

THIRD EDITION

CIVIL SERVICES INTERVIEW

HOW TO EXCEL ————— ●

For
UPSC
and State
PSCs

Mc
Graw
Hill
Education

Madhukar Kumar Bhagat

CIVIL SERVICES INTERVIEW
How to Excel

THIRD EDITION

About the Author

Shri Madhukar Kumar Bhagat is an officer of the 1995 batch of the Indian Revenue Service (I.R.S.). In the personality test conducted by the UPSC, he scored **246** out of 300 (82%) marks. In 1998, he was awarded the Finance Minister's Gold Medal for the best probationary officer in the 50th batch of I.R.S.

He is also the author of several other books published by McGraw- Hill Education, which are — ***CSAT: How to Excel, General Studies Paper II*** and ***What When and How: Prelims Mains and Interview***. His articles about preparation and the right approach to personality test have been published in leading national dailies including **The Hindu, The Hindustan Times, The Indian Express etc.**

He has also authored other books pertaining to taxation which have been published by the Income-tax department. He has delivered several talks on taxation and law related topics at National Academy of Direct Taxes, Nagpur, Indian Institute of Corporate affairs and other training institutes.

Earlier, he has also worked in the Indian Railways after qualifying the SCRA examination conducted by the UPSC and completing a four-year degree course in Mechanical Engineering. He also has a bachelor's degree in Law.

Presently he is posted as Commissioner of Income-tax. He may be contacted at madhukarbhagat@gmail.com



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Give me the strength never to disown
the poor

Or bend my knees before insolent
might.

Give me the strength

To raise my head high above daily
trifles.

And give me the strength

To surrender my strength to Thy will
with love.

GURUDEV RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Dedicated
to
My Gurus,
My Parents,
&
the Educational Institutions,
as these enabled me
to be what I am

Preface to the Third Edition

It has been just over seven years since this book was first published and already it is time for the third edition. The numerous reprints and all the editions are truly a testimony of the appreciation and faith the readers have reposed in the book. This places on us an incessant responsibility of endeavouring evermore to further improve so as to best suit what the readers would need and expect of us.

So, what's new in this edition? To begin with, all of the five model interviews have been largely revised to include the contemporaneous issues along with those of enduring significance. But that is not all. A **new chapter titled 'Interview of Toppers'** has been included. This contains the 'Personality Test' experience of six toppers, across three years and their interview transcripts. The toppers, be it, Shri Anmol Sher Singh Bedi (2nd rank, CSE 2016) or Shri Anurag Chander Sharma (11th rank, CSE 2015) have all scored remarkable marks in their personality test. Rather, their interview scores has been the key to attaining a top CSE rank, thus underlining the need for due focus, sufficient effort and proper guidance in this sometimes underrated aspect of the CSE preparation. We are thankful to the toppers for sharing their interviews

With each edition of this book, the preface has strived to capture a fundamental attribute crucial to success in the interview. The first being the significance of our **thoughts** which are truly the key to unravel our personality. The second preface highlighted the significance of **self belief and hard work**. This is best echoed in Mahatma Gandhi's following words, *"Man often becomes what he believes himself to be. If I have belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the ability to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning."*

Although self-belief is the cornerstone of success, its edifice is composed of our real abilities. But, as highlighted in the above thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi, our abilities are neither inert nor petrified; rather they are dynamic and evolving. The soil of hard work, the air of positivity and the illuminance of appropriate guidance is what is needed for nurturing the saplings of our abilities in this personality test. And the latter is what this book hopes to

impart.

All of the above, albeit necessary for success, may not be sufficient in a competition of this magnitude. The objective of this examination and particularly of the personality test is to select the very best. **But to qualify as the best, one has to bring out the best within oneself.** It is sincerely hoped that the present edition of the book, will in substantial measure, assist you to do so. May the best succeed.

My best wishes to all you readers.

MADHUKAR KUMAR BHAGAT

Preface to the Second Edition

At the outset, I would like to thank all my readers for the positive response to this book in the past three years. The innumerable mails comprising queries, appreciation and constructive criticism has always been profoundly encouraging. The doubts and queries which my readers posed in these mails and at times in personal interactions with me, encouraged me to incorporate a new chapter in this book titled, “Common Queries of Candidates”. I sincerely hope that this chapter will help the aspirants to resolve some of the nagging doubts and some of those simple queries, which they did not know whom to ask or how to resolve.

