

UG HANDOUTS · GS MAINS · AFTER THE RESULT

Where did my GS Paper I 2026 marks go?

A question-by-question reading of all 20 questions and parts of GS Paper I: what each one asked, what it quietly expected, and the structure a strong answer needed.

HOW TO READ THIS HANDOUT: ONE EXAMPLE

GS Paper I, Q1. Analyze the importance of Ashokan inscriptions for reconstructing Mauryan history.

1. The demand	The question asks one thing: analyse how Ashokan inscriptions help reconstruct Mauryan history. "Analyse" here means taking the inscriptions dimension by dimension and showing, for each, what they allow historians to rebuild about the Mauryan state and society.
2. The hidden demand	The evidence is almost entirely one king's own proclamations, so it can take reconstruction only so far; its historical value and its limitations must be weighed.
3. The structure	1. How Ashokan inscriptions reconstruct Mauryan history (about three-quarters) 2. Historical value and limitations of Ashokan inscriptions (about one-quarter)

Why it matters. Meeting the demand earns the marks. Meeting the hidden demand earns the marks that separate one answer from another.

20
questions read from GS Paper I

3
checks for every question: the demand, the hidden demand, the structure

1
pattern to find in your own answers, and the habit to change first

Guranchal Ma'am, Founder, UPSC Gurus · upscgurus.in

Before you begin

A result records how one set of answers was read on one day. It is not a verdict on your ability. Read carefully, it can show you precisely what to change.

Why the question comes before more practice

The natural response to a result is to write more: more answers, more tests, more full papers. Yet practice reinforces whatever approach you already have. If a question is read imprecisely, each new answer reproduces the same misalignment, however many are written. Marks follow alignment with what the question asks, not the volume of practice.

This handout therefore begins one step earlier, with the question itself. For every GS question of Mains 2026 it sets out what the question asked, what it expected without saying so, and how the answer needed to be built. Once you read questions this way, every answer you write begins aligned with the examiner's intent.

The method: three things in every question

1. The demand

What the question asks, named in its own words and in its own order, with the task word read for that particular question.

2. The hidden demand

What the question expects without stating it. This is where answers that score well part company with the rest.

3. The structure

The numbered parts the answer needed, in the question's order, each with its share of the space. The last and smallest part carries the hidden demand.

Introductions and conclusions are not checked here. Strong answers open and close in many different ways; what the question itself fixes is the demand, the hidden demand and the structure.

How to use this handout

1
Read each question and the three lines beneath it: the demand, the hidden demand and the structure.

2
Recall your own answer and mark each box: a tick if your answer met it, a cross if it did not, a question mark if you cannot recall.

3
At the end of each paper, count your crosses for the demand, the hidden demand and the structure, and enter them in the tally on the final pages.

The task words of 2026, and what each one asks

The task word decides what the answer must do. Across the 79 questions and parts of GS Papers I to IV, these are the task words UPSC used, how often, and what each one asks of you. Several questions combine two task words; each is counted.

Discuss	30	Examine the issue from its relevant sides, with evidence, and arrive at a reasoned view.
Explain	12	Make clear how or why something is so: its causes, its working, its significance.
Examine	11	Probe the subject in depth, test the claim against evidence, and conclude.
Analyse	7	Break the subject into its parts, show how they relate, and judge their significance.
Comment	4	Give a reasoned, evidence-based opinion on the statement.
Suggest	4	Offer specific, workable measures that answer the problem posed.
Justify	4	Give the reasons and evidence that support the position or decision.
Critically examine / evaluate	3	Weigh strengths and weaknesses and end with a balanced verdict.
Elucidate / Highlight	4	Bring out and clarify the key points, with examples.
Open questions: what, how, why, to what extent, in what ways	23	Answer the precise question asked: what identifies, how traces process or means, why gives causes, to what extent measures degree.

Counts are UPSC Gurus' reading of the task words in each question or part of the 2026 GS papers.

A task word is always read in its question

The same task word can ask for quite different work. In GS Paper I, Q2, "Discuss the impact of Macaulay's Minute on colonial administration and education in India", it asks you to weigh two named impacts, one after the other, and reach a view. In GS Paper II, Q11, "Discuss the position of the Governor in the federal polity of India", it asks you to place one office between the Union and the State and examine how it works there. A memorised definition is therefore only the starting point: the demand of each question in this handout reads the task word for that question.

When a question combines task words, each one sets a part of the answer. "What is the Fujiwhara effect? Explain its impact on the movement and intensity of tropical cyclones" asks first for a precise identification, then for an explanation of two separate effects. The structure follows that order.

