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# INTERVIEW GUIDANCE SERIES 2024

#01

## UNDERSTANDING THE ESSENCE OF UPSC'S PERSONALITY TEST: INSIGHTS FROM UPSC NOTIFICATION

Manoj K. Jha



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# UNDERSTANDING THE ESSENCE OF UPSC PERSONALITY TEST: INSIGHTS FROM UPSC NOTIFICATION

Manoj K. Jha

The UPSC's Personality Test stands as a unique and critical phase in the journey of aspirants seeking a career in public service. Beyond the scope of traditional examinations, this interview is a multidimensional exploration of a candidate's suitability for the responsibilities that come with serving the public.

It comprises of a dynamic discussion covering a wide spectrum of general interest topics, guided by a purpose far more sophisticated than a mere evaluation of academic learning. Looking deep into the essence of this stage and the evaluation that comes with it, we try and look at the layers that define its significance and the qualities it seeks to unearth.

## Read Carefully: The Demand of UPSC

- ❑ **Engaging Discussions:** The candidate will engage in discussions covering a spectrum of general interest topics.
- ❑ **Personal Suitability:** The primary objective of the Personality Test lies in evaluating the candidate's personal suitability for a career in public service. This evaluation is conducted by a board of competent and impartial observers.

- ❑ **Mental Prowess:** The Personality Test serves as a gauge for the mental prowess of the candidate.
- ❑ **Holistic Assessment:** It evaluates not only intellectual capabilities but also social traits and awareness of current affairs.
- ❑ **Key Qualities:** Attributes such as mental alertness, critical assimilation powers, clear and logical expression, balanced judgment, diverse and profound interests, social cohesion, leadership ability, as well as intellectual and moral integrity, are key aspects to be assessed.
- ❑ **Interview Technique:** The test employs a natural, directed, and purposeful conversation designed to unveil the candidate's mental attributes, rather than a rigid cross-examination.
- ❑ **Beyond Knowledge:** The test does not reiterate the candidates' specialized or general knowledge, which has already been tested through their written papers.
- ❑ **Curiosity Expected:** Candidates are anticipated to exhibit intelligent curiosity in their academic specializations and ongoing events within and beyond their State or Country. This extends to a keen interest in modern currents of thought and recent discoveries.

## The Essence of the UPSC Personality Test

The UPSC Personality Test carries out a variety of assessments at the same time. It is meticulously designed to decipher the mental makeup of aspiring public servants. It goes beyond the boundaries of conventional examinations, focusing not just intellectual capabilities but also social traits, awareness of current affairs, and a host of qualities that define effective leadership.

As candidates go through this purposeful conversation, they find that success lies not only in what they know but, perhaps more significantly, in who they are. The interview room becomes a stage for candidates to showcase not just their knowledge but their intellectual curiosity, social acumen, and the inquisitiveness expected of those ready to serve with distinction.

The official instructions in the UPSC notification provide a clear blueprint of what the Personality Test demands, helping candidates align their preparation with the expectations of the interview board.

## Breaking Down the UPSC Personality Test

### ❑ Questions on Matters of General Interest

- **What it Means:** The board does not seek highly technical or specialized knowledge. Instead, it aims to assess a candidate's awareness and perspective on broad themes and general issues of contemporary relevance.
- **Preparation Tip:** Develop a holistic understanding of current affairs, societal issues, and ethical dilemmas. Cultivate a balanced perspective on both national and global issues.
- **Example:** If asked about climate change, the focus will not be on specific scientific data but on how you perceive its social, economic, and ethical impacts and potential solutions.

### ❑ Objective of the Personality Test

- **Personal Suitability:** The test evaluates a candidate's aptitude for civil services based on personal qualities such as emotional intelligence, adaptability, and ethical values.
- **Unbiased Observers:** The board comprises experienced members who assess candidates without prejudice or preconceived notions.
- **Preparation Tip:** Reflect on your motivations for joining public service and how your personal values align with the responsibilities of a civil servant.

### ❑ Judging Mental Caliber

- **What it Involves:** Mental calibre encompasses cognitive skills like comprehension, problem-solving, decision-making, and the ability to handle pressure.
- **Preparation Tip:** Practice responding to situational questions to showcase your ability to remain composed and think logically in challenging scenarios.
- **Example:** A question about resolving a community dispute might assess your capacity for empathy, negotiation, and conflict resolution.

