

UPSC Mains 2026: Question Papers

Civil Services (Main) Examination 2026: Essay and General Studies Papers I to IV. Questions as printed in UPSC's official papers (English text).

Essay (Paper I), 21 August 2026

Write two essays, one from each section, in about 1,000 to 1,200 words each. 125 marks each.

Q1. Oxymorons reflect the ironies of life.

125 marks · 1,000 to 1,200 words · 87 min 30 s · Section A

Q2. A grateful mind is very beautiful.

125 marks · 1,000 to 1,200 words · 87 min 30 s · Section A

Q3. A thorn is a changed bud.

125 marks · 1,000 to 1,200 words · 87 min 30 s · Section A

Q4. When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled.

125 marks · 1,000 to 1,200 words · 87 min 30 s · Section A

Q5. Nature is the symbol of the spirit.

125 marks · 1,000 to 1,200 words · 87 min 30 s · Section B

Q6. A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.

125 marks · 1,000 to 1,200 words · 87 min 30 s · Section B

Q7. Shelving hard decisions is the least ethical course.

125 marks · 1,000 to 1,200 words · 87 min 30 s · Section B

Q8. A good leader is one who follows the followers.

125 marks · 1,000 to 1,200 words · 87 min 30 s · Section B

General Studies Paper I, 22 August 2026

Answer all 20 questions. Three hours, 250 marks.

Q1. Analyze the importance of Ashokan inscriptions for reconstructing Mauryan history.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q2. Discuss the impact of Macaulay's Minute on colonial administration and education in India.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q3. The significance of the Gandhian movements lay in the masses they mobilized. Elucidate.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q4. What is the Fujiwhara effect? Explain its impact on the movement and intensity of tropical cyclones.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q5. "Tundra regions are ecologically fragile but economically important." Examine this statement critically.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q6. Discuss the role of aeolian processes in desertification and land degradation.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q7. "Water resources are both an asset and a source of conflict in South Asia." Examine this statement giving examples.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q8. Unity in diversity remains the defining feature of Indian society despite the challenges from communalism and regionalism. Comment.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q9. How do you understand disability? Substantiate the need for inclusive policy framework in India in this regard.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q10. Do you think digital technology promotes social empowerment? Explain with examples.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q11. Vijayanagara architecture exemplifies the amalgamation of past traditions with contemporary practices. Elucidate with examples.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q12. Linguistic reorganization of Indian States was driven by popular pressure from below. Comment.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q13. The model of planned economy was adopted in India to address the regional imbalances left behind by colonial rule. Comment.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q14. Compare the Loo, Chinook and Foehn winds with respect to their regions of prevalence, their nature and climatic impacts.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q15. Analyze the role of satellite-based technologies in achieving climate-smart agriculture and food security in India.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q16. "The centre of global trade is gradually shifting from the Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific region." Examine this statement.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q17. Analyze the major drivers of human-induced land-use changes in India and their geographical consequences.

Q18. Is caste disappearing in urban India? Illustrate your answer with examples.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q19. Critically examine the challenges of demographic transition in contemporary India.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q20. Evaluate the impact of globalization on Indian youths with reference to social, political, economic and cultural spheres.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

General Studies Paper II, 22 August 2026

Answer all 20 questions. Three hours, 250 marks.

Q1. Right to privacy relating to self-identity is very dear to every human being and well protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. In this context, examine the effect of the amendment in 2026, to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q2. "Women as a class neither belong to a minority group nor are they regarded as forming a backward class." In the light of this statement, discuss the evolution of women's reservation from local bodies to Parliament.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q3. Examine whether the constitutional office of the Lok Sabha Speaker has become vulnerable to partisan politics under the current anti-defection regime. What institutional changes are required to ensure the neutrality of the Lok Sabha Speaker in managing a polarised House?

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q4. Is the right to vote a fundamental right? Discuss the position of the Election Commission of India while undertaking the revision of electoral rolls. Can it also examine the question of citizenship of voters?

