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Tips on cracking CSE by Ira Singhal Rank 1 CSE 2015

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UPSC Topper Ira Singhal Marks

These are marks of UPSC Topper Ira Singhal, she got all India rank 1 in Civil services exam 2014 conducted by UPSC.



- Essay: 160/250
- GS Paper : 103/250
- GS Paper : 122/250
- GS Paper : 95/250
- GS Paper : 135/250

- **GS Total: 455/ 1000**
 - Geography Paper 1 : 168/250
 - Geography Paper 2 : 137/250
 - Optional total : **305/ 500**
 - **Written total : 920/ 1750**

 - Interview : 162/275
 - Total : 1082 /2025
 - AI Rank : 1
-

Ira Singhal UPSC Topper 2014 Detailed Study Plan and advice Whether to take coaching or not

From Ira Singhal UPSC Topper 2014



COACHING OR NO COACHING

COACHING and My recommendation – I took coaching in my first attempt in 2009-10. I did not have idea about the preparation. I did not even know what the topics of the course meant! I had no friends or family who had ever done this. That time, in 2009-10 there was no material available online. I didn't know even NCERT books [[Download all the NCERT Books from one place](#)] are needed. I needed coaching mainly for my optional. I didn't attend most of the G.S. classes but did attend the optional classes. I had to prepare most of the stuff on my own though they helped guide me on where to start. These days a lot of material is available online and a lot of guidance on where to begin is also present online so if I were preparing today, I would not join them. I don't recommend or condemn them. It depends on the sort of person you are. Some of us need hand-holding and need someone else to keep them on track and some of us are self-motivated. So it all depends on how you think you can succeed best. Though if it is only about material, a lot of it is available online these days.

Coaching at ALS, South Delhi centre in specific – I took Geography, Public Administration and G.S. classes from ALS. Geography as taught by Mr. Shashank Atom was brilliant. The

teacher helped you recognize patterns and build your understanding yourself. I never opened a single book for Paper 2 of geography as I had understood everything so clearly in his class. I just had to update myself on the trends from the Economic Survey and the Census. Even though he didn't actually like me and even doubted I would ever get selected, I think he was a brilliant teacher because he made sure our fundamentals were built.

General Studies and Geography as taught by Mr. Jojo Matthews was absolutely terrible. In my opinion, he was pretty much the worst teacher possible. Firstly, he just comes to class and starts narrating some data which you have to take down at the speed of light because he doesn't feel like he should slow down and either try to explain anything or even give you enough time to properly put your pen to paper, so that you might be able to read the things you have written, sometime in future. After the first few attempts I gave up altogether. Another really nice thing he does, is insult the students when they ask questions. And not only does he insult you when you ask, right then and there, he continues doing it for the rest of the class and carries it to the next if he can remember you. He thinks he is being funny, the student who dared to ask feels he is being insulting, and I just found it all plain offensive and rude. A teacher should create a learning environment and no question is too stupid – something I think he missed when he decided to become a teacher.

Also he has claimed credit for my success so I think this is where I should clarify a few things that happened. I had given the exam in 2010 & 2011 and scored a rank both times. I did not give in 2012 because I thought I needed to first solve my matter in court before attempting this again, if ever. Since nothing was happening, I decided to try doing it again with the completely overhauled pattern in 2013. I went to their South Delhi center where I had taken the coaching and begged them to let me buy the material for the new pattern. I told

them I'd pay whatever they were charging. I was told that Mr. Matthews had given strict instructions and that I should call and ask him. I called him 5 times and messaged him 3 times. I told him I was an old student and that I had cleared the exam before and I wanted to buy the material and was ready to pay full price. He told me to call later but he didn't deign pick my calls later. He did NOT EVEN ONCE RESPOND TO MY MESSAGES AND AFTER THE FIRST TIME STOPPED TAKING MY CALLS. He didn't care if I was a partially successful ex-student. Actually he doesn't really care if you are his student, he needs money and as long as you are paying for the full class again, he will give you the material...not that he is polite and caring as a teacher should be even then! But then this time, as soon as the result came, he found time from his super busy life to call and congratulate me! I am suddenly important!