One such doubt which quite a few aspirants express is about the very need of making an interview preparation. At times their misgiving is about the efficacy of any such preparation especially when the realm of ‘what can be asked by the Interview Board’ is so wide and extensive. Many also firmly believe that personality as such is not an attribute that can be changed overnight. What can be gained in any such preparation, they feel is only information and the test of personality is surely not a test of the amount of information pre-loaded in a candidate’s mind.

Though I respect those who harbour such notions, I am not in conformity with them. Whether such views are expressed to justify one’s happy-go-lucky approach towards the personality test or one sincerely believes in such hazardous views, I best leave to the judgement of my readers. But I would like to recount a chance meeting with a young officer undergoing ‘Foundational Course’ training at the ‘National Academy of Direct Taxes’, Nagpur, who had similar views. On this issue of preparation for the personality test, my friend expressed his extreme disenchantment, deeming it almost a futile effort. He considered the whole process of interview to be too subjective and chance driven. His cynicism seemed to emanate from his own below average marks awarded by the interview Board. In his first attempt he secured 50% marks. He was so disappointed with such marks that he made very little preparation for the personality test in the next attempt, considering any such preparation to be infructuous. In the subsequent attempt his marks further plummeted to a meagre 40%.

I humbly explained to him that the objective of preparation for the personality test was not merely to acquire information or even knowledge, but more importantly to shape one's thoughts and hence personality. By being despondent or by considering 'preparation' as an infructuous exercise, one was not helping one's own cause but rather defeating it. Through preparation and hard work, one may or may not be able to anticipate the questions which eventually arise in the interview, or even the subjects from which they may emanate. But sincere effort surely instills that confidence to attempt an answer to such questions.

It is rightly said, that it is not only important to know, but to know that you know, for this knowledge instills confidence. This realisation comes neither from any divine revelation nor from special inborn skills. It is simply earned through the sweat of one's brow.

Finally, the mantra '**Work hard and believe in yourself**' may sound like an oft repeated cliché, but is always worth repeating for one more time.

So, my best wishes to all you readers. May you get to scale new heights in your endeavours.

MADHUKAR KUMAR BHAGAT

Preface to the First Edition

In *The Chamber of Secrets*, one of the popular books of the Harry Potter series, Professor Dumbledore explains to his pupil Harry, “in life, it is our choices, far more than our abilities, that show who we truly are”.

This observation of a fictional character highlights an enduring philosophy of this world—the *deeds* and *decisions*, more than the supposedly innate capabilities of an individual, reflect the quintessential essence of his/her personality. These deeds and decisions, in turn, are the product of human thought. The famous quote, ‘Watch your Thoughts’ (Anonymous), places human thoughts at the very core of the human destiny. It says:

Watch your thoughts, they become words,
Watch your words, they become actions,
Watch your actions, they become habits,
Watch your habits, they become your character.
Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the **civil services interview aims at unraveling and understanding the thoughts of a candidate as a means to assess his personality**. The views and opinions of the aspirants, his interests and abilities, his body language and communication traits, all are a reflection of his thinking, his state of mind and personality.

Thought and personality by themselves are not attributes frozen in time. Rather they are dynamic, changing, and evolving. Often, the occasion and purpose determine the aspects of human personality, which ought to come to the fore.

However, it is important to know about those aspects of one’s personality, which are pertinent from the perspective of the civil services interview.

- Does honesty and integrity pay off ?
- Is ideology important?
- What is the role of hard work and sincerity?
- Does smartness pay?
- How does one’s intelligence and ability to question help?

Simply put, it is good for a candidate to know about the most important attributes desirable for a personality test and how can he/she hone them.

This is what this book sets to explain. The endeavour here is to assist you to understand these and such other issues and help you to mould and evolve your own personality so as to befit an aspirant of the coveted civil services. Discussed in detail are such important issues as

- (a) when to start preparation,
- (b) how to answer,
- (c) how to prepare, etc.