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q5. Do constitutional bodies like the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) possess adequate enforcement powers to secure substantive social equality? Suggest measures to enhance their institutional effectiveness.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q6. Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance? Justify your answer.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q7. Malnutrition in India is not merely a public health concern; it is also a challenge of social equity, human development and effective welfare governance. Discuss.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q8. Analyse the advantages and limitations of the generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services in contemporary governance.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q9. "IPMDA (Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness) bridges the gap between India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision and the Quad's collective Indo-Pacific strategy." Make a critical assessment of the statement focusing on IPMDA.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q10. "BRICS acts as a powerful counterweight in global governance, actively amplifying the voice and influence of the Global South." Explain the role of BRICS in projecting itself as an alternative to other groupings.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q11. Discuss the position of the Governor in the federal polity of India. What is the nature of his power while giving assent to a bill passed by the State Legislature? Is he bound by the aid and advice of his Council of Ministers in all his functions?

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q12. What is meant by judicial legislation? In this context, discuss the verdicts of the apex court allowing "passive euthanasia" and a "living will".

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q13. How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q14. Examine how the separation of powers is practised in India compared to the rigid presidential model of the United States of America. In this context, compare the actual authority of the Indian Prime Minister with that of the President of the USA.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q15. To what extent do pressure groups, social movements and corporate lobbies deepen pluralistic democracy in India by representing excluded interests? Analyse whether the growing convergence of corporate wealth and political power poses a threat to the autonomy of formal democratic institutions.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q16. "Transparency and accountability in governance are not about controlling corruption but about creating the trust of stakeholders in the policy process by following the Rule of Law and Participatory Governance." Comment.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q17. Can the constitutional mandate of rights-based welfare be effectively realised in the context of non-integrated governance and minimal public investment? Examine.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q18. Should education be treated primarily as a welfare obligation of the state or as a strategic investment for building a globally competitive, knowledge-driven nation? Critically evaluate.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q19. "India's global diaspora acts as a living bridge, as a critical economic factor and knowledge network in transforming cultural heritage into geopolitical influence and strategic leverage worldwide." Critically examine this statement.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q20. "China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has transformed South Asia from a regional space into a theatre of great power competition." Analyse the strategic implications of the BRI for India's security and regional influence in South Asia.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

General Studies Paper III, 23 August 2026

Answer all 20 questions. Three hours, 250 marks.

Q1. What do you mean by Digital Rupee? In this context, explain the working and progress of India's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC).

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q2. Examine the view that financial inclusion is an integral part of social and economic inclusion in a country like India. Also throw light on the usefulness of the R.B.I.'s Financial Inclusion Index.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q3. Describe the various Technology Missions initiated in Indian agriculture and examine their role in food security.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q4. Explain the factors responsible for inefficiency of agri-produce marketing. How e-commerce helps to reduce inefficiency of agri-produce marketing? Explain.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q5. Explain by giving two examples, how biotechnology has helped the Indian farmers in processing their perishable crops.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q6. Distinguish between a Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) and a thermal nuclear reactor. In the context of first indigenously developed prototype FBR at Kalpakkam, explain the term 'criticality'. What are its implications for clean energy future of our country?

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q7. Discuss how the contradiction between 'rapid infrastructure development' and 'disaster-risk reduction' in ecologically-sensitive areas of India can be managed, with suitable examples.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q8. Discuss the aim and goals of Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework. Mention India's commitments and initiatives to achieve the goals and targets of this framework giving suitable examples.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q9. Explain how fake news and disinformation pose threat to Internal Security and Public Order in Indian context? In this regard, discuss salient features of amendments in respect of Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q10. Ladakh is strategically located between China and Pakistan. As a measure to win hearts and minds of locals, discuss the Border Area Development Programmes (BADP) by the Central Government and civic actions by the Army. Also discuss demand of promulgation of provision of the Sixth Schedule of constitution for Ladakh.

10 marks · 150 words · 8 min 45 s

Q11. Explain the key challenges for India's energy security. What measures do you suggest for ensuring energy security along with economic growth and sustainability?

