

UG HANDOUTS · GS MAINS · AFTER THE RESULT

Where did my GS Paper II 2026 marks go?

A question-by-question reading of all 20 questions and parts of GS Paper II: 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 II

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 II, 2026

Polity, Governance, Social Justice, International Relations · 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 Right to privacy relating to self-identity is very dear to every human being and well protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. In this context, examine the effect of the amendment in 2026, to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to examine the effect of the 2026 amendment to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, on the right to privacy relating to self-identity, protected under Article 21. "Examine" requires testing the amendment's provisions against that constitutional protection, identifying their consequences for self-identity and reaching a reasoned judgement on their compatibility with the right.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can the State regulate the recognition of gender identity without transferring control over a person's identity from the individual to an external authority?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Effect of the 2026 amendment on the right to privacy relating to self-identity under Article 21 (about four-fifths)
   Inside: constitutional protection of privacy and self-identity; changes introduced by the 2026 amendment; effect on self-identification and recognition; implications for dignity, autonomy and privacy; constitutional scrutiny of the amendment
2. **Reconciling State regulation with the individual's right to self-identity** (about one-fifth)

Q2 "Women as a class neither belong to a minority group nor are they regarded as forming a backward class." In the light of this statement, discuss the evolution of women's reservation from local bodies to Parliament. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to discuss how women's reservation evolved from local bodies to Parliament, read in the light of the statement that women as a class are neither a minority group nor a backward class. "Discuss" requires showing why women needed a distinct constitutional basis for reservation, and how that basis was extended step by step, rather than listing amendments.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND If women do not constitute a conventional minority or backward class, what justifies their reservation, and does representation of women as a whole adequately address inequalities among women?

3. STRUCTURE

1. In the light of the statement: the basis for reserving seats for women as a class (about one-quarter)
   Inside: women as neither a minority nor a backward class; why representation still required reservation
2. Evolution of women's reservation from local bodies to Parliament (about three-fifths)
   Inside: 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992); States raising the share in local bodies; repeated attempts in Parliament; the 106th Constitutional Amendment (2023) and its operational conditions
3. **Does reservation for women as a class reach inequalities among women?** (about one-sixth)

Q3 Examine whether the constitutional office of the Lok Sabha Speaker has become vulnerable to partisan politics under the current anti-defection regime. What institutional changes are required to ensure the neutrality of the Lok Sabha Speaker in managing a polarised House? **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks two things: whether the Lok Sabha Speaker's constitutional office has become vulnerable to partisan politics under the current anti-defection regime, and what institutional changes are needed to preserve the Speaker's neutrality in a polarised House. "Examine" requires testing the first concern against the office's powers and actual functioning; the second requires specific reforms addressing the vulnerabilities identified.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can neutrality depend on the Speaker's personal impartiality when the institutional design itself creates incentives for partisan conduct?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Vulnerability of the Lok Sabha Speaker to partisan politics under the current anti-defection regime (about half)
   Inside: constitutional position and expected neutrality; Speaker's powers under the anti-defection regime; scope for partisan influence; consequences for parliamentary functioning
2. **Institutional changes to ensure the neutrality of the Lok Sabha Speaker in a polarised House** (about half)
   Inside: selection and security of office; reform of anti-defection adjudication; procedural safeguards and accountability; protection of impartial House management

Q4 Is the right to vote a fundamental right? Discuss the position of the Election Commission of India while undertaking the revision of electoral rolls. Can it also examine the question of citizenship of voters? **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks three things in order: whether the right to vote is a fundamental right; the position of the Election Commission of India while revising electoral rolls; and whether the Commission can also examine voters' citizenship. The first requires a precise legal classification; "Discuss" requires explaining the Commission's authority and responsibilities in revision; the third requires a clear determination of its jurisdiction over citizenship.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Roll integrity against inclusion: the burden of proof, the documents asked for and the speed of correction decide whether revision protects or erodes the franchise.

3. STRUCTURE

1. Status of the right to vote (about one-third)
2. The ECI's position in revising rolls (about one-third)
3. **Citizenship: limited verification, not final determination** (about one-third)

Q5 Do constitutional bodies like the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) possess adequate enforcement powers to secure substantive social equality? Suggest measures to enhance their institutional effectiveness. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether the NCSC and NCST possess adequate enforcement powers to secure substantive social equality, followed by measures to improve their institutional effectiveness. The first requires judging what these bodies can actually enforce, not merely identifying their constitutional powers; "Suggest" requires workable reforms that address the shortcomings established.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND The weakness lies in practice as much as in law (delayed reports, vacancies, dependence for staff and funds), and court-like powers would blur a watchdog's role.

