

ESSAY STRATEGY
BY MANUJ JINDAL
AIR 53, CSE 2016
Marks in Essay: 158

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"Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man." -- Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

We must learn to write an effective essay to score well in the UPSC Civil Services exam. Essay carries a huge proportion in the overall exam scheme. If you do some basic calculation about the contribution of essay to your score in UPSC, you will realize that it can fetch up to 160 out of 250 marks, which is 64% marks! I got 1053/2075 as my final score, which is 50.75%. The topper got 1120/2075 which is 54%. As you can see, proportionally, essay has a central place in preparation for UPSC as it can literally make or break your rank.

So where to start? Perhaps, you are asking some questions like the following to yourselves:

Can I write well even if I have never written seriously, or as an Engineer I never wrote or I come from a Rural background where there was not much focus on English essay writing?

Writing can be mastered by anyone who reads well and writes a lot. PRACTICE PRACTICE PRACTICE, that is the mantra for success. That's not enough though. Practice must be accompanied by continuous analysis of your own errors and shortcomings in every essay. This is the first step to succeeding in writing a good essay in UPSC.

The question arises, where to start. First, inculcate self-belief. I believe that all of us can learn to write better, more effectively, and get a higher score in UPSC if we apply ourselves in the right direction. UPSC is not looking for a linguistic expert or a literary piece of writing. They are interested in the clarity of thought, simplicity of presentation and a well-groomed structure.

I am a classical example of failing to realize this in my previous attempt. I got only 90 marks in 2015 paper and then was very disappointed by my poor performance. First I felt like filing an RTI, and I questioned UPSC's checking.

Slowly, as I thought more about my essay, I decided to leave all this behind and start practicing and improving by getting consistent feedback – both feedback of others, and my own analysis of my mistakes. I realized that lack of self-practice and self-evaluation had led to my low marks. This time I wouldn't repeat the same mistake.

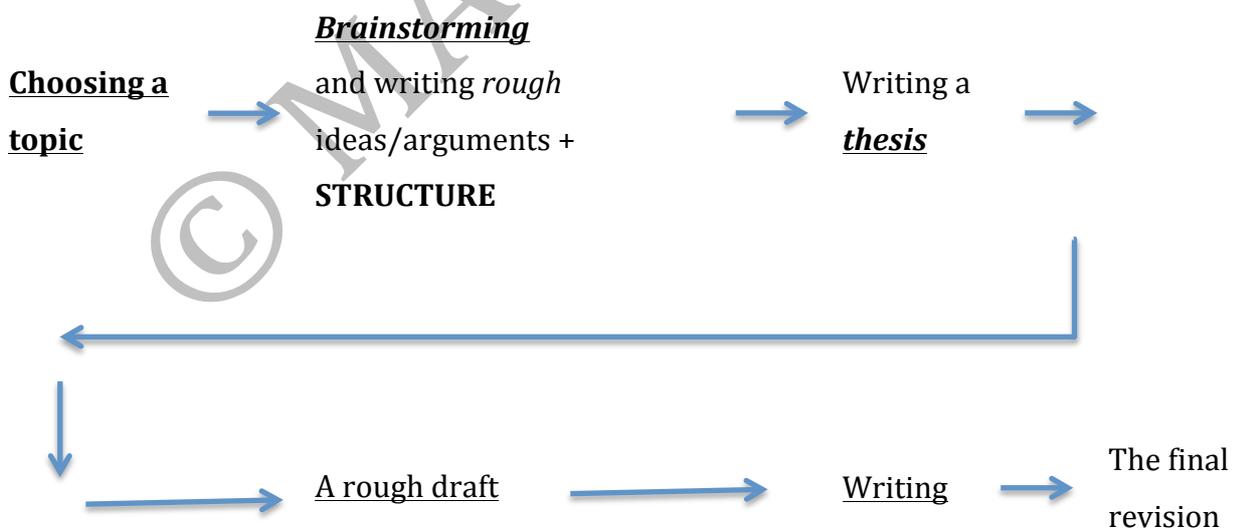
Techniques:

The question arises, how to use various techniques to improve writing for the essay module of UPSC?

Although writing is a complex task, it is a **learned craft** that can be mastered and improved with practice and a right approach. Although no formula can guarantee a good essay, many writers have developed some **good advice** to help you get started. I will highlight my preparation technique, which will help you to build this foundation.

The overall suggested process of Essay writing:

Firstly, for preparing and writing an essay — it could be summed up as follows:



As you write more, you too will discover that you will revisit some parts of the process more than others. I, personally, for example, spend considerable time on brainstorming and writing a good structure.