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q12. How are startups in India promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and employment? Discuss the global and domestic challenges in their working and suggest suitable measures to overcome these challenges.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q13. How Indian agriculture has been transformed from food scarcity to food surplus level? Explain the various government policies implemented for diversification of Indian agriculture.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q14. Discuss the different types of subsidies and supports provided by the Government of India to agricultural sector. Examine the related issues pertaining to Agreement on Agriculture of World Trade Organisation (WTO).

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q15. Mention salient features of 'Mission Drishti'. Discuss the imaging techniques used in the satellite launched on 3rd May 2026. Why it is being considered world's first satellite of its kind?

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q16. What is agentic Artificial Intelligence (AI)? Explain its working. Describe its applications with suitable examples. Discuss the advantages, risks and challenges associated with agentic AI systems.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q17. What are the challenges to solid waste management in India? Discuss the governmental policy framework on solid waste management. Discuss the success/failure cases of Delhi and Indore cities highlighting the salient feature of their solid waste management initiatives.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q18. "Community participation is the cornerstone of effective disaster management". Analyse this statement with suitable examples from India. Also discuss the challenges to community participation and measures to strengthen it.

Q19. Separatist movements have been one of the major factors contributing to militancy and instability in Jammu & Kashmir (J & K). Bring out actions taken by the Government to bring J & K into national mainstream. Discuss pre and post abrogation status of Articles 370 and 35A. Also bring out positive impacts of abrogation of both articles in mainstreaming the state.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

Q20. Discuss counterfeit currency and money laundering as major sources of terror funding in India. State the actions being taken at International level to check these menaces. Highlight the role of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and methods of compliance by its member states in preventing terror funding.

15 marks · 250 words · 8 min 45 s

General Studies Paper IV (Ethics), 23 August 2026

Answer all questions. Three hours, 250 marks.

Q1(a). Owing to paucity of time, a university professor generates a Ph.D. evaluation report using Artificial Intelligence and submits it with some modifications. Discuss this from the perspective of accountability and integrity.

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q1(b). A business house is working on a project that could displace a forest community from their habitat. As the administrative officer of that district, what ethical challenges are you likely to face?

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q2(a). An endangered tribe has developed a severe skeletal deformity. A university research has identified a mineral supplement as a possible remedy, though clinical trials are yet to be conducted. Should the District Magistrate (DM) use this research on the tribe? Discuss from the perspective of medical and administrative ethics.

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q2(b). Discuss how national security can be balanced with concerns of human rights.

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q3(a). Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had cautioned that employing civil disobedience within a constitutional democracy equates to endorsing 'anarchy'. How should modern democracies navigate the ethical dilemmas posed by civil disobedience movements that aim to promote social justice against policies that may raise genuine concerns?

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q3(b). In what ways can an Indian Administrative Officer apply Gandhi's notion of 'trusteeship' to ensure fairness in governance?

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q3(c). Shakespeare in Henry IV says, "The arms are fair when the intent of bearing them is just". What ethical implications does this have in governance?

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q4(a). Citing the serious adverse effects of long-term medication, a doctor convinces the family of a female patient for surgery. This led the patient to reluctantly consent for the surgery, though her original choice was to opt for medication. Explain the concepts of paternalism and beneficence by analysing the doctor's action.

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q4(b). Efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right thing. How do you strike a balance between the two to enhance productivity?

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q5(a). Usually schools, working in remote areas, do not fully comply with government regulations. However, if the rules are enforced strictly, it would lead to most schools closing down. How should an administrator strike a balance between enforcement of rules and educational rights of children?

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q5(b). In international relations, ethical considerations are often subjugated to the strategic interests of nation-states. Discuss this from an ethical perspective.

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q6(a). On the request of his Personal Assistant (PA), the District Magistrate (DM) stops the transfer of a schoolteacher who takes private tuition for his daughter diagnosed with learning disability. In this context, discuss the aspects of empathy versus compliance with rules.

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q6(b). Some moral philosophers argue that spending some of your resources, without significantly affecting your financial stability, to help other people who badly suffer is our moral duty and not merely a matter of charity. Justify this claim by explaining the distinction between duty and charity.