3. STRUCTURE

1. Powers of the NCSC and NCST (about one-fifth)
2. Limits on enforcement (about two-fifths)
3. **Measures to strengthen them** (about two-fifths)

Q6 Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance? Justify your answer. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether India's tribal development policy reflects the aspirations for socially grounded and equity-based governance. "Justify" requires taking a defensible position and supporting it through the policy's treatment of tribal rights, participation, cultural identity and equitable outcomes, rather than merely describing development schemes.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can governance be considered socially grounded if development priorities are determined for tribal communities without their meaningful participation and consent?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Extent to which India's tribal development policy reflects socially grounded and equity-based governance (about four-fifths)
   Inside: recognition of tribal identity and aspirations; participation and self-governance; land, forest and livelihood rights; equitable access to development; gaps between policy commitments and outcomes
2. **Whose aspirations determine the meaning and direction of tribal development?** (about one-fifth)

Q7 Malnutrition in India is not merely a public health concern; it is also a challenge of social equity, human development and effective welfare governance. Discuss. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to discuss malnutrition in India not merely as a public health concern but also as a challenge of social equity, human development and effective welfare governance, in that order. "Discuss" requires examining how each dimension shapes the problem and its resolution, rather than reducing malnutrition to dietary inadequacy or medical treatment.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can malnutrition be sustainably reduced without addressing the social inequalities and governance failures that reproduce it?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Malnutrition as a public health concern in India (about three-tenths)
   Inside: health and nutritional consequences; maternal and child health; public health response
2. Malnutrition as a challenge of social equity, human development and effective welfare governance (about six-tenths)
   Inside: social equity: unequal exposure and access; human development: capabilities and life opportunities; welfare governance: programme design and delivery; coordination and accountability across interventions
3. **Why nutrition outcomes require an integrated equity-based response** (about one-tenth)

Q8 Analyse the advantages and limitations of the generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services in contemporary governance. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks for the advantages and limitations of the generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services in contemporary governance. "Analyse" requires identifying how the generalist model produces particular administrative strengths and weaknesses, and judging its suitability for present governance demands rather than simply favouring generalists or specialists.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Is the central problem the generalist model itself, or the failure to combine broad administrative competence with specialised expertise?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Advantages of the generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services in contemporary governance (about two-fifths)
   Inside: administrative versatility; interdepartmental coordination; policy integration and implementation; leadership across varied assignments
2. Limitations of the generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services in contemporary governance (about two-fifths)
   Inside: specialised knowledge requirements; complexity of contemporary administration; effects of frequent role changes; technical capacity and policy outcomes
3. **Reconciling generalist leadership with specialised competence** (about one-fifth)

Q9 "IPMDA (Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness) bridges the gap between India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision and the Quad's collective Indo-Pacific strategy." Make a critical assessment of the statement focusing on IPMDA. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether IPMDA bridges India's SAGAR vision and the Quad's collective Indo-Pacific strategy, with IPMDA as the central focus. "Critically assess" requires showing where IPMDA advances the objectives of both frameworks, testing the limits of that convergence and reaching a reasoned judgement rather than separately describing SAGAR and the Quad.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does cooperation in maritime domain awareness amount to genuine strategic convergence, or does it connect only selected interests within two distinct regional visions?

3. STRUCTURE

1. How IPMDA bridges India's SAGAR vision and the Quad's Indo-Pacific strategy (about three-fifths)
   Inside: IPMDA's purpose and method; alignment with SAGAR's regional objectives; alignment with the Quad's collective strategy; practical value to small littoral states
2. Where the bridge falls short (about one-quarter)
   Inside: differing priorities of SAGAR and the Quad; capacity and data-sharing limits; perceptions in the region
3. **Genuine strategic convergence, or a selective overlap of interests?** (about one-sixth)

Q10 "BRICS acts as a powerful counterweight in global governance, actively amplifying the voice and influence of the Global South." Explain the role of BRICS in projecting itself as an alternative to other groupings. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks how BRICS projects itself as an alternative to other groupings by acting as a counterweight in global governance and amplifying the Global South's voice and influence. "Explain" requires showing the institutional and political means through which BRICS pursues this role, not simply listing its members or meetings.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does BRICS seek to replace established global institutions and groupings, or to increase the Global South's bargaining power within an existing international order?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Role of BRICS as a counterweight in global governance and an alternative to other groupings (about four-fifths)
   Inside: representation of Global South interests; demands for global governance reform; alternative institutional and financial arrangements; collective diplomatic influence; constraints on BRICS cohesion and effectiveness
2. **BRICS as an alternative or a complement to the existing global order** (about one-fifth)