Oh and by the way, ALS was the one who taught me to write only in paragraphs. In fact they insisted on it! They said NEVER WRITE IN POINTS. If I had stopped following their advice earlier, I might have not had to wait for my fourth attempt to clear IAS. I only wrote in points this time cause my friend Savita who was a fellow sufferer at their hands told me that all the toppers write in points! I was still scared to follow her advice because ALS had insisted SOOOO HARD to never write in points! But I thought, well it's not like I ever got brilliant marks ever before so let me just try it! In my B-School and Engineering we wrote the answers in points and it made everything to much simpler. But due to the coaching centre I wrote all my previous attempts in paragraphs. This time I did the opposite and I think I did a lot better in my presentation.

Answer and Essay Writing Strategy

Answer Writing Strategy

Wrote in points wherever possible. Even in the optional. And I write full sentences as points, not phrases. In my previous attempts I used to write answers in paragraph form and I never

got any marks. I used to know the whole paper but I still did not get any marks because of writing in paragraph form. Underlined key words – did not ever do this before so it must have helped.

Did not give a beginning or an ending paragraph. No time generally. Might have done for a few answers where it was absolutely necessary to start giving the points. I used to write nice starting and ending paras earlier but did not finish the exam paper...so I skipped it this time.

Did not use coloured pens. Mainly used the pencil or the pen I was already writing with to underline.

Diagrams if possible or needed. Not always possible or needed. Drew them in pen or pencil as convenient.

Did not lie to the examiner like in my previous attempts. I wrote only those questions that I knew. Did not attempt questions I did not know. In my previous attempts I used to do that. I saved time and energy by not trying to fool the examiner and writing just any nonsense. Mostly in such cases we keep writing the same thing again and again and I think it might just irritate the examiner. So I did not do that this time.

Did not worry about the word limit. Wrote whatever and as much as I knew. It might have been more or might have been less.

Essay Writing Strategy

Choosing the topic – I choose topics which can have something substantial to write and not philosophical. This time I wrote on Standardized Testing and Tourism. Both of them have multiple dimensions to talk about. I made the mistake of choosing a topic in an earlier attempt where I knew one part of the question too much and not enough of the other part ...wrote it very enthusiastically and got very little marks. Language skill matters in the essay so I wrote a nice grammatically correct one but did not use too complicated words...just to keep it easy to read for the examiner. I focused on not writing colloquial language and did try to keep my spellings in check.

I used Subheadings – something I learnt from reading the blog of Gaurav Aggarwal Sir, last year's AIR -1.
I underlined in a couple of places in the essay as well.
I made one or two diagrams where I could.

Booklist for Mains

Essay – No book. Marks 160/250

General Studies Paper 1 – Marks 103/250

Art & Culture – never prepared. But I have heard people say [Spectrum](#) is good. No clue cause I didn't study so please check with others. I left all the questions in the exam – which is reflected in my marks. J

Independence History – Old NCERT for pre-1857 and Spectrum for 1857 and beyond. I found that the questions need you to not go in depth but just know the topic and be able to analyse it right then and there. So I found reading the fat Bipin Chandra etc a complete waste of time. If you feel like it, then please go ahead but I didn't do it. Also check out the new NCERT because the important Personalities are mentioned in Boxes in that book.

Post- independence History – ONLY the new NCERT – India Since Independence. It is a brilliant book which gives everything you need to know clearly and concisely. Also again, the personalities are given in boxes. UPSC hasn't run out of questions to ask from that yet, so it should suffice a few more years.

World History – Old NCERTs available as photocopies right from 9-12th. The ones from before the year 2000. They are more than enough. Again, UPSC hasn't run out of questions to ask from that yet, so it should suffice a few more years.

Sociology material – did a few coaching materials on the random topics but it was more about my general understanding of Indian Society.

Geography – can't help there since it was my optional so I did detailed material on the topics. But Mrunal.org has covered some stuff very nicely and YouTube has some brilliant videos

on the basic topics. NCERTs are the main starting point even for the optional people.

General Studies Paper 2 – Marks 122/250

Polity – I only ever did [Laxmikant Polity](#). I find it the best book ever. Haven't read anything else. But maybe now after the exam I will try reading [D.D. Basu](#) just to see what it is all about. I tried it before and couldn't get past the first chapter. So it was Laxmikant for me!

