

HOW TO APPROACH CSE 2021 INTERVIEW

— Arpan Yaduvanshi, IPS —

Civil services 'personality test', also popularly known as '**interview**' is the final phase in the three stages of examination and is the most important of all, as the marks in the interview decide the service of your choice. **Interview** is the **least prepared** of all, but if rightly managed it can be a most rewarding experience.

It is the last hurdle, still quite a significant one. Marks in this may result in amongst the top rank or may evict you out of the race, no matter how good you have been performing till now. Marks in the interview have a great bearing on your selection/elimination or at least on your service allocation.

Purpose of Interview and what an interview board expects:

Civil service interview is more or less like a discussion. The members **don't check** how much knowledge you possess or how in-depth you know things about as they have already checked these stuffs in your prelims and Mains examination. They only check your presence of mind and problem handling capacity.

If you look at the Gazette notification for both CSE and 'Personality Test', this is what is mentioned:

- ❑ "The candidate will be interviewed by a Board who will have before them a record of his/her career. He/ she will be asked *questions on matters of general interest*. The object of the interview is to *assess the personal suitability of the candidate for a career in public service by a Board of competent and unbiased observers*. The test is intended to judge the mental caliber of a candidate. In broad terms this is really an assessment of not only his/her intellectual qualities but also social traits and his/her interest in current affairs. Some of the qualities to be judged are mental alertness, critical powers of assimilation, clear and logical exposition, balance of judgment, variety and depth of interest, ability for social cohesion and leadership, intellectual and moral integrity".
- ❑ "*The technique of the interview is not that of a strict cross-examination but of a natural, thought directed and purposive conversation which is intended to reveal the mental qualities of the candidate.*"
- ❑ "The interview test is not intended to be a test either of the specialized or general knowledge of the candidates which has been already tested through their written papers. *Candidates are expected to have taken an intelligent interest not only in their special subjects of academic study but also in the events which are happening around them both within and outside their own state or country as well as in modern currents of thought and in new discoveries which should rouse the curiosity of well-educated youth.*"

This might come across as jargon for first time readers, but frankly it pretty much sums up the answer to your question. Pay special attention to those keywords that are italicized. If any candidate, irrespective of her academics, grades, experience and background is able to have this checklist done right, 200+ is highly feasible. Yes, there might be a factor of some luck involved too but it is better to focus on the things we have in our hands than those which we don't!

As a future administrator you are supposed to be unbiased, neutral and apolitical in your views. Moreover, UPSC looks for professional as well as intellectual integrity in the candidates. It doesn't matter whether you are a left, center or right in your political leanings or what your religious views are, what matters is whether you display a balanced opinion on issues or not. Also, under no circumstance you should try to manipulate your answers because the board members are very experienced people and they usually know if you try to manipulate. And that reflects very poorly on you. Also, there is very less ideological bias in the selection because they are selecting future civil servants and not politicians and civil servants being the permanent executive are by the very nature of their job, supposed to be ideologically neutral. There are few tips that can help a candidate to sail through the interview.

- ❑ Don't just answer a question, **discuss** them with the board. I think one should **engage with the members** while answering questions.
- ❑ Be **humble** while answering. If you didn't know any answer, directly say, I am sorry sir I don't know the answer/unable to recollect at the moment but also say that I will look it up. Never ever try to bluff the board.
- ❑ **Never beat around the bush.** If you didn't have absolutely any idea about any question say, sorry sir I don't know. But many a time there are questions we are not totally sure of, but we know the answer. What most people do is say sorry and don't answer that question but it's a bad move. What one should do is to say that Sir I don't have complete idea about this issue but if you allow me, I will try to explain it in my own words. Then if they say go ahead and then explain. The thing is that one should always ask for their permission otherwise it reflects very poorly on you. Same goes for taking a guess. And trust me it's the way you say also matters. Never say that Sir **Can/May I** take a guess? Instead it's better if you say Sir **If you allow me** I will take a guess.

- ❑ If you are not comfortable with any area of DAF be prepared for explaining and if you haven't been able to pursue any hobby/interest in recent past straightway tell them so.
- ❑ **Be prepared for vague questions.** There were so many of them in everyone's interview. What I feel is that if you don't understand the question asks them humbly to repeat. So, it is much better to say **I am sorry sir/I beg your pardon sir** I didn't understand your question than to say Sir would you please repeat the question. Trust me it's easier said than done.

Overall, it's **the range of interests and knowledge, honesty, truthfulness, humbleness and calm demeanor that matters in the interview.** And one should be happy during that interview. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity to meet so many knowledgeable people. The interviewers are not testing merely your knowledge; rather they are testing your personality traits through your answers. And that is why it is absolutely okay not to answer a few questions and that doesn't affect your marks. But if your answers reveal any bad personality traits you will be awarded poor marks.

Also, it is absolutely vital to **be unbiased and balanced** in your approach towards issues. As an administrator you are not supposed to take sides and be impartial and judge issues based on fact and that is what should be reflected in your answers. It does not mean that you can't have an ideology. UPSC doesn't want people who are bereft of ideology; rather they want people who are **appreciative and accommodating of other opinions.**

Also, under **no** circumstances your answers should reflect **arrogance or lackadaisical attitude** towards life or other people. **That's why it is acceptable that you might have failed at a certain point of time in your life, but what is not acceptable is that you don't have a valid explanation for the same.** So, if you have, poor marks in academics be ready to have an explanation that shows your positive attitude towards it like what you learnt from it, how you overcame/bettered yourself after that setback and the like.