GS Paper I, 2026

History, Geography, Society · 20 questions or parts

Each question is followed by **1 the demand**, **2 the hidden demand** and **3 the structure**: numbered parts with their share of the space; the part in red carries the hidden demand. Mark each box against your own answer.

Q1 Analyze the importance of Ashokan inscriptions for reconstructing Mauryan history. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks one thing: analyse how Ashokan inscriptions help reconstruct Mauryan history. "Analyse" here means taking the inscriptions dimension by dimension and showing, for each, what they allow historians to rebuild about the Mauryan state and society.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND The evidence is almost entirely one king's own proclamations, so it can take reconstruction only so far; its historical value and its limitations must be weighed.

3. STRUCTURE

1. How Ashokan inscriptions reconstruct Mauryan history (about three-quarters)
   Inside: identity and chronology; extent; administration and justice; statecraft; economy and welfare; religion
2. **Historical value and limitations of Ashokan inscriptions** (about one-quarter)

Q2 Discuss the impact of Macaulay's Minute on colonial administration and education in India. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks about two impacts of the Minute: its impact on colonial administration, and its impact on education in India. "Discuss" means examining each with evidence and reaching a view; the subject is what the Minute changed, not what it said.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Whose interests did the new education serve, and with what unintended result?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Impact on colonial administration (about two-fifths)
   Inside: Persian replaced from 1837 mainly by regional languages; English at higher levels; an English-educated intermediary class in public service
2. Impact on education in India (about two-fifths)
   Inside: Anglicists over Orientalists; Bentinck's resolution of 7 March 1835; downward filtration; neglect of vernacular and mass education
3. **Whose interests it served** (about one-fifth)

Q3 The significance of the Gandhian movements lay in the masses they mobilized. Elucidate. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks why the significance of the Gandhian movements lay in the masses they mobilized. "Elucidate" requires showing how mass participation changed the reach and character of these movements, rather than merely naming campaigns or the groups involved.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Were all sections of society mobilized equally, and was mass participation the whole of these movements' significance?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Significance of the Gandhian movements in the masses they mobilized (about four-fifths)
   Inside: social breadth of participation; forms of mass mobilization; expansion beyond political elites; transformation of nationalist politics
2. **Reach and limits of mass participation** (about one-fifth)

Q4 What is the Fujiwhara effect? Explain its impact on the movement and intensity of tropical cyclones. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks what the Fujiwhara effect is, followed by its impact on the movement and the intensity of tropical cyclones. "Explain" requires tracing how interaction between cyclones produces each kind of change, not assuming that both outcomes always occur.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND No single outcome: depending on size, strength and distance, the storms may orbit, merge or pull apart, which makes tracks and landfall harder to forecast and warn against.

3. STRUCTURE

1. What the Fujiwhara effect is: the mechanism (about one-quarter)
2. Impact on movement (about three-eighths)
   Inside: mutual rotation; changes in track and speed; merger or separation
3. **Impact on intensity, and why outcomes vary** (about three-eighths)
   Inside: strengthening or weakening; forecasting and warning challenges

Q5 "Tundra regions are ecologically fragile but economically important." Examine this statement critically. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to test both claims about tundra regions: that they are ecologically fragile and that they are economically important. "Examine critically" means assessing the basis and limits of each claim before judging the tension between them.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Fragility and importance interact: warming opens resources and routes while deepening the tundra's stress.

3. STRUCTURE

1. Ecological fragility (about one-third)
   Inside: short growing season, slow recovery; permafrost and ice-rich ground
2. Economic importance (about one-third)
   Inside: minerals, oil and gas; routes and Indigenous livelihoods
3. **Critical assessment: where the claim holds and where it needs qualifying** (about one-third)

Q6 Discuss the role of aeolian processes in desertification and land degradation. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks for the role of aeolian processes in desertification and in land degradation. "Discuss" requires explaining how wind-driven processes produce each outcome and assessing their importance, not merely defining the processes or treating the two outcomes as identical.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Wind acts both directly and as an amplifier: declining cover exposes soil, wind strips fertile particles, and degradation weakens cover further. Show the loop and how to break it.

