

UPSC CSE Syllabus 2026

Union Public Service Commission — Civil Services Examination (IAS, IPS, IFS & Allied Services)

Vacancies	933 posts (2026 notification, across IAS, IPS, IFS and Central Services)
Age Limit	21–32 years as on 1 August of the exam year (relaxation for SC/ST/OBC/PwD/ex-servicemen per standard norms)
Qualification	Bachelor's degree in any discipline from a recognised university; final-year students may apply provisionally
Application Fee	■100 (General/OBC/EWS). Women candidates and SC/ST/PwBD candidates are exempted.
Official Website	upsc.gov.in
Last Reviewed	13 Jul 2026

Overview

UPSC CSE is India's premier examination for recruiting officers into the IAS, IPS, IFS and other All India and Central Group A/B services. The 2026 cycle has 933 advertised vacancies. Selection runs through three stages spread across roughly a year: a two-paper objective Preliminary exam (Prelims 2026 was held on 24 May 2026), a nine-paper descriptive Main examination (scheduled from 21 August 2026), and a Personality Test. Prelims is purely a screening stage — its marks are never added to the final rank — while the Main examination and Interview together decide the merit list, out of a combined 2025 marks (1750 for Mains + 275 for the Interview).

What's New in the 2026 Cycle

- 2026 notification released 14 January 2026 for 933 vacancies; Prelims held 24 May 2026, Mains from 21 August 2026.
- Prelims negative marking: 0.66 marks deducted per wrong answer in GS Paper I, 0.83 marks in CSAT.
- CSAT remains qualifying only — candidates must score at least 33% (66/200) to qualify, but marks are not added to the Prelims cut-off.
- Mains has 9 papers worth 1750 marks: 2 qualifying language papers (300 each), Essay, GS I–IV (250 each) and 2 Optional papers of the same subject (250 each).
- Interview carries 275 marks — final merit is out of 2025 marks (Mains 1750 + Interview 275); Prelims marks are excluded entirely from the final rank.

Exam Pattern

Preliminary Examination — GS Paper I

Mode: Offline, OMR-based objective MCQ | Duration: 2 hours

Section	Questions	Marks
General Studies (History, Geography, Polity, Economy, Environment, Science & current affairs)	100	200

Negative marking: 0.66 mark deducted per wrong answer (1/3rd of the question's 2 marks) | **Nature:** Merit-determining for the Prelims cut-off; not counted in the final rank.

Preliminary Examination — CSAT (GS Paper II)

Mode: Offline, OMR-based objective MCQ | Duration: 2 hours

Section	Questions	Marks
Comprehension, Logical Reasoning, Analytical Ability, Decision-Making, Basic Numeracy & Data Interpretation	20	200

Negative marking: 0.83 mark deducted per wrong answer (1/3rd of the question's 2.5 marks) | Nature: Qualifying only — minimum 33% (66/200) required; marks not added to the Prelims cut-off.

Main Examination — Qualifying Papers

Mode: Offline, descriptive | Duration: 3 hours per paper

Section	Questions	Marks
Paper A — Compulsory Indian Language	—	300
Paper B — English	—	300

Negative marking: Not applicable — descriptive paper | Nature: Qualifying only — minimum 25% (75/300) required in each; not counted for merit.

Main Examination — Merit Papers

Mode: Offline, descriptive | Duration: 3 hours per paper

Section	Questions	Marks
Essay	—	250
General Studies I (Culture, History, Geography, Society)	—	250
General Studies II (Polity, Governance, IR, Social Justice)	—	250
General Studies III (Economy, Environment, S&T, Security)	—	250
General Studies IV (Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude)	—	250
Optional Subject — Paper I	—	250
Optional Subject — Paper II	—	250

Negative marking: Not applicable — descriptive paper | Nature: Counted for final merit.

Personality Test (Interview)

Mode: Board interview, 20–30 minutes | Duration: 20–30 minutes

Section	Questions	Marks
Personality, communication, current affairs & suitability for civil services	—	275

Negative marking: Not applicable | Nature: Counted for final merit.

UPSC CSE — Detailed Subject-Wise Syllabus

Prelims — General Studies Paper I

The broadest and most competitive section — consistent revision across all subject areas matters more than expertise in any one.

- Current events of national & international importance
- History of India & the Indian National Movement
- Indian and world geography — physical, social, economic
- Indian polity & governance — Constitution, Panchayati Raj, public policy, rights issues
- Economic and social development — sustainable development, poverty, inclusion, demographics
- Environmental ecology, biodiversity & climate change (non-specialist level)
- General science

Prelims — CSAT (GS Paper II)

Often underestimated by humanities-background aspirants — treat the 33% qualifying mark as a hard, non-negotiable target.

- Comprehension
- Interpersonal skills including communication skills
- Logical reasoning & analytical ability
- Decision-making & problem-solving
- General mental ability
- Basic numeracy (Class X level) — numbers, arithmetic, data interpretation
- Data interpretation — charts, tables, graphs

Mains — General Studies I

Rewards structured, example-rich answers over exhaustive fact recall — practice linking history/geography to current relevance.

- Indian culture — art forms, literature, architecture
- Modern Indian history from ~mid-18th century
- Indian freedom struggle
- Post-independence consolidation
- World history (18th century events onward)
- Indian society — diversity, poverty, urbanisation
- Salient features of world/Indian geography, distribution of resources

Mains — General Studies II

Governance and polity questions increasingly test application to current events, not just textbook definitions.

