

PREPARING FOR IAS INTERVIEW: THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

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With the announcement of the results of the civil services main examination, a lot of excitement, fear and hope grips the mental state of the successful candidate which is but natural given the fact that after months, or even years of hard work, success almost seems to embrace him. It is the most transformative phase of the competition which will change the entire world for him. It has the power to change the entire context of his life. Overnight, she/he becomes an officer from an aspirant. Her/his social recognition is much bigger than they had expected. The delight of her/his family members is unfathomable. She/he gets attention from media, relatives, friends, future aspirants. In fact, the success makes her/ him a superstar, a status enjoyed till next year when new results are announced. All this looks wonderful. But, all this would happen only when the performance at the interview is splendid. Or else, the opposite can also happen. A dismal performance in the interview brings the aspirants back to square one and they find themselves struggling again for the dream job from the starting point, i.e., preliminary examination. All aspirants dread to confront this because, going all over again in the process of the civil services examination is a true nightmare. It takes more than a year to go through the entire ritual of preparation, and at

every stage, there is uncertainty looming. Therefore, every candidate looks forward to producing a commendable performance at the IAS interview so that one does not have to go through the same rigmarole of this tedious examination again. But just wishful thinking will not ensure good performance. Only a good understanding of the nitty and gritty of the interview can navigate the candidate through this maze.

Importance of interview in success and ranking : As is well known, the three-step civil services examination is designed to evaluate different qualities of a candidate. The preliminary examination is designed to eliminate the non-serious, non-deserving candidates through a filtering process. The main examination tests the academic learning of the candidate acquired through his education as well from commanding the UPSC syllabus. The interview part, as UPSC itself states, tests a candidate's personality. Therefore, this is known as personality test in UPSC parlance. Put simply, the objective and purpose of any job interview is to assess the suitability of the candidates for the job they are aspiring for. For example, an interview board which is interviewing aspirants for a captain's job in the army, will look for qualities of courage, valor, mental and physical fitness, discipline, leadership. Similarly, in the case of a lecturer's interview, the board will test their pedagogy. The IAS interview thus is designed to test the suitability of the candidate for a career in the civil services. This suitability is tested by scanning the candidate's mental, intellectual and administrative caliber during the interview session. As far as the importance of the interview in ranking is concerned, it must be noted that it can significantly contribute to getting a very high rank by fetching 190 plus marks out of a maximum of 275 marks. In other words, even if a candidate could not secure very high marks in the main examination, the interview offers another opportunity to add more marks to get a good rank.

The best guide to the IAS interview is the notification issued by UPSC itself. It is pertinent here to quote from UPSC notification on personality test.

- ❑ **On qualities to be tested:** To quote UPSC, “The candidate will be interviewed by a Board who will have before them a record of the candidate’s career. The candidate will be asked questions on matters of general interest. The object of the Interview/ Personality Test is to assess the personal suitability of the candidate for a career in public service by a board of competent and unbiased observers. The Interview/ Personality Test is intended to judge the mental caliber of a candidate. In broad terms, this is an assessment of not only intellectual qualities but also social traits and interest in current affairs. Some of the qualities to be judged are: mental alertness, critical power of assimilation, clear and logical exposition, balance of judgement, variety and depth of interest, ability for social cohesion and leadership, intellectual and moral integrity.
- ❑ **Technique of the interview:** Again, to quote UPSC, “The technique is not that of a cross-examination but a natural, though directed and purposive conversation which is intended to reveal the mental qualities of the candidate.”
- ❑ In own words of UPSC, “Interview test is not intended to be a test either of specialized or general knowledge of the candidates which has already been tested in their written papers. Candidates are expected to have taken an intelligent interest not only in their special subject of academic studies but also in the events which are happening within and outside their own state or country, as well as the modern currents of thought and in new discoveries which should rouse the curiosity of well-educated youth.”

Composition of the UPSC interview Board: In all, there shall be 8 to 10 separate boards each headed by a member of UPSC, and four other experts invited from outside, who are called **domain experts**. Of these four, usually two are ex-civil servants who belong to the IAS, IPS, IFS or group A services. The other two belong to academia, social work, art or literary background. **Please note that there is no psychologist sitting in the board as is sometimes made out by market sources.** Each board interviews 10 candidates in one day. Thus, the schedule of the board is pretty tight every day.