### ❑ Assessment of Intellectual and Social Qualities

- **Dual Evaluation:** The Personality Test evaluates not just intellectual sharpness but also emotional and social intelligence.

- **Interest in Current Affairs:** The board expects candidates to demonstrate awareness and insight into current socio-political and economic developments.
- **Preparation Tip:** Engage in critical discussions on recent events and their implications. Build your understanding of public policies, global trends, and grassroots realities.

### ▣ Key Qualities to Be Judged

- **Mental Alertness:** Demonstrates presence of mind and the ability to think quickly.
- **Critical Powers of Assimilation:** Reflects the ability to absorb, analyze, and synthesize information thoughtfully.
- **Clear and Logical Exposition:** Highlights clarity of thought and coherent expression.
- **Balance of Judgment:** Assesses impartiality and the ability to consider diverse perspectives before forming conclusions.
- **Variety and Depth of Interest:** Reveals intellectual curiosity and a well-rounded personality.
- **Social Cohesion and Leadership:** Tests your ability to inspire collaboration and harmony.
- **Intellectual and Moral Integrity:** Reflects adherence to ethical principles and intellectual honesty.
- **Preparation Tip:** Reflect on how these qualities manifest in your daily interactions and decision-making. Be ready to demonstrate them through real-life examples and situational responses.

### ▣ Interview Technique

- **Natural yet Directed Conversation:** The Personality Test is not a rigid cross-examination but a purposeful interaction aimed at understanding the candidate's thought process.
- **Preparation Tip:** Engage in mock interviews that simulate a conversational yet focused environment. Practice articulating your thoughts without hesitation.



- **Example:** If asked about your views on the rural-urban divide, the conversation might explore your understanding of the issue, proposed solutions, and ethical considerations.

#### ▣ **Beyond Specialized Knowledge**

- **What It Means:** The board explores the candidate's broader understanding and application of knowledge in real-world contexts.
- **Preparation Tip:** Avoid overloading answers with technical jargon. Instead, focus on demonstrating practical understanding and balanced perspectives.

#### ▣ **Expectation of Intelligent Interest**

- **Areas of Focus:**
  - Awareness of contemporary events within and outside the country.
  - Knowledge of modern currents of thought and discoveries that shape societal progress.
- **Preparation Tip:** Develop a genuine curiosity for learning and remain updated on scientific advancements, technological innovations, and cultural trends.
- **Example:** A question about artificial intelligence might explore not just its technological aspects but also its ethical implications, economic impact, and role in governance.

**Lets understand this with more examples-** unlike conventional interviews, it's a test of "Personality". It unfolds as an engaging, semi-structured, yet formal conversation, aiming to gauge the holistic suitability of a candidate for the Indian Administrative Services (IAS).

Lets look at the key qualities assessed during the interview, and their significance with examples.

- ▣ **Mental Alertness** - Mental alertness refers to being fully present and engaged in the moment, demonstrating a sharp "presence of mind." It involves quickly grasping the context of questions and adapting to changing directions during the conversation.

- **Indicators of Lack:** Repeatedly asking for clarifications, missing cues or hints provided by the board, or failing to understand the underlying context of a question.
  - **Example:** If the board asks a follow-up question with a twist, such as, “How would you handle a conflicting directive from two senior officers?” a mentally alert candidate would promptly grasp the dilemma and respond with a balanced and thoughtful answer, showcasing adaptability and focus.
- **Critical Power of Assimilation**-This quality evaluates whether a candidate can go beyond rote learning to reflect, introspect, and form reasoned conclusions based on available information.
- **Key Requirement:** A candidate must synthesize diverse perspectives and offer a balanced, well-reasoned view rather than just listing facts.
  - **Example:** When asked about the efficacy of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a candidate with critical assimilation would discuss its benefits, challenges, and suggest improvements, rather than merely reciting its provisions.
- **Clear and Logical Exposition**-The ability to present thoughts in a structured, coherent, and logical manner. It involves avoiding vagueness and ensuring that responses follow a logical sequence.
- **What It Involves:**
    - ◆ Presenting facts and arguments in order of relevance or importance.
    - ◆ Avoiding excessive jargon and ensuring clarity.
  - **Example:** If asked about climate change policies, a candidate might start by explaining the global context, India’s position, and key initiatives like the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC), before discussing challenges and solutions, thus maintaining logical flow and clarity.
- **Balance of Judgment** - Balance of judgment refers to the ability to assess situations impartially, considering all facets before forming an opinion. It discourages rash decisions based on incomplete information, prejudice, or bias.