RPA – did google search and read stuff from multiple websites and also whatever was in the news.

Schemes etc – I did from the direct Ministry websites. Also my friend Shikhar used to listen to the news and would force me to listen with him on AIR Fm. Sometimes the news analysis that came after the news would give brilliant points for the schemes. But I hadn't done ministry websites before and I did it this time. It made a huge difference. Also would google search for schemes of government of India and check out all the results that appeared.

Current Affairs – I did Vision coaching current affairs [[Click Here To Download](#)] . I think they copy paste articles from The Hindu but since I was too lazy to read the Hindu everyday, this worked for me. I did the C.A. right from December of 2013. Last year I did not do current affairs at all, but that was a big mistake.

International Affairs – I did from Vajiram Coaching material which they bring out around a month before the exam. It was more than sufficient in my opinion.

Other topics – I did a lot of government documents like reports on the topics and also googled all the topics mentioned and read some of the articles that came up. Didn't make notes but got a general idea. I did this for the first time this year. Also did coaching material from 3 delhi based coachings – Sriram, Vajiram and Vision. Some topics were good in one source and some in the other.

General Studies Paper 3 – Marks 95/250

Basic Economics – I had done this in Business School so I just brushed it up. Didn't follow any particular source.

Economics C.A. – Mrunal.org is a brilliant source. I did it only on the last night before the exam but I regret not paying more attention.

Government documents and websites for the other topics where needed.

Referred to Vision and Sriram material for most of the topics.

Security – I did Vajiram booklet but didn't find it great.

Sriram material had covered some of the topics really well.

Disaster – NDMA and other government websites.

S&T, Bio-diversity and Environment – I had in my first attempt finished Wizard Science & Tech (big fat book), so I kept doing it. Bought newer editions where I just had to update on the new additions.

General Studies Paper 4 – Marks 135/250

[Lexicon thin book on ethics](#)

Didn't really need to prepare much so no clue. Never did a single case study or read any other book. Can't help much here.

I handled Case Studies basis what I had learnt in Business School so there isn't any one technique. Every question requires a different strategy. Some techniques you can google are – PESTEL, Stakeholder Analysis, Value Chain, SWOT and Pro-Con.

Geography Optional – 305/500

[Savinder Singh – Physical Geography](#)

[Rupa Made Simple – Physical & Human geography both](#)

[Majid Hussain – Evolution of geographical thought](#)

[Goh Cheng Leong – Certificate Physical and Human Geography](#)

[K. Siddhartha – Economic Geography](#)

NCERTs -6th to 12th old and new

I, even, did ICSE 6-8th – not relevant anymore

Coaching material for the rest of the topics

Google searched a lot of issues not given clearly elsewhere.

YouTube videos on resources etc.

There were a few other books but none of them were relevant. I tend to buy everything anyone said and they were mostly useless. So just giving a list of the books I read again and again.

I am terrible at Maps. I can do the world map perfectly but just can't do India Map. I have been known to draw Amarnath in China, exchange Kandla and Mundhra port and basically change the location of every city. I know the big features as they relate to India physical but the small towns and cities and rivers that get asked, I never know. They ask a lot from Current Affairs and since I do my Current Affairs differently, I always get a 0 in map. Though I think I knew some of it correctly this year. So I cannot help with the preparation of the Map.

Preparation Strategy

PLEASE NOTE THESE ARE JUST MY OPINIONS AND MY WAYS OF DOING THINGS. IN NO WAY IS ALL THIS WHAT I ASK ALL OF YOU TO DO.

I only prepared the topics I was comfortable with. I cannot mug up stuff so I left the topics which required mugging up. I do not prepare data and I don't know data for anything. Never mugged up any.

Left Art & Culture and Environment topics in G.S. and left Map completely in Geography. They required mugging up and I am not very good with that. So I focused on preparing the topics I could handle.

Started from the basics. I found NCERTs are a must-read. But yes, some subjects require specialised books after that. But I found that you cannot ignore NCERTs. You have to do other books alongside NCERTs. Everything starts from there. Also we need to do them multiple times.

Mostly depended on online material. Did not go to any one site, but checked multiple sources for everything. I like getting different points of view on everything so I would read as many sources as possible for the same topic. I did not

revise anything though, something I should have done. I don't necessarily recommend doing this because I ended up wasting a lot of time and effort and did not even remember most of the stuff I read. Though using more than one source is always a good idea.

