materials and faculties available.



# MEERA K IAS

**RANK 06, 2021**

**F**ortune IAS Academy played a pivotal role in my UPSC preparation. Special thanks to Muni sir, Sylesh sir and Jeevan sir for supporting me through my highs and lows. Thank you Team Fortune!



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**Dilip K Kainikkara IAS**  
AIR 21, 2022

**After graduation from IIT Madras and a dream job at Samsung with a salary of 1Crore per annum, what made you choose civil services as a career?**

I was satisfied with the job at Samsung. But personally, I wanted to be involved in a job which could make a difference in society and that led me to thinking about a career in Civil Services.

**You were a high achiever academically throughout your life. But had to face failures in two attempts before securing such a huge victory in your third attempt. What was going through your mind when you failed in your first two attempts?**

I was underprepared for my first attempt. But I had studied well for my second attempt. I had prepared my GS and Optionals well but I was unable to execute it as well as I had planned. In retrospect, I could've done better.

**You mentioned the failures in executing your plan. A first-time aspirant may commit these same mistakes. What were those mistakes? How did you overcome it?**

Maths was my optional subject. I had studied the theory part well and had confidence that I would get the answer if I attempted a question. But I had not focused on time management and that backfired during my optionals exam.

**What mistakes were made during the prelims?**

I had cleared prelims in all three of my attempts. That's a stage I'm comfortable in. The most important thing I do for prelims is to follow a prelims test series. I studied according to the timetable. Confidence is also a huge factor in clearing prelims.

**What was your personal study time table?**

I followed the prelims test series timetable. I completed my portions





Dilip K Kainikkara, IAS (AIR 21 and Kerala Topper) being felicitated by former Health Minister K K Shailaja MLA in the presence of V K Prashanth MLA, TKA Nair, IAS (Retd) and HN Nair, ICAS (Retd) at Fortune IAS Toppers Felicitation function 2022.

according to the test the next week.

### **What was your Mains preparation strategy?**

The test series is what helped me the most. Regardless of how much content we have, to execute it correctly in the mains exam is a different skill. Also, I focused more on optionals. I revised it as many times as I could after the prelims exam. I also covered mains exclusive topics such as post-independence history, internal security etc in 3 weeks after the preliminary exam.

### **How was the mains test series experience at fortune?**

Nitin sir was my mentor. He was a really good mentor. His feedback was really insightful. He pinpointed exactly what I should do to score more marks in mains. He is very experienced in this field. His insights helped me a lot in my essay and GS. Fortune Mains Test Series was really helpful in helping me score good marks in mains.

### **You had attended two interviews. How was the overall interview experience?**

We hear so many things about the UPSC Interview. But it was surprising to me that it was not like how I had heard about it before. It is a personality test. It is our personality that is tested and not our knowledge. It was more of a friendly conversation than a typical job interview.

### **You were also a mentor at fortune, giving you the opportunity to interact with so many first-time aspirants. What are some of the common mistakes they commit in their first attempt?**

A lack of planning. Selecting optionals based on popular trends and not one suitable to them.

### How has your life changed after your splendid victory?

I'm relieved that I'm out of the UPSC loop. When the results came, I was attempting a prelims test preparing for the next attempt.

### What are your priorities when you become an IAS officer?

I have an overall vision to bring a difference in the society. Specifically, I wish to study the problems regardless of whichever post I'm assigned to. I wish to create an actual actionable change in the society.

### What are the most memorable moments in overall preparation journey?

This was a collective effort. I had a really good peer group and that was really helpful in my journey. Even during my failures, their support helped me the most. I have a lot of good memories of my peers in Fortune.

### A message for the aspirants?

The most important that I have to say is to keep at it. Dedication is the most important. If you believe in yourself, you can definitely reach your goals.



## DILIP K KAINIKKARA IAS

**RANK 21, 2022**  
**PRESENTLY POSTED AS**  
**ASST COLLECTOR,**  
**KASARAGOD**

**F**ortune IAS Academy has been an integral part of my UPSC preparation, especially in my latest effort. The insights and feedback provided by Nitin sir during the Mains Test Series program was quite helpful in improving my Mains marks. Also the mock interviews and one on one sessions with Fortune played an important role in moulding my interview skills and demeanour.



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- ✓ Flexibility - online and offline classes
- ✓ Topper's talk
- ✓ Extra curricular activities



Excellent reading room facilities





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# DEVI NANDANA IFS

**RANK 92, 2020**

I had enrolled for the Mains Test Series (MTS 2019) at Fortune immediately after Prelims 2019. Fortune's MTS is designed to effectively cover the entire syllabus of mains. The programme comprises of Module tests to focus on each entry in the syllabus as well as comprehensive tests to familiarise the actual UPSC examination pattern.

The one on one mentorship by experienced mentors helped me improve on answer quality and time management with each test. The timely feedbacks after each test, identification of problem areas and proper strategizing by my mentors helped me in putting my best foot forward in CSE Mains 2019.







### Topper's Talk Session -

Arya V M, IAS (AIR 36) with Anton Babu, Director, Fortune IAS Academy



Please scan this QR code  
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A black and white photograph of two hands shaking, symbolizing agreement or partnership. The hands are positioned in the upper half of the image, with the fingers interlaced.

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