A chapter summary has been provided at the end of each chapter to highlight its salient aspects. It is sincerely hoped that this book will be useful to candidates preparing for the civil services interviews, conducted by the U.P.S.C and the State P.S.Cs and will establish itself as a comprehensive and quality book on this subject.

The chapters of this book are a product of my understanding, experience, and interaction with a host of successful candidates, besides deliberations with several experts in this field. I am thankful to all of them for sharing their thoughts. My wife, Garima Bhagat, who is also a civil servant (I.R.S) has been of profound help as an encouraging critic and a contributor of useful inputs. I am also thankful to the publishers, who fully believed in this book and pursued it with alacrity and earnestness from the very outset.

In any venture, there is always room for growth and improvement; I, therefore, welcome wholeheartedly all constructive suggestions and feedback which can enrich this effort.

I wish all aspirants the best in their endeavours.

MADHUKAR KUMAR BHAGAT

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MADHUKAR KUMAR BHAGAT

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The Personality Test: A Perspective

When on the brink of complete discouragement... success is discerning that the line between failure and success is so fine that often a single extra effort is all that is needed to bring victory out of defeat.

—**Elbert Green Hubbard**

When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.

—**Helen Keller**

1.1 The Civil Services Examination: A Challenge

The Civil Services examination is one of the most arduous and keen competitions in India. The process of selection, comprising three tests each of varied nature, stretches to almost a year. Nearly 4.5 to 5 lakh aspirants vie for a meagre 800–1000 seats (a ratio of 450–550 applicants for every job). Thus, to emerge successful and secure a good rank in this stiff competition would perhaps require the agility and energy of a sprinter, and also the stamina and resilience of a marathon runner. What beckons and motivates the thousands who toil hard, is the desire to join the Indian Civil Services¹, an opportunity to work for a billion plus people; to contribute in good measure to the progress of our nation; to be a part of an elite work force having bright

prospects, numerous challenges and wide diversities in career.

1.2 The Selection Process

The selection process begins with the Preliminary examination held in May–June, where the bulk of applicants are screened through an objective test comprising a General Studies and an aptitude test paper. Those who clear this first hurdle get to appear for the Main examination held in October–November. Here, nine subjective papers including four General Studies, two papers of an optional subject, an essay and two qualifying language papers, test the mettle of the candidate. Out of the 1750 marks for which candidates appear, those who secure 40 per cent or more (700 marks) usually get a call for the personality test (also referred as the interview). But even securing a 40 per cent mark may not be a guarantee to qualify for the personality test. Generally, the ratio of aspirants getting an interview call, to the jobs offered, is 2:1 only. This implies that out of 10000–12000 candidates who appeared for the Main examination, only 1800–2000 will be able to sail through to the next level, as around 800–1000 vacancies are announced in the various services.

1.3 Significance of the Personality Test

The Personality test is akin to the final frontier to be conquered. It is the grand finale of the prolonged and onerous selection process. Here the candidates are evaluated for 275 marks. Compared to the 1750 marks of the Main examination, the weightage of the interview may appear to be insignificant. But this is far from so.

All candidates who are appearing for the personality test are very well within the striking distance (of at least being selected, if not securing a top rank). As such the marks awarded by the Board can be crucial, rather than a deciding factor in determining the final outcome. While some may be awarded an 80 per cent or more, some may even land a paltry 30 per cent. Thus, a good show in the interview can push your ranking to a higher level.

This can very well be the difference in qualifying/not qualifying or getting a service of your choice.

Here it is pertinent to remember that variation in the final marks (out of the total of 2025) of all candidates who appeared for the personality test, is usually not more than 200–250 marks. This implies that for every mark lost, there may be a drop in the final ranking by six to eight positions. While the difference in the marks of the top ranking candidates (top–100) may be wider, the distribution of candidates per marks is much more crowded for middle and lower rankings. Thus, it is all the more important to give in your very best in the personality test. Every additional mark secured here pushes your position by a few good notches in the final ranking. The personality test, thus, does offer an opportunity to grab those additional marks in a good measure. But many candidates fail to fully comprehend the significance of the personality test and appreciate the golden opportunity these marks represent, which may either make or mar the arduous efforts put up till now.