Time to be allotted to each part:

1. *Choosing a topic: 5-7 minutes.*
2. *Brainstorming and writing rough arguments: 20 minutes*
3. *Thesis: 10 minutes total*
4. *A rough draft: 10 minutes each, 20 minutes total*
5. *Writing: 50-55 minutes each, 110 minutes*
6. *Revision: 5-7 minutes each, 10 minutes total*

Total Time taken: 180 minutes

The important thing is to keep the process in mind. As you become more proficient with practice, you will become more confident and consistent, developing your own practices and techniques also.

Interesting Fact: Essay Means "To Try"

In the 14th century, English borrowed the word *essay* from the Middle French word *essai*. In Middle French, the word meant "**to try**". The word's origins ultimately go back to the Late Latin word *exagium*, **the act of weighing, evaluating, judging.**

The history of this word is instructive, for in its history we see everything that writers hope to achieve when they compose an essay. → create a well-structure, critical piece of analytical writing.

Process of Writing Essay for UPSC:

1. Choosing a Topic: → UNDERSTAND THE TOPIC first

- a. UPSC provides 4 topics in each section. Generally, the essay topic can be philosophical in nature or it can be just looking for a simple analysis of a particular current topic of economic, technological or social importance.
- b. The key is to get a VERY CLEAR UNDERSTANDING of the topic, whichever it is.
- c. You will naturally choose a topic that you have the maximum content on, but that can be misleading. You might miss the crux of the essay when trying to just pick a topic with maximum content. So spend time on understanding each topic and picking the one where you have the BEST CLARITY.
- d. To get this clarity look for: **the key terms** stated in the topic or what is the main essay question. Look for words that suggest the kind of reasoning you should be using in the essay. Also use words such as *why, how, analyze, compare, evaluate, argue*, etc. to reframe your essay topic and think what UPSC is trying to ask in that essay.

2. Brainstorming:

- a. You can start by writing various keywords, quotes, random lines that come to your mind, examples etc. that come to your mind after you have decided a particular topic.
- b. You can also form categories such as (1) Intro (2) Body (3) Conclusion and write a rough work when brainstorming there under these categories.
- c. You can use the last 4 pages provided by UPSC to write these in a proper way → rough work should be the cleanest work in the entire paper.
- d. Evidence/Examples to support your view and arguments in essay:
 - i. The essay must consist of examples or other references, what I call “evidence” to support arguments you are making in the body. This can be sorted out in the brainstorming stage only.

- ii. Why this is needed: When Aristotle wrote his *Rhetoric* in the 4th century BC, he began a process of codifying the possible ways that speakers or writers could persuade their audiences by the use of evidence. His schema has proven so useful that it has been the foundation for writers for more than a millennium, and will likely endure as long as civilization does. Aristotle's outline of the use of evidence for persuasive writing was just as useful for the ancients as it will be in the next century.
- iii. Evidence provides support for claims. Evidence is subcategorized according to *how* it is used to support the claim. Evidence that focuses on our ability to think is classified as *rational appeal*, evidence that focuses on our ability to 'feel' is *emotional appeal*, and evidence that focuses on our ability to trust those we find to be credible is *ethical appeal*. In UPSC, rational and ethical are the most effective. → Use facts, logical reasoning, expert views/quotes, studies, quotes from world reports etc.

The Types of Evidence		
<u>Rational Appeals</u>	<u>Emotional Appeals</u>	<u>Ethical Appeals</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facts • case studies • statistics • experiments • logical reasoning • analogies • anecdotes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the higher emotions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. altruism 2. love 3. ... • the base emotions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. greed 2. lust 3. ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trustworthiness • credibility <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. expert testimony 2. reliable sources 3. fairness

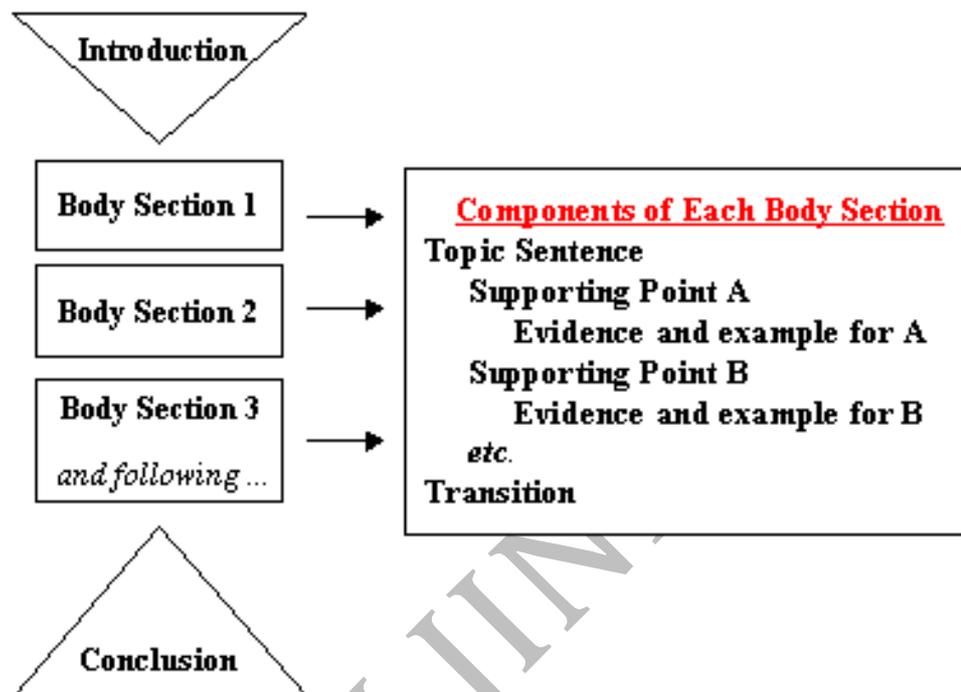
3. Structure:

