

## Introduction

Name Neeraj Kumar Singh  
Roll number 240550  
Rank (CSE 2011) 11  
Optional Subjects Economics  
Public Administration  
Medium for Mains Exam English  
Mains Examination Centre New Delhi  
Number of Attempts 1  
Details of Graduation and Post-Grad. Integrated (5 year) Master of Arts in Economics  
Schooling (Medium) English  
Extracurricular activities,  
hobbies, achievements etc. Essay Writing  
Event Management  
Are you a working professional? Yes  
If yes, then did you leave your job  
or prepared while on the job? Joined the job after the main examination  
Did you take Coaching? Prelims: Yes  
Mains: Yes. (for economics)  
Interview: Took mocks  
Did you buy any postal courses? No  
Did you join any Mock test series? Yes

## Questions

### Inception

Q. When and how did the inspiration and idea of joining civil service come in your mind?

I zeroed on civil services as a career option in 2009 after a lot of deliberation. During my undergrad days I was a part of National Service Scheme. The projects there interested me and also got an experience of some of the lacunae in public policy implementation. Further, discussions on developmental issues in classrooms and with friends also made me interested in taking up a career in public policy implementation.

The Choice of Optional Subjects

Q7. After a person decides to appear in civil service exam, the first big obstacle is “Choice of optional subjects”. What factors did you consider before selecting your optional?

Choice of subjects should be based on interest and availability of guidance. For me, Economics was a natural choice as I was pursuing my post-graduation in it. The subject interested me and I was willing to put in the hard-work to crack the exam with Economics as an option. For my second option, I looked

through the probable options and considered taking either Public Administration or Political Science. I had done few courses in Political Science during my undergrad studies and quite liked the subject. But when I read the syllabus of Pub Ad and saw a couple of ARC reports I felt inclined to take this subject. Since I hadn't earlier studied theories of administration and organization I thought there will be a lot of new things I could learn by taking this subject. Hence, I chose Pub Ad as my second option.

My advice to the aspirants would be keep your interest in the subject foremost while deciding on optional subjects. Then look at factors like previous training in the subject (especially for technical subjects) and availability of guidance. Make a rational choice based on these three factors. Please do not go by preconceived notions like one subject is easier to score than others. A lot of people kept telling me that one cannot score high marks in Economics but I found no reason to listen to them.

### Momentum

Q. People initially prepare with much enthusiasm but then a boredom phase comes – they don't even find the motivation to read the daily newspapers, let alone studying the books.

Sometimes they get diverted because of external factors e.g. heavy workload in office, family responsibilities and so on. How did you sustain the study-momentum throughout the year, How did you keep yourself busy with the books, continuously?

This is a huge problem. This happens not just with civil services but with any relatively long term project we take up. We tend to start with the lot of enthusiasm which gradually declines. In this respect, I think the intensity of your resolution matters. When I started my preparation I had told myself that I will give all that I have in this first attempt. If I cannot clear this year, then I won't have anything to regret since I gave my all. This might sound slightly over the top but I had a countdown on my Gtalk status message to the prelims. It was a 365 day countdown and when I changed the number of days left each day I remembered the promise I made to myself to clear in the first attempt. These small things do help in sustaining the momentum and making sure that you don't let a day go waste. But despite all this, it wasn't easy. There will always be some issues at home, some fights with friends, the feeling of being cut-off from everyone that will test the strength of your resolve. At all these times, I would just remind myself that I have made a promise to myself and I would lose that self-respect if I deliberately break that promise. And with that I would shutoff everything that distracts me and get back to the books.

### Hours

On an average, How many hours did you study per day? How many months did it take you to complete the core syllabus of GS and optional subjects?

My prep was divided into phases.

#### Phase 1

The first phase was from May 2010 to July 2010. This was the period when we had a summer break in IIT. Since there was no pressure of coursework I went full-on with the preparation during this period. Call it the initial enthusiasm, but I often studied for 16 hours per day during this period. On an average I think I devoted 14 hours per day during this time. A lot of learning happened at this time as anything I read added

to the knowledge base. I completed about 80 percent of first reading of Pub Ad and 40 percent of first reading of Econ during this time.

## Phase 2

The second phase was from August 2010 to November 2010 which was my 9th sem at IIT. There was coursework but most of the courses related to Economics so the time spent in classes was also in some ways useful for civil services prep. During this period I spent close to 8 hours a day on civils prep. I managed to complete full reading of Pub Ad and Econ once and started on revision of both subjects.

## Phase 3

The third phase was from December 2010 – April 2011. I completed one more revision of my optional subjects. I wasn't very confident about paper 2 of Pub Ad though. Since I also had to work on my final year thesis, I spent about 10 hours per day on civils prep.

## Phase 4

The fourth phase was mid-April 2011 to May 2011. I prepared only for prelims during this period. I had also kept on preparing for GS during all these phases. But I never set any target on GS. I was a very fluid preparation.

## Phase 5

Fifth phase was from June 2011-October 2011. This was the most crucial phase. I moved to Delhi and joined a coaching from Economics and test series for Pub Ad and GS. For Pub Ad and GS I also started a discussion group with few friends. The discussions were really helpful. During this time I started understanding both Econ and Pub Ad in a much better way. Now I was able to not just understand a concept but go beyond that and relate it with other concepts in the subject and present a coherent picture. I devoted close to 10 hours a day during this period.

## Internet

How did you use computer and internet for your exam-preparation?

I used to read many articles online, watch lectures on youtube, listen to All India Radio discussions their website for my preparation. Most of my notes were made on my computer as I found modifying it much easier than modifying hand-written notes. I would go as far as to say that you can no longer merely rely on books to crack civil services. Using internet is a must.