3. STRUCTURE

1. Aeolian processes: erosion, transport, deposition (about one-quarter)
   Inside: deflation and abrasion; suspension, saltation, creep
2. Role in desertification and land degradation (about two-fifths)
   Inside: topsoil and nutrient loss; burial by sand; dust
3. **Weighing against other causes, and remedies** (about one-third)
   Inside: drought and land use as intensifiers; shelterbelts, dune stabilisation, grazing control

Q7 "Water resources are both an asset and a source of conflict in South Asia." Examine this statement giving examples. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to examine water resources in South Asia first as an asset and then as a source of conflict, using examples for both. "Examine" requires testing the two-sided claim and showing why the same resources can generate benefits and disputes.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND When do shared water resources encourage cooperation rather than competition, and what makes that difference?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Water resources as an asset in South Asia (about two-fifths)
   Inside: livelihoods and agriculture; energy and development; shared regional benefits
2. Water resources as a source of conflict in South Asia (about two-fifths)
   Inside: transboundary river disputes; allocation and upstream-downstream interests; competing domestic uses
3. **Conditions for cooperation over shared waters** (about one-fifth)

Q8 Unity in diversity remains the defining feature of Indian society despite the challenges from communalism and regionalism. Comment. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether unity in diversity remains the defining feature of Indian society despite challenges from communalism and regionalism. "Comment" requires a reasoned judgement on that claim, weighing the strength of unity against each challenge rather than simply praising diversity.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does every expression of regional identity weaken national unity, or can regional diversity also sustain it?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Unity in diversity as the defining feature of Indian society (about three-tenths)
   Inside: social and cultural plurality; shared civic and national bonds
2. Challenges from communalism and regionalism (about half)
   Inside: communalism; regionalism; their effects on social cohesion
3. **How unity can endure without erasing diversity** (about one-fifth)

Q9 How do you understand disability? Substantiate the need for inclusive policy framework in India in this regard. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks first for your understanding of disability and then for a substantiated case for an inclusive policy framework in India. The first requires a clear conception of disability; "Substantiate" requires showing why that conception makes inclusion necessary, rather than merely listing policies.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can a policy be called inclusive if it recognizes rights but leaves barriers to equal participation intact?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Understanding disability (about three-tenths)
   Inside: medical and social understandings; rights and dignity
2. Need for an inclusive policy framework in India (about half)
   Inside: removal of barriers; equal access and participation; accommodation and support; implementation and accountability
3. **From formal inclusion to substantive equality** (about one-fifth)

Q10 Do you think digital technology promotes social empowerment? Explain with examples. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether digital technology promotes social empowerment and requires an explained position supported by examples. "Explain" means demonstrating how technology can change people's ability to participate and exercise agency, not simply listing digital services or asserting that access equals empowerment.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Who is excluded from these benefits, and when does digital access fail to become genuine social empowerment?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Whether digital technology promotes social empowerment (about four-fifths)
   Inside: access to information and services; education and capabilities; voice and participation; economic and social agency; examples across social groups
2. **Limits of empowerment through digital access** (about one-fifth)

Q11 Vijayanagara architecture exemplifies the amalgamation of past traditions with contemporary practices. Elucidate with examples. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks how Vijayanagara architecture brought together past traditions and practices contemporary to its own period. "Elucidate with examples" requires demonstrating the amalgamation through identifiable architectural features and buildings, not presenting two unrelated inventories of styles.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Did inherited and contemporary elements merely coexist, or combine to produce a distinctive architectural identity?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Past traditions in Vijayanagara architecture (about two-fifths)
   Inside: inherited temple forms; established artistic and structural conventions; continuities with earlier regional styles
2. Contemporary practices in Vijayanagara architecture (about two-fifths)
   Inside: Indo-Islamic arches, domes and vaults; secular and courtly buildings; larger gopurams and pillared mandapas
3. **Distinctive synthesis of past and contemporary practices** (about one-fifth)

Q12 Linguistic reorganization of Indian States was driven by popular pressure from below. Comment. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether popular pressure from below drove the linguistic reorganization of Indian States. "Comment" requires weighing the causal force of public mobilization against other influences on state decisions, not merely recounting the sequence of reorganizations.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Popular pressure forced the question, but the Union leadership decided how and when linguistic demands were accepted, weighing them against national integration.