- a. You can divide your essay in roughly 8 parts of 125 words each. 1 for introduction, 1 for conclusion, and rest 6 for the body of the essay.
- b. Heading/Subheadings → for me, these worked as they provided a well-defined structure to my essay. Use them as you wish but do not think that essay means no headings. UPSC wants you to write like a bureaucrat, not an academic. Also, feel free to use extremely relevant diagrams/flowcharts. I did not do so, but they are acceptable in UPSC. If you want to play on the safe side, just go with the headings and not diagrams.
- c. Essays may present an argument differently, but an essay's organization — how it begins, develops, and ends — should be designed to present your argument clearly and persuasively. (The order in which **you** discovered the parts of your argument is seldom an effective order for presenting it to a reader.)
- d. The introduction begins with the general and moves toward the specific, as the sides of the triangle narrow down toward a point. A writer uses the introduction to show how the specific question addressed in this essay relates to a greater issue or field.
 - i. Your introductory paragraph sets the stage or the context for the position you are arguing for.
 - ii. This introduction should end with a thesis statement that provides your claim (what you are arguing for) and the reasons for your position on an issue.
- e. Body:
 - i. The body of the essay is, of course, where all the really work is done. Having gained the readers' attention in the introduction, the writer must now hold their attention by offering substantial, interesting, compelling ideas that



support, illustrate, exemplify, or expand the thesis of the essay.

Components of Each Essay



f. Conclusion:

- i. Your conclusion should neither be a summary nor a mere restatement of your thesis.
- ii. Instead, it must *go beyond the thesis* to reach a **judgment**, **to express your approval of one side of an issue**, to discuss your findings and their implications, or to **offer solutions**. To put it succinctly, you should say something worthwhile. After all, the examiner has stayed with you through several pages; you owe them a concluding statement.
- iii. The conclusion serves several functions:
 1. **to inspire** the audience with a favorable opinion of ourselves and an unfavorable opinion of our opponents,
 2. **to amplify** the force of the points we have made in the previous section and to extenuate the force of the points made by the opposition,

3. **to rouse** the appropriate emotions in the audience, and
 4. **to restate** in a summary way our facts and arguments.
- iv. Techniques of conclusion:
1. Restate the thesis and reach beyond it with a recommendation, an evaluation, a prediction, or a question. In essence, you must be conclusive; that is, you must present your thesis in its final, most persuasive form. In the introduction you were giving the reader an idea of what was to follow, trying to attract interest. In the conclusion, you have the weight of the essay behind you, and you can state your case succinctly, knowing that the reader has all the information you have provided.
 2. Close with an effective
 3. Offer a directive or solution.
 4. Compare past to present or the beginning to the end — is another way frequently used by some to make an impactful conclusion.

4. Thesis

- a. Topics by UPSC does not provide you with an obvious thesis, you should first think of possible question(s) you can use to answer the "problem" presented in your essay's assignment. Asking the right questions can lead you toward collecting relevant information and ultimately formulating an interesting, worthwhile thesis.
- b. What is a thesis:
 - i. states what your position on an issue is
 - ii. usually appears at the end of the introduction in a short essay
 - iii. should be clearly stated and often contains emphatic language (should, ought, must)

5. Writing

- a. If you do the rough work and brainstorming suggested above, writing will be a cakewalk.
- b. The better the planning stage, the easier the writing stage.
- c. Don't try to write too slowly, as it will not provide a flow and you might become nervous.
- d. Write with your normal speed and use the rough work consistently to guide your writing. I used to look back after every paragraph to ensure I was following my rough work.
- e. Write legibly – the better your handwriting, the more advantage you have over someone with similar content but poor handwriting.
- f. Underline: Headings and important keywords.
- g. Use CAPITAL letters to showcase important ideas or words you want examiner to read.

