

6. SCOPE OF QUESTIONS FROM OPTIONAL AND ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

- Interview of civil services examination is basically a test of your personality. While it is quite subjective and any definite advice about how you can prepare, cannot be given for, it would definitely be good if you are well versed with your personality. One must be careful while filling the DAF, the points mentioned in which form the most common topics of questions asked in the interview. **At the same time, it is important to understand that the board members, sitting in the panel, never intend to test your deep insights on a particular topic, rather, they expect that you must have a general understanding of things going around you.** This is quite obvious as you are going to be the part of an elite section, on whose decisions, rest the future of society. Hence, the questions posed before a candidate by the interviewing board are very well framed and answers to them should be made taking into consideration all possible views and a balanced approach.
- **The two most important sections, which form the part of the interview questions, are your academic background and the optional subject, you have chosen in the examination.** Trends have shown that, board members are more likely to ask questions from these two sections. At times, they also delve deep into the optional subject or ask specific questions from your academic background.
- Under such circumstances, problems faced by candidates are two-fold. First, the limitations posed by generalised knowledge of optional subject gained during the preparation, deter them to tackle the specific questions related to optional. Second, the time duration between completion of graduation and interview of civil services, vary significantly. This makes the candidate vulnerable, when a question is asked from his academic background. Consider a situation:
- Mr. A is a Doctor. He has decided to prepare for civil services by taking sociology as an optional. He worked hard and cleared the first two stages of the examination. He is focusing on general awareness and general questions related to the personality, for the interview. He has joined institutes for mock interviews, in which his performance is outstanding. On the day of interview, he was quite confident
- As he entered, the first question asked to him was why he had chosen civil services as a career option?
- He answered the question smartly. However, the next question asked from him was 'the mechanism involved in administering onco-medicines in patients', which was an unexpected question to him. He became little nervous and started recalling what he studied in his graduation. Since, there was a huge time gap, he was unable to recall the facts correctly and started illustrating wrong mechanism. Finally a time came, when he conveyed to interview panel that he was unable to recall things from his academic background. Despite this, the panel asked few more questions to him from his academic background, which he was unable to answer correctly. Finally the panel came on optional and asked him to justify the 'Kantian Principles' in modern context. Since he had failed to revise optional adequately, he couldn't recall elements of Kantian Principle and started bluffing. This made him more and more nervous and his interview ended up in an unexpected manner.
- Another person B has same academic credentials and optional subject. He, when asked questions from his background, accepted the fact that he couldn't recall the things. What marks the difference between the two was, rather than answering the question, the latter had accepted the truth. Similarly on the matter of optional, he tried his best to answer correctly and wherever he faced confusion, he has chosen to remain silent and conveyed the board that he did not remember the topic completely. However, when asked on the matter of current relevance, the views conveyed by him were less effective than those of
- Mr. A. He even skipped few questions related to general awareness. He was not hopeful of his result.
- However, when the result came, it was Mr. B who found his name in the merit list. Mr. A, despite of getting higher marks in mains examination, failed to secure his name in merit list.

- The bottom line is members present in the interview board intend to test your personality rather than your knowledge, which UPSC has already tested during the mains examination. While appearing in the interview, a candidate, prima facie, may feel that his denial in answering the questions asked by the board would fetch him bad marks, but in reality, by doing so he is manifesting his ethical and moral character to the board. The same was true with the case of Mr. B. His polite way to convey truth to board has fetched him good marks in interview. However, it is not to suggest that Mr. A was a liar and he was trying to misguide the board intentionally. The problem has a different perspective.

So What Should Be Done?

- With being understood the importance of academic credentials and optional in the interview, now let us move to the remedy of this problem. The strategy to tackle the questions can be broadly divided into two steps. The first is Pre-interview preparation and second is reflection of confidence in the interview.
- As a part of preparation of interview, one should try to revise all the topics of his optional thoroughly. As you opt a particular subject as an optional, board is of the view that you must have deep insights in it.
- This means if you fail to answer the questions related to optional, this may fetch you bad marks. While, in case of academic background, the board is well versed with the fact that candidate may not be able to recall things from graduation level. They ask you the questions, to check your facial expressions, your reaction when you get an unexpected question and your adherence to honesty.
- Therefore, the best way to handle these questions is to 'be original'. Interview demands the manifestation of the personality 'which you have' – not the one which coaching institutes have developed in you, with the course of time. Additionally, bluffing on facts or misguiding the board must be avoided. It is always better to accept the truth than to bluff. However, if you can faintly recall the things and you know that this might be a correct answer, a prior permission for making guess should be taken from the board. If the board permits, you should keep your guess in front of them, with adequate logics which have helped you to arrive on the answer.
- That said "Honesty is the best policy". The quote works in every aspect of life. Brining honesty in thought and action is the key to success.

Problem Solving Skills

- Problem-solving skills are relevant for evolving solutions to a problem or set of problems. A problem is a gap between desired state of affair and actual state of affair at a particular point of time. In order to overcome this gap, relevant action is required. For identifying this action, problem-solving skills are required. Problem-solving skills are relevant not only for case-based group discussion as widely perceived but are relevant to topic-based group discussion too. Your problem-solving skills will be reflected in your following actions during group discussion process
- While discussing a topic or case, adopt systems approach, that is, treat the topic/case as a system and identify its different components (technically called subsystems) and their interrelationships. For example, if you are talking about status of education in India, classify education into three categories: primary education, secondary education, and higher education; these three categories of education have high relationships – a higher-level education is highly dependent on a lower-level education. In order to identify issues involved in topic/case, apply your creative power. Through this power, you can identify root causes underlying issues. For example, while discussing the reasons for poor status of education in India, do not just mention lack of funds, lack of discipline in the society, etc. These may not be root causes but intervening causes resulted from root causes, for example, lack of commitment on the part of concerned governments or similar such causes. While suggesting a solution to any problem, check its feasibility and its effect on other components of the system, otherwise, there is likelihood that your solution may solve one problem but may generate more problems. If possible, also mention how your solution can be implemented. For example, if you mention that governments should allocate more funds to education, also mention from where these funds should come as governments always feel lack of funds.