1.4 The Process of the Personality Test

The Personality test usually takes place in the months of March and April and carries 275 marks. The evaluation of the personality is done through an interview process, by a Board usually comprising five members, who are persons of eminence and experience from various walks of life. One of the members (generally a member of the U.P.S.C.) is designated the Chairman of the Board. The Chairman regulates the conduct of the interview and also awards marks to the candidate, which is usually by consensus.

The U.P.S.C. organises six to seven such Boards and interview is conducted in the forenoon as well as the afternoon. Usually half an hour is slotted for each candidate and up to six candidates are taken in a Board in one half. The particular Board which is to interview the candidate, is disclosed only on the day of the interview. Some candidates often have apprehensions, about certain Boards being strict in awarding marks and some being liberal. However, such apprehensions and prejudices are not only pointless, but at times detrimental also.

The Boards conduct the interview by posing questions, seeking views asking for objective appreciation and analyses of matters relating to the personal profile of candidates—as disclosed in Mains examination form—issues pertinent to the society, state and country and about current affairs of national and international significance. Thus, the range of questions can be pretty wide. **The tenor of the interview is that of a purposeful conversation. The objective is the assessment of the overall personality of the candidate** and not merely bookish knowledge or theoretical concepts, which in any case have already been evaluated in the Preliminary and the Main examination.

1.5 Attributes Desirable in Aspirants

The attributes desirable in the aspirants are essentially those which are expected of a civil servant. These include honesty, integrity, sincerity of purpose, clarity of thought and expression, ability to take decisions, balance of judgement, self-belief and confidence, ability to reason, to think critically and analytically, awareness and concern for socio-economic issues and problems, mental alacrity, positive approach, politeness and leadership qualities.

The list of desirable traits in aspirants, may well be extended further. But the seemingly long list should not be a cause for trepidation or undue concern. Many of the specified skills and attributes are already a part of one's personality, though in varying degree. What requires to be done, is to identify these abilities in one's own self, suitably enhance and modify it (wherever needed to do so) and express it. But amongst the various attributes, **what is of utmost importance is the ability to think, coupled with an honest approach, sincerity of purpose and willingness to toil hard.**

The interview is not only an occasion for expression of one's personality but also an opportunity to modify and develop it, to raise the bar to such exalted levels which are desirable and expected of a civil servant. But how to go about it? Well the path of personality development is often a solitary travel, but it is sincerely hoped that the ensuing chapters will be of guidance

and assistance in your endeavour.

1.6 The State Services Interview

The States conduct the 'State Services Examination' to select candidates for the various State Services (viz. The State Administrative Service, the State Police Service, the State Accounts Service and others). These examinations are conducted by the respective State Public Service Commissions. The pattern of examination is analogous to the Civil Services examination conducted by the U.P.S.C. The screening preliminary test is followed by the Main examination and the interview. The preliminary test (PT) comprises objective tests of General Studies and an optional paper. The Main examination also comprises two papers of General Studies, two papers of two optionals, two qualifying language papers and a regional language/Hindi literature/essay paper. The weightage given to the interview is more or less the same as in Civil Services interview conducted by U.P.S.C. and carries usually 250–300 marks out of a total of 2300–2400 marks.(A weightage of 10 per cent to 15 per cent of total marks)

The State Services Interview is also conducted by a Board consisting of five to six members, with the member of the State P.S.C. being the Chairman of the Board. The significance of the personality test, the process and dynamics of interview and the attributes desirable in aspirants, are the same as discussed in the preceding paragraph. As such, the methodology to prepare for the interview, the answering techniques, approach to be adopted for preparation for personal profile etc. as described in the subsequent chapters, are applicable in equal measure for this interview too. However, what the candidates need to bear in mind is, that here, the focus on appreciating the important state and local issues, has to be understandably more.

Summary

- ◆ The Civil Services examination is one of the most keenly contested competition in our country. The personality test is truly like a grand finale to this marathon selection

process.