3. STRUCTURE

1. Popular pressure from below that drove the linguistic reorganisation of States (about three-quarters)
   Inside: linguistic identity and regional aspirations; mass movements and agitations; the turning point of 1952 to 1953; demands that followed the 1956 reorganisation
2. **Was popular pressure decisive? The role of the leadership and the State** (about one-quarter)

Q13 The model of planned economy was adopted in India to address the regional imbalances left behind by colonial rule. Comment. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether addressing regional imbalances left behind by colonial rule explains India's adoption of the planned economy. "Comment" requires judging how important that objective was in the choice of economic model, rather than narrating successive Plans or assuming it was the only motive.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Was correcting colonial regional imbalance the principal reason for planning, and did adoption of planning necessarily mean that imbalance was corrected?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Planning as a response to the regional imbalances left behind by colonial rule (about three-quarters)
   Inside: the colonial legacy of uneven development; why planned intervention was chosen; instruments meant to balance regions
2. **Other aims of planning, and whether the imbalances were in fact corrected** (about one-quarter)

Q14 Compare the Loo, Chinook and Foehn winds with respect to their regions of prevalence, their nature and climatic impacts. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks for a direct comparison of the Loo, Chinook and Foehn winds in three stated respects: their regions of prevalence, their nature and their climatic impacts, in that order. "Compare" requires applying the same criteria to all three winds to reveal both similarities and differences, not writing three separate descriptions.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Which apparent similarities conceal different mechanisms and, therefore, different local climatic effects?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Regions of prevalence of the Loo, Chinook and Foehn winds (about three-tenths)
2. Nature of the Loo, Chinook and Foehn winds (about three-tenths)
   Inside: origin and mechanism; temperature and moisture characteristics; seasonality
3. Climatic impacts of the Loo, Chinook and Foehn winds (about three-tenths)
   Inside: temperature and humidity changes; snowmelt and dryness; effects on local weather
4. **Distinctions obscured by their apparent similarities** (about one-tenth)

Q15 Analyze the role of satellite-based technologies in achieving climate-smart agriculture and food security in India. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks how satellite-based technologies contribute to achieving climate-smart agriculture and food security in India. "Analyze" requires tracing the link from satellite-derived information to agricultural decisions and outcomes for each goal, rather than cataloguing satellites or applications.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can satellite data deliver either goal unless the information is timely, usable and accessible to farmers?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Role of satellite-based technologies in climate-smart agriculture in India (about two-fifths)
   Inside: climate and crop monitoring; resource-efficient decisions; risk anticipation and adaptation
2. Role of satellite-based technologies in food security in India (about two-fifths)
   Inside: production and yield assessment; early warning of crop stress; planning of food availability
3. **Conditions for translating satellite intelligence into farm-level outcomes** (about one-fifth)

Q16 "The centre of global trade is gradually shifting from the Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific region." Examine this statement. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether the centre of global trade is gradually moving from the Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific region. "Examine" requires assessing evidence of the geographical shift, its extent and counter-evidence, rather than treating the proposed change as an established fact.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Is the Atlantic being displaced as the centre of trade, or is global trade becoming more widely distributed across interconnected regions?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Evidence of a shift in the centre of global trade towards the Indo-Pacific (about three-quarters)
   Inside: changing trade flows; new centres of production and consumption; shipping routes and ports
2. **Extent and limits of the shift: the Atlantic's continuing weight** (about one-quarter)

Q17 Analyze the major drivers of human-induced land-use changes in India and their geographical consequences. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks for the major drivers of human-induced land-use changes in India and their geographical consequences. "Analyze" requires connecting each important driver to the resulting spatial and environmental changes, rather than giving two disconnected lists.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Why do similar land-use pressures produce different consequences across India's varied regions?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Major drivers of human-induced land-use changes in India (about two-fifths)
   Inside: urbanization and infrastructure; agricultural expansion and intensification; industry and extraction; policy and demographic pressures
2. Geographical consequences of human-induced land-use changes in India (about two-fifths)
   Inside: changes in land cover and habitats; soil and water systems; settlement and landscape patterns; regional environmental risks
3. **Why geographical consequences vary across regions** (about one-fifth)

Q18 Is caste disappearing in urban India? Illustrate your answer with examples. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks for a judgement on whether caste is disappearing in urban India, illustrated with examples. "Illustrate" requires testing that judgement through concrete urban situations showing both weakening and persistence of caste, not merely asserting that cities are more equal.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does caste becoming less visible in some public settings mean it has ceased to shape private choices, opportunities and power?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Evidence that caste is weakening in urban India (about two-fifths)
   Inside: everyday social interaction; occupational mobility; changing public practices
2. Evidence that caste persists or changes form in urban India (about two-fifths)
   Inside: marriage and kinship; housing and social networks; inequality and exclusion; urban examples
3. **Disappearance or transformation of caste?** (about one-fifth)

