

UPSC CDS Syllabus 2026

Union Public Service Commission — Combined Defence Services Examination

Vacancies	Announced twice yearly (CDS I & CDS II) for IMA, INA, AFA and OTA entries
Age Limit	IMA: 19–24 years (unmarried men); INA: 19–24 years (unmarried men); AFA: 20–24 years; OTA: 19–25 years (men & women)
Qualification	Bachelor's degree (Engineering degree for specific Navy/Air Force entries; final-year students may apply provisionally)
Application Fee	■200 (General/OBC male candidates). Women and SC/ST candidates are exempted.
Official Website	upsc.gov.in
Last Reviewed	2 Jun 2026

Overview

UPSC CDS commissions officers into the Indian Military Academy, Indian Naval Academy, Air Force Academy and Officers Training Academy, and is conducted twice a year (CDS I and CDS II). Selection has two major stages: a written exam (with paper combinations differing by academy — IMA/INA/AFA require three papers including Maths, while OTA requires only two, without Maths), followed by the multi-day SSB interview process covering psychological, group and personal-interview assessments, and a final medical examination. The written exam filters purely on academic ability, while the SSB is where officer-like qualities are actually assessed and where most serious preparation time should ultimately go.

What's New in the 2026 Cycle

- Two annual cycles — CDS I (written exam typically around April) and CDS II (typically around September).
- OTA entry (Non-Technical, for the Short Service Commission) does not require the Elementary Mathematics paper — only English and GK.
- SSB process spans 5 days across two stages (Screening, then Psychology/GTO/Interview) and is the actual differentiator in final selection.
- Final merit combines written exam marks and SSB marks — written qualifying alone does not guarantee selection.

Exam Pattern

Written Exam — IMA / INA / AFA

Mode: Offline, objective MCQ | Duration: 2 hours per paper (3 papers)

Section	Questions	Marks
English	120	100
General Knowledge	120	100
Elementary Mathematics	100	100

Negative marking: 1/3rd mark deducted per wrong answer | **Nature:** Merit-determining; candidates must also clear the SSB to be finally selected.

Written Exam — OTA (Non-Technical)

Mode: Offline, objective MCQ | Duration: 2 hours per paper (2 papers)

Section	Questions	Marks
English	120	100
General Knowledge	120	100

Negative marking: 1/3rd mark deducted per wrong answer | **Nature:** Merit-determining; candidates must also clear the SSB to be finally selected.

SSB Interview (Stage I & Stage II)

Mode: Screening test, Psychological tests, Group Testing Officer tasks, Personal Interview, Conference | Duration: 5 days

Section	Questions	Marks
Officer Potentiality Assessment	—	300

Negative marking: Not applicable | **Nature:** Counted for final merit alongside the written exam.

UPSC CDS — Detailed Subject-Wise Syllabus

English

Tests practical grammar and comprehension rather than literary depth — consistent daily practice closes gaps quickly.

- Grammar & usage
- Vocabulary — synonyms, antonyms, word meaning
- Comprehension of passages
- Sentence correction & error detection
- Ordering of words/sentences

General Knowledge

Leans toward current events and defence-related awareness more than pure static GK — follow defence news specifically.

- Current events — national & international, defence-related news
- History, freedom struggle & culture
- Geography — physical, Indian & world
- Indian polity, economy & governance
- General science — physics, chemistry, biology basics
- Defence-related general awareness

Elementary Mathematics (IMA/INA/AFA only)

Set at a Class 10 level — most candidates can master this fully with structured revision, making it a high-leverage scoring section.

- Arithmetic — number system, ratio, percentage, time & work
- Algebra — basic equations, set theory
- Trigonometry — ratios, heights & distances
- Geometry & mensuration
- Statistics — basic collection & representation of data

SSB — Psychological & Group Testing

This is where selection is actually decided — sustained mock practice over months matters far more than last-minute preparation.

- Officer Intelligence Rating test (screening)
- Picture Perception & Discussion Test
- Thematic Apperception Test, Word Association Test, Situation Reaction Test, Self-Description
- Group Discussion & Group Planning Exercise
- Progressive & Half Group Tasks, Command Task, Individual Obstacles
- Personal Interview & Conference

Selection Process

- 1 Written Examination — English, General Knowledge and (for IMA/INA/AFA) Elementary Mathematics.
- 2 SSB Interview — Screening (Stage I), then Psychological Tests, GTO tasks & Personal Interview (Stage II).
- 3 Medical Examination by a Board of service medical officers.
- 4 Final merit list based on combined written and SSB marks, subject to medical fitness.

Salary & Job Profile

On commissioning, Lieutenants (Army) and equivalent ranks in the Navy/Air Force start at Pay Level 10 (₹56,100 basic) plus Military Service Pay, Dearness Allowance and various service-specific allowances; pay rises with rank through a defined promotion timeline.

Best Books for Preparation

- Pathfinder CDS Entrance Examination — Arihant Experts

- Objective General English — S.P. Bakshi (Arihant)
- Quantitative Aptitude for Competitive Examinations — R.S. Aggarwal
- Manorama Yearbook (for General Knowledge & current affairs)

Previous Cut-off Trends (Approximate)

CDS written exam cut-offs vary by academy (IMA/INA/AFA/OTA) and cycle (CDS I/II), typically shifting with paper difficulty and vacancy count each time. SSB selection ratios are historically far more competitive than the written cut-off suggests, so treat the written stage as necessary but not sufficient — always check UPSC's official cut-off release for exact figures.

Preparation Tips

- Don't over-invest in Elementary Mathematics if you're an arts/commerce background candidate applying for OTA — that paper isn't required for the non-technical entry.
- Start SSB-specific preparation (group tasks, personal interview mock sessions) well before the written result — the 5-day process rewards sustained practice, not last-minute cramming.
- Read a daily newspaper specifically for defence and international relations news, since GK questions lean noticeably toward current affairs relevant to the armed forces.
- Physical fitness matters for the SSB's outdoor tasks — build basic stamina and coordination alongside academic prep.

Exam Day Guidelines

- Carry the e-Admit Card and a valid original photo ID to the exam centre.
- Only black ballpoint pens are permitted for the OMR answer sheet — carry spares.
- Arrive at least 60 minutes before reporting time; gates close strictly at the notified time.
- No electronic devices are allowed inside the examination hall.
- For SSB, carry multiple passport-size photographs, original certificates and photocopies as specified in your call letter.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is Elementary Mathematics compulsory for all CDS entries?

No — it's required for IMA, INA and AFA entries, but OTA (Non-Technical, Short Service Commission) candidates write only English and General Knowledge.

How many times a year is CDS conducted?

Twice — CDS I and CDS II — each with its own separate notification, written exam and SSB cycle.

What happens after clearing the CDS written exam?

Shortlisted candidates are called for the SSB interview process, a 5-day assessment of psychological and group testing followed by a personal interview, and final selection is based on combined written and SSB marks.

Is there negative marking in the CDS written exam?

Yes, 1/3rd of the marks allotted to a question is deducted for every wrong answer.

Can women candidates apply for CDS?

Yes, through the Officers Training Academy (OTA) entry for the Short Service Commission (Non-Technical); other CDS academy entries currently list separate eligibility per the official notification.

Compiled and reviewed by Syllabus Hub against the official Union Public Service Commission notification as of 2 Jun 2026. Exam patterns, vacancies and dates are subject to change — always cross-check with the official notification at upsc.gov.in before applying. © 2026 Syllabus Hub.