10 marks · 150 words · 9 min 13 s

Q7. Lata, a mother of two children, was admitted to a hospital for acute abdominal pain. Her sister-in-law, Sujatha, accompanied her. Dr. Mansi examined Lata and recommended a diagnostic laparoscopy. Lata's consent was taken to conduct the medical procedure under general anesthesia. During the laparoscopy, Dr. Mansi's team discovered a tumor in Lata's uterus. A closer examination suggested that the tumor could be malignant. One option before Dr. Mansi was to extract a sample for biopsy. In that case, if the tumor was malignant, Lata would have to undergo another surgery for removal of the uterus. An alternative was to remove the uterus immediately. Dr. Mansi had to take a quick decision. As Lata was under general anesthesia, Dr. Mansi explained the situation to Sujatha. Sujatha agreed with Dr. Mansi's recommendations for a hysterectomy, wherein Lata's uterus would be removed to avoid the risk and pain of undergoing another surgery. Dr. Mansi removed Lata's uterus after receiving Sujatha's consent in writing. Lata was informed of this the next day. She was very upset and felt betrayed as she had not consented to the removal of her uterus. Lata complained to the police who tried to convince her that Dr. Mansi had acted with good intention to help a patient. Sujatha was of the same opinion, however Lata was not convinced and decided to approach the court.

- (a) Discuss the ethical issues involved in this case.
- (b) Discuss the moral conduct of the doctor in this situation.

20 marks · 250 words · 9 min 13 s

Q8. Ravi is a senior police officer with vast experience in riot control and cyber-policing. Since one year, he has been the Superintendent of Police (SP) of a district with a history of frequent rioting. Last year, Ravi had

sought installation of an AI enabled software for predictive policing. This system has been operational for approximately six months. This new system employs advanced algorithms for capturing the biometric data of persons in a crowd and swiftly relating it to a data library. This has enabled the police to identify the persons involved in various crimes. The system has identified an immigrant and low-income neighbourhood as a centre for gang violence and drug trafficking. Aided by this AI analysis, the local police has focused its patrolling, preventive detentions and establishing checkposts. Consequently, public order and law enforcement has visibly improved. Last week, some community leaders, civil rights lawyers and human rights activists visited Ravi's office. They submitted a memorandum that the new system is faulty as it is based on incorrect historical data caused by social biases and discriminatory policing. The memorandum also alleges that the increased surveillance has created a climate of tension amongst residents. This feeling is aggravated by the fact that the residents are not aware of the data noted against their names.

- (a) What are the ethical issues including biases involved in the use of AI in data-driven policing?
- (b) Place yourself in Ravi's role and discuss the alternatives available. Justify the action that optimises compliance with ethics.

20 marks · 250 words · 9 min 13 s

Q9. Seema is a senior bureaucrat with a reputation of honesty and professional efficiency. She has recently been posted as the District Collector (DC) to Surinder Nagar, where a large industrial area is being established. The new industrial area had caused many farmers to submit applications for change of land use (CLU) to convert their farmlands into residential areas. There is an unusually large backlog of these applications awaiting processing. Seema noticed that some applications had been approved selectively with no visible chronological pattern. The case files showed a few complaints of some approvals being subject to receipt of large bribes from the applicants. On further fact-finding, Seema realized that a small group of touts was controlling this illegal activity through some subordinate officials in the Collectorate. This had created a fear in the other employees who were reluctant to process any application. The resultant backlog has been piling up thereby hindering local economic progress and causing public dissatisfaction. Seema was faced with a major moral and administrative challenge of dismantling this corruption network without hampering daily administrative operations. An aggressive internal investigation would result in institutional resistance and, possibly, a backlash from labour unions. Conversely, ignoring this situation would encourage the wrongdoers and unnecessarily continue this avoidable harassment to the populace.

- (a) What are the ethical issues involved in this case?
- (b) Discuss the options open to Seema. Identify the recommended option and justify it.