I am extremely, extremely lazy and since Current Affairs requires effort throughout the year, I had to depend on online websites at the last minute for getting my material. But if you can, please read the newspapers daily. Cannot recommend any magazines since I never read any. Do prepare your Current Affairs from the exam month of the previous year.

I never prepared notes for anything, even when I read the same topic from multiple books. I just went back and read all the books again – mainly for my optional Geography where I consulted more than 35-40 books. I used to underline important stuff in the books but I was too lazy to write it all down. Please don't take this as what everyone must do. Do what makes it better for you to remember stuff.

I used to discuss and debate a lot of stuff with my friends so it helped giving me different view-points and helped my analytical abilities.

I am not someone who can study throughout the day or something, so my study plan is always about finishing a particular amount of course rather than studying for a fixed number of hours. For example, I would plan to finish 20 chapters in a day rather than study for 15 hours. I did not waste time starring at the same page for a long time and then get up telling myself that I studied for so many hours. Instead I spent a LOT of time on my multiple hobbies.

I did not lock myself away from my friends and family or my hobbies. I somehow found time for everything...but that might be because I used to avoid studying. I do realise sometimes talking to people can be a distraction because you will end up spending time thinking about the stuff they said and that can take your concentration away from your books when you start studying. Do what works best for you. I couldn't lock myself

away from all the other things I love but maybe you need to. I never prepared for Prelims or Interview. I used to directly prepare for Mains and answer prelims based on my knowledge of Mains syllabus. Which is why I never score very high in GS of prelims. I don't recommend this but this is the reason I cannot help anyone with how to prepare for the prelims. I have given CAT so I didn't need to prepare for CSAT so don't know the material for that either.

I didn't prepare for interview because I see it as an opportunity to interact and exhibit my personality and thought-process to the interviewer rather than my knowledge. So I get good marks in interviews when the questions are about me and my hobbies and how I would handle situations but I do terribly when asked factual questions of Current Affairs. I have been asked many times about when to start studying for this exam – and this is what I believe and did for myself. I think it is important to find another alternate career before you stake your future on this uncertain path. That will give you confidence and a safe haven in case things don't go your way. This exam needs a lot of hard work, a lot of mental strength and some amount of Luck. So to remove the luck factor, I decided to get a strong alternate career before this drowned me. Also working helped me analyse and see what I was good at and what I could handle. It gave me a lot of maturity and a wider, bigger perspective to things. Something that helped me a lot during preparation. And having a work possibility somewhere out there, keeps you positive and gives a lot of emotional balance.

I never made clearing the exam as the only thing in my life. I did not connect it to my ego or to my personal success or made it my reason to live. I can't be that intense about something like this. To me this exam is about what it allows me to do...like help manage things in my country, help improve lives, help make policy changes and work at the national and international levels to make lives better. I did not care about being rank 1 or something, I would have been quite alright even with rank 1000 as long as I get to do the work I

want to do.

I never took any test series or interview prep classes. I am too lazy to attend those. But if you need to practise and can't do it yourself, it is upto you!

Revision Short Notes of Tamilnadu History-Class-XII

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Source Teamwork

GK Today Mock Test For IAS Prelims

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Current Affair Material

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Committee to examine age relaxation for civil services exam

An expert committee will examine various issues related to age relaxation, eligibility, syllabus and pattern of civil services examination to select IAS and IPS officers, the government said on Thursday.

“The central government has received various representations on issues concerning the scheme of civil services examination (CSE) including for relaxation in maximum age limit and setting of question papers in the regional languages in the civil services (preliminary) examination,” minister of state for personnel Jitendra Singh told Rajya Sabha in a written reply.

It has been decided to constitute an expert committee to comprehensively examine various issues raised from time to time i.e. eligibility, syllabus, scheme and pattern of CSE, he said. The civil services examination is conducted annually in three stages—preliminary, main and interview—to select candidates for prestigious Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and Indian Police Service (IPS) among others. There are two compulsory papers—Paper I and Paper II—of 200 marks each in civil services (preliminary) examination.

Current affairs Collection for Upsc Ias 2015

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