- ◆ The interview marks play a crucial role in determining the final ranking and may make or mar the hard work put in by the aspirants.
- ◆ The tenor of the interview is that of a purposeful conversation; the objective is the assessment of the personality on the whole.
- ◆ The personality test examines a wide range of innate qualities of the aspirants. But the most valuable attributes include, an honest approach in life, sincerity of purpose, ability to think, analytically, logically, holistically and optimistically; along with a willingness to toil hard.

¹ see list of services offered in Appendix A

How to Prepare for the Interview

*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act
but a habit.*

— **Aristotle**

2.1 When to Start

The personality of an individual is a reflection of his various traits. These include his approach and attitude in life, his aptitude and his abilities, his skills and also his knowledge quotient. These traits evolve over a period of many years. Thus, development of an individual's personality is an ongoing process. In real sense the preparation for interview has already begun when you are preparing for the Main, for the Preliminary examination and even before. However, concerted effort should be initiated just after the main examination, preferably after taking a break of 10–14 days after the last paper.

2.2 Why to Start Early

“Early bird catches the worm,” goes the saying. But understandably the early bird in the present scenario may be an utterly exhausted one!

The Preliminary examination followed by the arduous main examination takes a heavy toll on a candidate. Is it then not fine to just wait for the result of the main examination to be declared before embarking upon the preparation for the personality test? After all, less than 20 per cent of the candidates who appeared for the Main examination will get an interview call. So why waste time now?

Despite the arguments mentioned above (which are usually echoed by many candidates) it is prudent to start the preparation early. The personality test is like the last lap of this marathon. Besides it carries substantial marks. A difference of 5 per cent to 8 per cent (15–20 marks) in the interview, can very well mean a substantial rise or fall in the final ranking. Early and good preparation for the interview, can fetch in the marks and catapult the candidate's position higher. Even if one does not get an interview call, the effort put in will nevertheless be beneficial, if the candidate plans to take a further attempt. In any case, one has to start working in anticipation of getting the interview call. After all, the effort put in so far, is aimed at securing a final selection and a good ranking. Nobody aims for merely qualifying for the main examination. So do not bother about the possibility of your effort getting wasted (which will not be wasted in any case). Get in the groove for preparation, so as to overcome the last hurdle.

2.3 Filling up the Detailed Application Form of the Main Examination

After you have cleared the Preliminary examination you are required to fill up and submit the Detailed Application Form (DAF) of the Main examination. In this form, the U.P.S.C seeks information about your educational and social background, home state, choice of subjects, medium of examination and interview, preference of services, details of prizes, scholarship, previous employment, etc. Needless to say, this information furnished by you, forms the nucleus around which the questions in the interview revolve.

Understandably, **this form should be filled very carefully**, specially the

particulars of extra-curricular activities and interest (hobbies), prizes and scholarship won, the order of preference of various services etc. It is advisable that a hard copy of the DAF should be filled first. Once you are sure that you do not wish to make any changes in the information submitted, you may fill the DAF and submit it to UPSC. However, a **copy of this filled up form should be retained and kept readily available**, as it enables you to recollect later, the information furnished by you and how and what to prepare for the interview.

2.4 Getting in the Groove: The Preliminary Phase

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, it is advisable to start early, ideally 10–14 days after the last Main examination. However, the sabbatical from your books should not stretch beyond a month. Unlike the Main examination, which calls for intensive preparation with single-minded dedication, preparation for interview can begin with by devoting only a couple of hours daily. This can well be done side-by-side, while you are pursuing your academics, your career, or your other personal and professional commitments, which might have got neglected while you were preparing for the mains.

Make it a habit to read newspapers and magazines meticulously and not cursorily. Focus should be on issues which are likely to figure in the personality test, specially articles carrying out analytical perspective of relevant issues. It is advisable to start an interview diary and also to keep handy pocket note books. Be in the habit of summarising the articles you have read and jotting down the relevant points in the diary or the note book.

It is also pertinent to carefully go through the application form for the mains and identify areas which will require intensive preparation or further inputs. Your job profile, academic background, hobbies and interest, home state, city and state of current domicile, are other areas from your personal profile, which require a good hard look at this stage. Besides, read good books which could be those relating to your personal profile or which simply

interest you. Reading good books hones your understanding and expression.