20 marks · 250 words · 9 min 13 s

Q10. Vikas is a government officer with over a decade of service in public administration. He has recently moved as the District Collector (DC) of Nainipura, a remote hilly district bordering a forest. Due to Nainipura's low levels of economic development, one of his major duties is to ensure proper functioning of the public distribution system (PDS) amongst the economically weaker sections (EWS). During his on-site visits, Vikas was apprised of a typical administrative challenge in operating the PDS. To prevent leakages, all distributors were required to carry out real-time biometric identification of the beneficiaries, whose fingerprints were tallied with identity card records. This was creating problems as the operating system sometimes rejected fingerprint matching in the cases of growing children, manual labourers and senior citizens. The problem was further compounded in periods of low WiFi connectivity. The distributors, in such cases, resorted to personal discretion when they could identify the recipient. Vikas had to address this problem on priority. Strictly adhering to government regulations would ensure fiscal probity but would greatly trouble the proposed beneficiary, i.e., EWS. It may even impinge on their fundamental right to life as per Article 21 of the Constitution. Conversely, leaving the resolution solely to the discretion of the distributors could lead to misuse and leakages.

- (a) What are the options open to Vikas? How should he balance fiscal probity with empathy towards the designated beneficiaries?
- (b) Discuss the ethics of using technology as a gatekeeper for welfare schemes.

20 marks · 250 words · 9 min 13 s

Q11. Rajapuram is a border district. Jhara and Biru, its two major communities are in continual conflict with each other. The social fabric is fractured and demands mending. Ethnic tensions between the two communities have erupted into violence resulting in a large number of deaths. The stated causes are conflicting land claims, uneven resource allocation and inadequate political representation in government bodies. Separate relief camps had to be created for the two communities. The situation is volatile and appears to be getting out of control. Rajan has been appointed the District Magistrate (DM) of Rajapuram and tasked to quickly get the situation under control. His immediate tasks include restoring administrative authority, reopening the highway and initiating peace talks. On taking over his appointment, Rajan realized that the inter-community rivalry had even seeped into the local administration and police. With functional neutrality being the immediate casualty, it had made both communities distrustful of the government. The neighbouring country could utilize the opportunity to spur insurgent activity and further aggravate the situation. Rajan favoured a controlled approach starting with opening the highway to restore food and medical supplies. He toyed with the idea of requisitioning CRPF units to help restore administrative control.

- (a) Discuss the ethical issues that need to be addressed in this case.
- (b) What are the options open to Rajan? Which option would ensure protection of his non-partisan image without compromising ethics?

20 marks · 250 words · 9 min 13 s

Q12. Ajit has been recently promoted as the Head of the Department of Weapon Sales (DWS) in the Ministry of Defence Production (MDP). His charter of duties includes international sales of weapons produced domestically by MDP. In two recent wars, MDP weapons have performed admirably, resulting in many countries showing interest in buying them, particularly long-range artillery and missiles. Country A and country B have asked for these weapons. However, production constraints restrict DWS to accept only one purchase order. Country A is a developing nation with a sound technology base. MDP is planning R&D collaboration with it for the next generation of weapons. It is not part of any security alliance and needs weapons for protection from a troublesome neighbour. It seeks large acquisition on a long-term loan. Country B is also a developing nation. Military strength is its priority, with the military budget often ingressing into allocations for human resources and infrastructure development. It is in security alliance with a superpower who has a large military base there and periodically allots it financial grants. It is a member of an economic bloc with which the government is currently negotiating a free trade agreement. It is not a signatory of NPT but possesses smaller nuclear weapons and delivery systems. It supports some guerrilla forces abroad. It has sought a smaller acquisition and is prepared to make some advance payment. It is currently negotiating arms purchases from another nation too. Ajit discussed this case with his counterparts in the related departments. Therein, the significant economic benefits, employment generation and stronger diplomatic relations arising from this sale were highlighted. It was also emphasized that refusing the deal could result in country B purchasing weapons from some other supplier. Ajit was aware that in arms sales, due diligence at each stage was pivotal to ensure conformity to national policy and international treaties.

- (a) Discuss the options available to Ajit. Which option should he select and why?
- (b) How can Ajit balance nation's economic and strategic interests with ethical considerations?

20 marks · 250 words · 9 min 13 s