Q19 Critically examine the challenges of demographic transition in contemporary India. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks for the challenges of demographic transition in contemporary India. "Critically examine" requires probing which challenges arise from changing population structures, how their severity differs and whether transition creates opportunities as well as pressures.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can India be treated as one demographic unit when different regions are at different stages of transition?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Challenges of demographic transition in contemporary India (about four-fifths)
   Inside: regional differences in transition; employment and human capital; ageing and care; gender and health inequalities; migration and urban services
2. **Uneven challenges and opportunities across regions** (about one-fifth)

Q20 Evaluate the impact of globalization on Indian youths with reference to social, political, economic and cultural spheres. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks for an evaluation of globalization's impact on Indian youths in four spheres, in order: social, political, economic and cultural. "Evaluate" requires weighing gains and costs in each sphere and reaching an overall judgement, rather than giving an unbalanced list of changes.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Do globalization's gains and costs fall equally on all young Indians, and how much control do they retain over these changes?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Impact of globalization on Indian youths in social, political, economic and cultural spheres (about four-fifths)
   Inside: social sphere: relationships and identities; political sphere: participation and civic outlook; economic sphere: work and opportunities; cultural sphere: practices and values
2. **Unequal gains, vulnerabilities and overall judgement** (about one-fifth)

Your pattern

Enter your cross counts below. The total matters less than the row in which the crosses gather: that row names the habit to change first.

	GS Paper I	GS Paper II	GS Paper III	GS Paper IV	Total
Demand missed					
Hidden demand missed					
Structure parts missed					

What your largest row is telling you

Most crosses on the demand

Your knowledge was sound, but the answers addressed the topic rather than the task, or omitted a part the question named. Before writing, underline the task word and number every part the question asks for.

Begin with: the UG Handout "How to Read a GS Mains Question".

Most crosses on the hidden demand

Your answers were accurate but did not go beyond the obvious. Before writing, ask what the examiner is really testing, and what most answers to this question will leave out.

Begin with: Mains Mastery, the UPSC Gurus GS Mains programme, which trains you to read every question for its hidden demand.

Most crosses on the structure

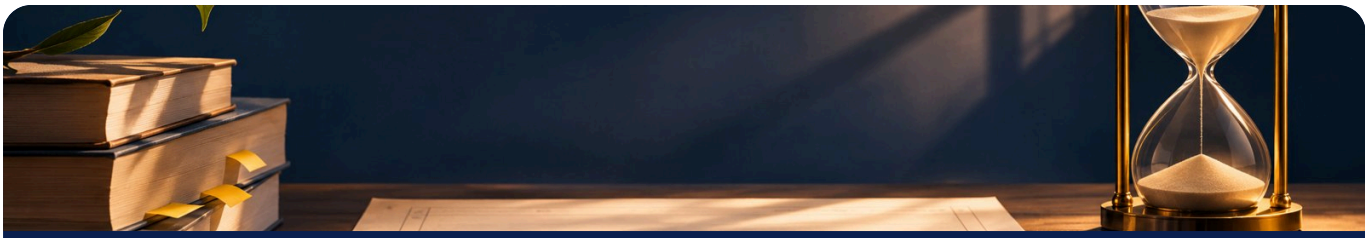
Your answers moved around the question rather than through it. Before writing, turn the question's own parts into numbered parts in the same order, and give each its share of the space.

Begin with: the UG Handout "GS Mains PYQ Topic Map 2013-2026", and structure ten past questions on paper.

Crosses spread evenly, or many question marks

Recollection can take you only so far. Write a few of these questions again, this time with the demand, the hidden demand and the structure in front of you.

Time yourself: every 2026 GS paper on Mains Replay at upscgurus.in carries a free three-hour examination clock.



YOUR NEXT STEP

Now write the paper again.

You now hold what few aspirants ever see: what each question asked, what it expected without saying so, and how the answer needed to be built. Writing the 2026 papers again with that understanding is a different experience from writing them alone, and it places you well ahead of where you would otherwise begin.

1. Read the decoding for one paper
2. Write the full paper in three hours
3. Have it evaluated
4. Read the feedback against this handout

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PROGRAMME

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The UPSC Gurus GS Mains programme: learn to read every question for its demand, hidden demand and structure, and to write the answer it deserves.

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Previous year questions decoded on YouTube: the reasoning, the structure, and what a strong answer contains.

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Go deeper into the habits this handout reveals: How to Read a GS Mains Question, Openings and Closings in GS Mains, Quotation Questions in GS Paper IV, Ethics Case Studies, and the GS Mains PYQ Topic Map 2013-2026.

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Guranchal Ma'am

Founder, UPSC Gurus