- Indian Constitution — historical underpinnings, features, amendments
- Functions of the Executive, Legislature & Judiciary
- Government policies & interventions
- Welfare schemes & social sector issues
- India and its neighbourhood relations
- International relations & global groupings
- Governance, transparency & accountability

Mains — General Studies III

The most current-affairs-driven GS paper — daily newspaper reading pays off disproportionately here.

- Indian economy — planning, resource mobilisation, growth
- Government budgeting
- Agriculture & food processing
- Land reforms, infrastructure
- Science & technology developments
- Environment conservation & disaster management
- Internal security & border management

Mains — General Studies IV

Case studies carry heavy weight — practising structured, balanced responses matters more than memorising ethical theories.

- Ethics and human interface
- Attitude, aptitude & foundational values for civil service
- Emotional intelligence
- Contributions of moral thinkers & philosophers
- Public/civil service values & ethics in public administration
- Probity in governance
- Case studies on ethical dilemmas

Optional Subject (choose one from 48 UPSC-listed subjects)

Often the single biggest score differentiator in Mains — choose based on genuine interest and scoring consistency, not just perceived 'safety'.

- Common choices: Public Administration, Sociology, Geography, History, Political Science & IR
- Literature optionals in 13 languages
- Two papers of 250 marks each, examined at postgraduate depth
- Optional choice should balance personal interest, overlap with GS, and scoring consistency

Selection Process

- 1 Preliminary Examination — GS Paper I (merit) and CSAT (qualifying); screening stage only.
- 2 Main Examination — 9 descriptive papers including 2 qualifying language papers and 7 merit papers.
- 3 Personality Test (Interview) — assesses suitability for civil services.
- 4 Final merit list prepared from combined Mains (1750) and Interview (275) marks — total 2025.

Salary & Job Profile

IAS/IPS/IFS officers enter at Pay Level 10 of the 7th CPC matrix (₹56,100 starting basic), rising through the career progression scale to Cabinet Secretary-equivalent levels over a full career, plus Dearness Allowance, HRA, official accommodation and other service-specific allowances and perquisites.

Best Books for Preparation

- Indian Polity — M. Laxmikanth
- Certificate Physical and Human Geography — G.C. Leong
- India's Struggle for Independence — Bipan Chandra
- NCERT textbooks (Class 6–12) — History, Geography, Polity, Economics, Science

Previous Cut-off Trends (Approximate)

UPSC CSE Prelims cut-offs have generally ranged from roughly 85–105 marks (out of 200) for the general category in recent cycles, though the exact figure shifts every year based on paper difficulty and the number of vacancies. Mains and final cut-offs vary even more by category and service preference — treat any single number as directional only and check UPSC's official cut-off release for the exact figures.

Preparation Tips

- Build NCERT-level foundations first for GS I–III before layering on advanced reference material — most Mains answers reward clarity over exhaustive detail.
- Treat CSAT as a must-clear hurdle, not an afterthought — many strong GS performers have been eliminated at Prelims purely for missing the CSAT qualifying mark.
- Choose your Optional subject early and stick with it; switching mid-preparation is the single biggest time cost aspirants report.
- Practise daily answer writing for Mains from month one, not just in the final months — writing speed and structure take much longer to build than content recall.

- Follow current affairs through a single consistent daily source rather than multiple overlapping ones to avoid information fatigue.

Exam Day Guidelines

- Carry the e-Admit Card printout and a valid original photo ID matching the name on your application.
- Only black ballpoint pens are permitted for the OMR sheet in Prelims — carry a couple of spares.
- Reach the centre at least an hour before reporting time; UPSC enforces strict gate-closing timings with no late entry.
- No electronic devices, including smartwatches and calculators, are allowed inside the examination hall.
- For Mains, carry your own stationery — UPSC does not provide pens for the descriptive papers.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are UPSC Prelims marks counted in the final CSE result?

No. Prelims is purely a screening stage to shortlist candidates for the Mains — its marks are never added to the final rank, which is based solely on Mains (1750 marks) and Interview (275 marks).

Is CSAT really just qualifying?

Yes, CSAT requires only 33% (66/200) to qualify, and beyond that threshold its marks don't affect your Prelims cut-off or final rank — but failing to clear it disqualifies you regardless of your GS Paper I score.

How many optional subjects does UPSC allow?

Candidates choose one optional subject from a list of 48 subjects (including 13 literature options), examined across two papers of 250 marks each in the Mains.

What is the UPSC CSE age limit and attempt limit?

The general category age limit is 21–32 years as on 1 August of the exam year, with relaxations for reserved categories; the number of permitted attempts also varies by category as specified in the notification.

Is there negative marking in the UPSC Mains exam?

No, since Mains is entirely descriptive, there's no negative marking — though the two language papers do carry a 25% qualifying threshold that doesn't count toward merit.

How many vacancies were advertised for UPSC CSE 2026?

The 2026 notification advertised 933 vacancies across the IAS, IPS, IFS and other Central Services, as released with the January 2026 notification.

Compiled and reviewed by Syllabus Hub against the official Union Public Service Commission notification as of 13 Jul 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.