Topics that needs to be covered for interview preparation

DAF

Details like significance of date of birth, significance of your name, family background, service order, cadre order, giving other exams etc. should be looked into.

State

You need to be thorough with your **state's major topics**: Demography, Challenges, Inter-State conflicts, Agriculture, Industry, Culture, History, Major tourist spots, Weaknesses, Unique Opportunities, Resources, etc. State Development Reports (SDRs) published by the government are available for each state. They are quite comprehensive. State Government websites are also useful. If no other resource is available, then you can also go for NBT books available for each state.

Hobbies and Games

This is the most feared part of UPSC interview. It's advisable to write one or at maximum two hobbies. You should be clear with **broader contours** of your hobby. Let us take 'Sketching' as an example, following can be your expected points of understanding:

- ❑ Types of sketching,
- ❑ Techniques of sketching,
- ❑ Some famous sketch artists/ painters/ cartoonists,
- ❑ Importance of sketching in academics, like, geography, cartography, anatomy studies, etc.
- ❑ How it changes your worldview or approach to see the world

around?

- ▣ How sketching would help you in IAS?
- ▣ Issues related to Right to Freedom of expression, for ex, M.F. Husain issue

These along with, what is your inspiration are some of the must know questions. At the same time, some should-know questions may include comparison of various forms of paintings, paintings in temple architecture of India, Photography vs Painting, Schools of Painting etc.

Background

You should be thoroughly familiar with your Schools, Colleges and Employers on a broader level. Again, do not explore into detailed history but a cursory knowledge over important topics like meaning of the school name should be there. The important peripheral issues related to your background should be adequately addressed. Let us take IIT as an example of your college. Questions like Change in standards of Alumnus, Brain drain, Loss of engineer if you join IAS, Entrepreneurship culture, Why IAS after IIT, opening up of new IITs, Autonomy of IITs etc. should be prepared with diligence.

Achievements and Positions of Responsibility

Again falls into the must know topics. Should be thorough with these things. Peripheral questions like how they have impacted your personality, key learning for life etc. should be prepared.

Current Affairs

Continue reading newspaper. This time of the phase demands two newspapers, one a bit right-of-center and other a bit left-of-center. The two techniques stated above will be more than helpful in this phase.

Optional and Graduation

Basic topics related to your graduation subject are expected but they are less likely to be asked if you have a prior work experience. You

should be thorough with your optional as many questions will be related to the optional directly or indirectly.

Groups for mock Interview

It's a good practice to form groups for interview preparation. Form a group of around 3-5 friends (group of 3-, too less diversity while group of 5+, too much time pass). Take mock interviews of each other once a day. Blatant and explicit flaws will be easily pointed out and the basic common questions will be practiced. Also, you come into the flow of giving the interview.

Mocks

The correlation of mock interviews with scoring high marks in the interview is a debatable topic. Don't ever lose your originality. Yet, it is advisable that if you have never given a mock interview, then giving 1 or 2 mocks would be helpful to get some unambiguous and clear-cut errors pointed out to you. However, the feedback of the mock interviewers should not be taken very seriously. Different mock boards may give contradicting feedbacks. You should not try to modify your personality too much before the interview. Be yourself.

Finally, some useful tips for a successful interview at UPSC are:

- ❑ To have a positive body language, your gesture and posture should reflect a confident person. Sit comfortably showing respect to board members.
- ❑ To have a good personal turnout and ensuring the right posture. Your attire should be formal. The looks of a person does not matter rather it is how he present himself/herself in those 30-40 minutes is important.

- ❑ To answer questions clearly and confidently taking a little pause in between. Always have a pleasant smile.
- ❑ Try to remain calm and composed even when faced with provocative questions because it might be possible that you are falling in a trap. Members test your temperament and patience through such discussion.
- ❑ Try not getting into long winded explanations and answer to the point. Be honest, no need to pretend as the board is well experienced.

Things to be avoided at the UPSC interview

- ❑ Avoid conversational clichés, like: 'as you know', 'that's correct', 'of course', 'indeed', 'obviously', etc.
- ❑ Avoid technical jargon. However, if a member continues to probe you in any technical field, you can use technical expressions.
- ❑ Maintain a cheerful disposition. Now and then you can appear serious; but most of the time keep smiling or look cheerful and composed. **One caution here:** if the board laughs, you should only smile. It is only when you maintain some amount of distance that the board begins to wonder about the depth of your personality.
- ❑ Do not give long introductions. Come straight to the heart of the matter.
- ❑ Show human concern whenever possible in your answers.
- ❑ You should be logically consistent and analyze things rationally while talking. You are supposed to defend what you say, but with due respect to the views of the board. Stop trying to defend an answer if it becomes difficult to do so logically and fairly.
- ❑ Do not make hasty or sweeping generalizations.

Last but not the least, have utmost faith in yourself, which will drive you to back yourself till the very end with confidence and poise.

All The Best To Aspirants!