How it begins: Just after a candidate is ushered into the interview room, he/she is asked to take their seat after exchange of greetings. Then, the chairman of the board initiates the interview by asking a few questions on his DAF (Detailed Application Form) which carries various information about the candidate. He may also ask questions outside the DAF before handing over to another member. After this, turn by turn, each member is provided a chance to ask questions. On an average, two to three questions are asked by each member and each question has to be answered by the candidate in 3- 4 minutes. If he/she is taking a longer time to answer, they may be cut short by the member because there is a paucity of time. **It is worth noting that the caste details are not revealed to the board members except the chairman to avoid any possible caste bias.**

How marks are allotted: Once the candidate leaves the room, a short discussion follows among the members which helps to arrive at a consensus on their performance level. After that, the chairman suggests certain marks to be allotted to the candidate which is usually accepted by all. If a member feels that he/she should have been given a little more or less marks, this is considered by everyone, and a revised mark is allotted. But generally, the allotment of marks is a smooth process and there are no disputes among members on this.

How secrecy is maintained about the Board: Till the last moment, the board does not know the details of candidates allotted to it for the day. Every morning, just before the interview starts, the list of candidates to be interviewed is furnished to the board. This is why UPSC interview has a reputation of being fair to all. Similarly, the candidate has no clue about the board he is going to face. He/ she is ushered in the interview room without any knowledge of who all are there.

Objectivity, impartiality and non - partisanship of the Board: A remarkable feature of the board is its impartiality. It is not a biased Board in terms of caste, religion, gender, region, language. Also, your elite background or poor background makes no impact on the board. They will look for your qualities, rather than your background.

In the same vein, even if you have been a mediocre student, they will not create a negative opinion about you without giving you a due opportunity to prove yourself. All in all, the UPSC board is a friendly board and there is no need to dread it. The members are cordial, cooperative and encouraging. For example, if they find that you are not able to answer questions on a particular area, they will ask you which topic you are more familiar with and if you suggest an area, they will ask you questions on that. Similarly, even if your medium of interview is English and you are fumbling to answer a particular question in English, they will allow you to attempt it in Hindi on your request. This way, the board is flexible and reasonable. So, there is no need to imagine a very hostile board trying all-out to put you down. On the contrary, the board will encourage you to bring out the best by providing ease and comfort during the entire session.

GROUND RULES OF FACING THE BOARD:

- ❑ **Be honest:** Never try to hide anything from the board. Always speak the truth. Only truth will be appreciated. If you tell any manufactured thing, be sure you will be caught.
- ❑ **Be polite:** Be humble and polite. Never give an impression that you are rigid, arrogant etc.
- ❑ **Be courteous:** Maintain etiquette, be respectful to the members
- ❑ **Present your true, authentic self:** Do not try to present what you are not. Project a true and authentic self of yours before the board. There is no need to prove to the board that you are extraordinary, because they are looking for a down to earth person, not a super-hero in you. In other words, there is absolutely no need to present a manufactured personality, but a true personality.
- ❑ **Be attentive, alert, and energetic all through the interview session:** While you are answering questions, you are constantly being watched for your energy levels, degree of attention and alertness. Never give an impression of a lazy, disoriented person to the board.

- ❑ **Say no when you really do not know:** There definitely will be some questions you may not be able to answer. It is perfectly alright to say that you don't know the answer to that particular question. No bad impression will be created by admitting this. If you attempt to answer something you do not know, it will put you in an awkward position.
- ❑ **Read the UPSC notification very carefully:** There can be no better guide than the UPSC explanation of the purpose and technique of the interview as given above in this article. This will help you articulate your answers before the board on the expected lines.
- ❑ **Defend you DAF very well:** The information you have furnished in your DAF is entirely yours and you own responsibility for each information supplied. You should be able to defend them. Therefore, never provide any information that you find difficult to defend, particularly with regard to your hobbies, extra-curricular activities, job experience. If you fluster on these, a negative impression will be created.
- ❑ **Don't make the interview preparation look like GS preparation:** Always remember, IAS interview is an interactive and engaging conversation with the board. Therefore, the issues cannot be looked from the prism of GS preparation. The approach should be to engage yourself in a conversation with the board on expected issues rather than furnishing loads of information before the board.
- ❑ **Do not clutter your mind with myths about the interview:** Of late, every second person in the coaching world has begun to wear the mantle of an interview expert, without knowing what really happens inside the board. This will take you away from the realities of the interview and drive your preparation in wrong direction. It is prudent to get guidance from proven, competent persons rather than from people without any credentials.