6. Revising

- a. Look out of general grammatical mistakes that you can catch in one revision quickly only. No need to focus too much than this on grammar.
- b. Misspellings can be fixed in this revision.
- c. *Aesthetics*: I used my time for revision for underlining. I underlined everything with a pencil and a scale. The essay must look as good as it reads 😊

Other things to keep in mind:

Keep your essay's overall purpose and organization in mind. Give yourself the freedom to adapt and change your outline as you are in the process of writing the rough part.

Don't wait till "everything is ready" before you begin to write. Give yourself the liberty of starting to write even as soon as possible. Don't wait till you have finished the syllabus and all that. Even if you don't have much content, start now!! This will give you enough time to build your foundations.

My first article on essay after marks came out:

A story of improving the score from a paltry 90 to a game changing 158!

The Achilles' heel in my success to CSE 2015 was the essay component. Despite having been writing for almost a decade on a daily basis (I write my diary), I made some critical mistakes that cost me a spot higher up in the ranks in 2015. Perhaps, it was a blessing in disguise, but it was quite a painful blessing! The real question most of you must be thinking about is, how did I recognise this problem and tackle it? How did I improve my score so drastically? Well, here are my two cents on it.

The initial step was to recognize that I failed to get good marks because of my own follies. First, I realized that I did not practice enough for the essay component. I barely wrote 3-4 essays during the 2015 attempt. I ignored this critical part of the exam and took it for granted. I imagined, to my own peril, that since I had been writing for so long, I would be able to handle the essays well. For many of us it works, however there are also many (trust me, MANY), who fall because of this complacency, just like I did.

Also, please realise the fact that essay can fetch up to 160 out of 250 marks, which is 64% marks! I got 1053/2075 as my final score, which is 50.75%. The topper got 1120/2075 which is 54%. Clearly, essay has a central place in our preparation for UPSC as it can literally make or break your rank.

Second, I simply did not write a good enough essay in 2015. Initially I did not believe so. After the mark sheet of main exam was out, I spent countless nights thinking what had I done wrong to get a score of 90?! Was it a mistake at UPSC's end? My father even told me to file an RTI and all that.

In a matter of a few days I recollected about 20-30% of my essay, or at least how I had gone about it. I also re-read my older essays (although I had written only two or three of them). It was clear to me by this time that the marks I got were not random. They were based in some sort of reality, some basic mistakes I made and also due to lack of good guidance and practice.

Immediately after the marks were out I started looking for Essay test series available in the market. This was the first important step – make a mindset to write a lot of essays and get all of them evaluated by the right people. These people can be your friends, siblings, parents, teachers and successful candidates from past years as well. I wrote a total of 46 essays in the course of my journey for CSE 2016, and it definitely paid off.

So how to write UPSC essays?

Follow the pattern [this is an argumentation technique that is well accepted for conventional academic writing across various universities]:

1. Introduction
2. Thesis statement [the main argument of your essay]
3. Mini-thesis statements to support the main argument
- 4 Antithesis, if needed
5. Conclusion

Example: Topic: “Impacts of Globalisation on Indian Culture” – see my essay attached

This above formulation helped me to get my structure and line of thinking intact. I was not someone who had command over language. I also understood that UPSC does not focus on language/vocab skills when awarding marks in these essays. They are looking for clarity, structure and diversity of thought process. A conventional essay would, on average, fetch you more marks than an unconventional/creative one for sure.

Heading/Subheadings -> for me, these worked as they provided a well-defined structure to my essay. Use them as you wish but do not think that essay means no headings. UPSC wants you to write like a bureaucrat, not an academic. Also, feel free to use extremely relevant diagrams/flowcharts. I did not do so, but they are acceptable in UPSC. ***If you want to play on the safe side***, just go with the headings and not diagrams.

I also followed a video lecture offered free on coursera on writing academic papers and essays, which basically talks in detail about the above structure I have provided you.

The link is here [not sure if it's still offered but providing the link nonetheless]: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/getting-started-with-essay-writing/home>

Test Series I took:

Lukmaan IAS, +wrote some Insights essays which helped and other old papers of UPSC also

Lukmaan experience:

Teachers with years of valuable experience check copies here. Lukmaan's Ansari sir knows what is needed in an essay and he communicates that superbly in his comments. He consistently evaluated my essay and provided me critical feedback and helped me develop an intuitive sense on essays. Thank you sir.

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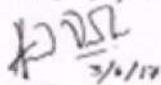
ED CLASSES/100 TOPICS BATCH

I did the 100 current affairs class by Anand sir at Lukmaan IAS. It helped me get a great grasp at the relevant and important topics for Mains. The conceptual clarity and lateral thinking that sir encouraged was amazing.

I also referred to the ED booklet for my 2016 attempt and succeeded in scoring great marks in GS.

I thank sir for his kind guidance and support.

ANAND VARDHAN
AIR - 7, CSE - 2016


3/6/17

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