- **Key Aspects:**

- Weighing pros and cons of an issue.
- Considering moral, ethical, and long-term implications.

- **Example:** When asked about the pros and cons of implementing a uniform civil code, a balanced candidate would acknowledge its potential for fostering equality while also considering its implications for cultural diversity, thus presenting a nuanced perspective.

- ▢ **Ability for Social Cohesion and Leadership** - This quality assesses the candidate's understanding of the need for unity in diversity and their capacity to lead in a way that promotes inclusivity and collaboration.

- **Key Traits of Leadership:**

- Identifying problems and proposing viable solutions.
- Demonstrating optimism, resilience, and team spirit.
- Avoiding populism and ensuring judicious use of resources.

- **Example:** A leadership-oriented response to a question on managing a flood situation might include forming teams, prioritizing resource allocation, addressing immediate needs, and planning for long-term mitigation, while maintaining transparency and accountability.

- ▢ **Intellectual and Moral Integrity** - Integrity forms the backbone of public service. It involves demonstrating honesty, ethical conduct, and adherence to principles in thought and action.

- **Importance in Public Service:**

- Builds trust and credibility among citizens.
- Ensures governance that is fair, humane, and equitable.

- **Example:** In a question about handling corruption allegations against a subordinate, a candidate showcasing integrity would emphasize the importance of due process, impartial inquiry, and adherence to ethical standards, regardless of personal biases.

- ▢ **Effective Communication Skills** - The ability to express thoughts clearly, concisely, and confidently without being overly verbose or ambiguous.

- **Key Aspects:**

- Using language that is simple yet impactful.
- Adjusting communication style based on the audience.

- **Example:** When asked about India's foreign policy stance, a good communicator would articulate key principles such as strategic autonomy and peaceful coexistence, illustrating with relevant examples like India's role in the G20 or the QUAD.

- ▣ **Awareness of Current Affairs-** Demonstrates a candidate's awareness of national and global issues and their ability to analyze the implications of these events.

- **What It Involves:**

- Staying updated on recent developments across sectors.
- Understanding the larger context and potential consequences of current events.

- **Example:** If asked about the implications of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on India's energy security, a well-prepared candidate would discuss the shift towards renewable energy, the impact on crude oil prices, and India's geopolitical balancing act.

- ▣ **Composure Under Pressure-** The ability to remain calm and composed even in high-pressure situations or when faced with unexpected or provocative questions.

- **Importance:** Reflects emotional stability and resilience, both critical for effective public administration.

- **Example:** If asked a challenging or controversial question about reservation policies, a composed candidate would avoid defensive or aggressive tones, instead presenting a reasoned and balanced response.

- ▣ **Curiosity and Learning Orientation-** UPSC values candidates with an inquisitive mindset and a genuine desire for continuous learning and improvement.

- **Indicators:**

- Showing interest in acquiring knowledge and understanding new perspectives.

- Acknowledging gaps in knowledge with humility and enthusiasm to learn.
- **Example:** When asked about an emerging technology like quantum computing, a candidate might share what they know while expressing curiosity about its potential future applications in governance.

## Final Reflections

- ▣ The UPSC Personality Test is not just an evaluation; it is a transformative journey for candidates stepping into public service. It challenges aspirants to introspect, refine their perspectives, and develop qualities that define effective leadership. Beyond academic knowledge, the test values empathy, composure, and the ability to approach complex problems with a balanced and ethical mindset.
- ▣ Every question posed by the board is an opportunity to reveal your character, vision, and readiness to shoulder the responsibilities of governance. Success in the interview hinges on authenticity—being genuine in your motivations and demonstrating a clear commitment to serving the nation.
- ▣ Preparation is key, but so is the ability to stay grounded and adaptable during the process. The interview room is not a battleground for showcasing facts but a platform to exhibit intellectual curiosity, moral integrity, and a well-rounded personality. Embrace the challenge with confidence and an open mind, and you'll find that the journey to becoming a civil servant is as rewarding as the destination itself.

**Manoj K. Jha**

Director – GS SCORE