This is also a good time to meet people, who can offer guidance regarding the personality test or who can give useful inputs about the topics/areas mentioned in your personal profile. This is the first phase of preparation for the personality test. Here the objective should be, to gradually wean yourself from the break you had taken, and also to get into the groove for more intensive preparation. It is also important to fully enjoy this initial break and the subsequent warming up period. For, in this phase of preparation you have sufficient time to read good books, pursue your interests and hobbies, read newspapers and magazines and talk to people, without any sense of guilt of not fruitfully utilising your time. Enjoying is important to refresh you and give you the energy to embark upon the final burst of preparation for the personality test. Enjoying this phase is also essential, as this is the only time you have some **leisurely** moments in life before you latch on again to the cycle of the interview, the Preliminary and the Main examinations.

2.5 Preparation at Full Throttle: The Next Phase

After 6–8 weeks of the last Main examination, it is time to raise your interview preparation to a higher notch. The pertinent areas of preparation and some useful techniques are being discussed below.

- Reading Newspapers and Magazines
- Preparing Diary/Note Books
- Watching TV and surfing Internet
- Books to read
- Meeting People
- Preparing for personal profile

2.6 Reading Newspapers

Reading newspapers is important to get daily inputs about issues of national, international and regional significance. This is one medium which provides

you a wide range of information and analysis of issues, which are current and relevant. It is easily affordable and expendable. It is accessible everywhere, right from a railway station to a tea shop, from big metros to nondescript villages. Besides, it is portable and enables you to gainfully utilise even small fragments of your available time say, while you are waiting for a bus, commuting in a train or otherwise having just a few idle moments. Reading quality newspapers should become like a daily religious chore. Some significant points about reading newspapers are being mentioned below.

- ***Reading National Dailies—Read at Least Two Newspapers Every Day***

Preferably two national newspapers like The Times of India, The Hindustan Times, The Hindu, etc. (for U.P.S.C's Civil Services personality test) should be read everyday. While preparing for the interview of the State Civil Services examination, make it a point to read a regional newspaper/local daily also, which gives good coverage of the issues pertaining to the state, apart from a national daily.

- ***Perusing Articles***

Go through the newspapers once. Identify the news items, articles or editorial comments which are significant from the perspective of the interview. Read these articles/news items very carefully.

- ***Summarising and Noting Important Issues***

After going through the news items, make a mental note of what the news item has to say and what you have understood. If the issue is important, then briefly jot down the summary of the issue in your diary or note book or in a file/memo of your smart phone (mobile).

- ***Scrapbook of Articles***

Some candidates prefer to cut out relevant articles and collect them in a scrap book. Such collection can be helpful to revise important issues at a later

stage. Mark out/highlight the important portions of the articles or better still note on the side margins of the article, the summary of the issues. If cutting and collecting articles is too much of a bother, then simply summarise the essence of the article in your diary or note book. Such compilation can also be made in a computer device in a soft form.

• ***Reading Financial and Economic Segments***

Most national dailies have separate sections to cover economic and financial news. Read this section very carefully. The upheavals in world market, the burgeoning burden of oil prices, soaring inflation, industrial slow down, increasing fiscal deficit, all these have considerable impact on the economic growth of a nation and even on the life of the common man. No wonder this is one area from which questions often crop up in the interview. It is also noteworthy that annual budget and the Finance Bill is now laid in the Parliament on the first of February. Discussion on the budget in the Parliament, before it is put to vote usually takes place in the months of February and March. Understandably, when the interviews begin in the month of March or early April, the budgetary and economic news still continue to grab the headlines and therefore they are likely to capture the attention of the interviewer. As such, candidates should also learn/brush up their knowledge about the budgetary process including the various kinds of deficits etc. (fiscal deficit, budgetary deficit, revenue deficit and primary deficit) and other budgetary and economic terminologies.

However, students from non-economics background at times encounter difficulties in comprehending the technical jargon and budgetary terminologies that financial/economic news items invariably use. A valuable aid to such candidates would be an economics primer/ dictionary or an elementary level economics course book (like NCERT publications), that would elucidate these concepts in simple terms.

For those who are from economics, commerce or business studies background, it will be prudent if one regularly reads an economics or business daily, *The Economic Times*, *The Financial Express*, *The Business*