## Essay

How did you prepare yourself for the essay?

Which Essay did you write in Mains-2011?

What were your keypoints in that essay?  
How many marks did you get in that essay?

Didn't do any special preparation for essay.  
Wrote the essay on smaller states in the exam.  
The main line of argument was that the available evidence gives an inconclusive result about the benefits of smaller states. Hence, a case by case study is needed for each of such demands and decision should be taken on the merit of such study only.  
Marks: 105

## Profile

Many aspirants fear the interview, thinking that "my profile is not good because I've low marks in SSC/HSC/College, I don't have any extra-curricular certificates, I don't have work experience, I graduated from some unknown college, I'm from non-English medium and so on..."

So, How important or relevant is the profile of a candidate during interview?

It's hard for me to answer this question as I have no background to answer satisfactorily. From my interview experience I can say that they didn't ask me many question on my academic profile or my achievements. They mostly focused on the problems existing in Chhattisgarh (my home state) and what solutions I have in mind for them.

How much portion of your interview centered on your profile?

80% of the questions were about the problems in Chhattisgarh (my home state). The rest 20 % was also from my profile. So nothing outside the profile was asked.

Did they ask any uncomfortable questions from your profile?

There wasn't any uncomfortable question. All the questions were expected. But the questions were such that they required in-depth understanding the ground level issues.

## Backup

Q. In case you had not cleared the UPSC exam, what was your career/future backup plan?

I had taken up a job recently. I would have worked on this job for next two years.

## Family and Friends

Q. Behind one topper are many people who stood by him/her during those uncertain times when he/she was merely an 'aspirant'. Would you like to tell the world, who were those people in your case? Any specific incidence that you would like to share with the readers?

My sisters and parents supported me through the period of preparation and gave me the needed encouragement. I used to talk home on phone for about 30 minutes daily to as a stress buster. I made some extremely good friends during my studies and talking with them at times helped get out the stressful moments. My family and all my friends were always confident that I would crack the exam and speaking with them provided the positive attitude that is needed for sustaining oneself through the period of preparation.

Your Study plan

CSAT (Paper I) General studies

Topic Source of your preparation

Current Affairs The Hindu, Economic Times, Live Mint

History Ancient/Medieval/Modern NCERT

Physical Geography NCERT, Go Che Long

Geography of India NCERT

Geography of World NCERT, Atlas

Polity and Governance Laxmikath

Public Policy

Rights issue Made self notes from internet

Environment and Biodiversity Made self notes

Economic and social Development Made self notes

Science

Economy

General Studies paper I

Syllabus Topic Source of your preparation

History Bipin Chandra, NCERT

Culture Spectrum

Geography of India NCERT

Polity Laxmikanth

Issues of social relevance Self notes

Indian economy and planning Self notes

Public health

Law and order

Good governance

Environment Self notes

General Studies paper 2

Syllabus Topic	Source of your preparation
India and the World	MEA website + made notes on all the important countries and institutions
Indian diaspora	Ministry of Overseas Indians Affairs
India's Economic interaction with world	Website of commerce ministry + self notes
International affairs and institutions	Made self notes
Statistics	-
Science & Tech.	-

Optional Subject #1 and #2

I have posted my detailed strategy for the optional subjects on IO.

Public Administration Strategy

My Strategy for Economics Optional

Interview

How did you prepare for the interview?

Didn't prepare much. Made sure I knew my profile well.

Who was the chairman of your interview board?

Mr. Vijay Kumar Singh

Was your interview on the expected lines of what you had prepared or

Yes. I had expected a lot of questions to be from Chhattisgarh and so it turned out to be.

Did they ask you totally unexpected questions?

No.

What was the toughest question you faced during the interview and how did you answer it?

Rather than toughest the most curious moment that I faced in the interview was when I was asked to repeat a rather long answer I had answered few minutes back.

[Mrunal: For more on his Interview, see the thread Neeraj Singh's UPSC Personality Test April 17, 2012]

Marksheet	SUBJECTS	MARKS
ESSAY (PAPER-III)	105	

GENERAL STUDIES (PAPER-IV)	118
GENERAL STUDIES (PAPER-V)	103
OPTIONAL-I(PUBLIC ADMIN.) (PAPER-VI)	184
OPTIONAL-I(PUBLIC ADMIN.) (PAPER-VII)	167
OPTIONAL-II(ECONOMICS) (PAPER-VIII)	170
OPTIONAL-II(ECONOMICS) (PAPER-IX)	209
WRITTEN TOTAL	1056
PERSONALITY TEST	210
FINAL TOTAL	1266

Remarks: Recommend

Message

Q. What is your message to the aspirants?

You will have distractions all your life. Never let any distraction move you away from your goal. If you don't believe you can clear in this attempt, you never will. Set the date for yourself when you want to see yourself as an IAS officer and work towards it. Ask yourself each day if what you have done today is the maximum you could have done to achieve your goal.

Finally two questions

When you'll give interview in the famous competitive magazines, the last question is generally "did you use our xyz magazine and how did it help you?" So here goes mine. And Even if you answer "No", there is no problem; I'll publish your answer as it is. (Unlike some Competitive magazines who distort the answers after taking the Toppers' interview.)

Did you use indianofficer.com for your preparation? If yes, How did it help you?

I joined IO in early 2012. So I hadn't used it during my mains preparation. But I am delighted to note that the quality of discussion on IO is very high and useful for civil services aspirants.

Did you use mrunal.org for your preparation? If yes, how did it help you?

Yes. I had subscribed to RSS feeds from mrunal.org during the entire period of my preparation. The website helped me clear a lot of doubts about the exam. The articles by Mrunal helped me better understand a lot of topics in GS.