Q11 Discuss the position of the Governor in the federal polity of India. What is the nature of his power while giving assent to a bill passed by the State Legislature? Is he bound by the aid and advice of his Council of Ministers in all his functions? **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks three things in order: the Governor's position in India's federal polity; the nature of his power when giving assent to a State bill; and whether he is bound by ministerial aid and advice in all his functions. The first is discussed; the second asks for his options under Articles 200 and 201 and how far each is open to him; the third asks for a clear verdict with its exceptions.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Is the office a constitutional head serving federalism, or an agent of the Centre straining it?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Position of the Governor in the federal polity (about three-tenths)
2. Nature of his power while giving assent to State bills (about three-tenths)
3. Whether he is bound by aid and advice in all his functions (about three-tenths)
4. **Making the office serve federalism** (about one-tenth)

Q12 What is meant by judicial legislation? In this context, discuss the verdicts of the apex court allowing "passive euthanasia" and a "living will". **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks first what judicial legislation means and then requires discussion of the apex court's verdicts allowing passive euthanasia and a living will. The first needs a precise distinction between judicial interpretation and lawmaking; "Discuss" requires examining the reasoning, scope and safeguards of the verdicts in relation to that distinction.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND When courts recognise rights and prescribe procedures in areas lacking legislation, are they filling a constitutional gap or crossing into the legislature's domain?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Meaning of judicial legislation (about one-quarter)
   Inside: distinction from judicial interpretation; constitutional limits
2. The apex court's verdicts allowing passive euthanasia and a living will (about three-fifths)
   Inside: Aruna Shanbaug (2011); Common Cause (2018) and the right to die with dignity; guidelines framed in the absence of a statute; the simplified procedure of 2023
3. **Filling a legislative vacuum, or crossing into the legislature's domain?** (about one-sixth)

Q13 How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks three things in order: how successfully India's federal framework accommodates regional and cultural diversities; the role of asymmetric federalism in that accommodation; and measures to improve dispute resolution mechanisms. "How far" calls for a balanced assessment of success and gaps; "Highlight" requires bringing out asymmetric federalism's distinct contribution; "Suggest" requires practical reforms to the mechanisms identified.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can India's federal arrangements preserve differentiated regional identities while maintaining constitutional equality and sufficient trust between governments?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Success of the Indian federal framework in accommodating regional and cultural diversities (about three-tenths)
   Inside: constitutional accommodation of diversity; regional autonomy and cultural recognition; achievements and continuing tensions
2. Role of asymmetric federalism in accommodating regional and cultural diversities (about three-tenths)
   Inside: meaning and constitutional basis; differentiated arrangements; contribution to accommodation and integration; limitations and tensions
3. Measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective (about three-tenths)
   Inside: intergovernmental consultation; institutional dispute resolution; timely and credible decisions; cooperative and negotiated approaches
4. **Balancing diversity, constitutional equality and federal trust** (about one-tenth)

Q14 Examine how the separation of powers is practised in India compared to the rigid presidential model of the United States of America. In this context, compare the actual authority of the Indian Prime Minister with that of the President of the USA. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks first how separation of powers operates in India compared with the rigid presidential model of the United States, and then how the actual authority of the Indian Prime Minister compares with that of the US President. "Examine" requires testing constitutional design against institutional practice; the subsequent comparison requires judging effective powers and constraints, not merely contrasting official titles.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does a formally stricter separation of powers necessarily produce stronger checks on executive authority than a parliamentary system?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Practice of separation of powers in India compared with the rigid presidential model of the USA (about two-fifths)
   Inside: constitutional design in both systems; relationship between legislature and executive; judicial role and institutional checks; separation and overlap in actual practice
2. Actual authority of the Indian Prime Minister compared with the President of the USA (about two-fifths)
   Inside: sources of executive authority; control over government and legislative agenda; political and institutional constraints; effective decision-making power
3. **Constitutional separation versus actual concentration and accountability of power** (about one-fifth)

Q15 To what extent do pressure groups, social movements and corporate lobbies deepen pluralistic democracy in India by representing excluded interests? Analyse whether the growing convergence of corporate wealth and political power poses a threat to the autonomy of formal democratic institutions. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks two things: to what extent pressure groups, social movements and corporate lobbies deepen pluralistic democracy by representing excluded interests; and whether the growing convergence of corporate wealth and political power threatens the autonomy of formal democratic institutions. The first requires distinguishing the representative contribution of each actor; "Analyse" requires tracing how the convergence affects institutional independence and democratic equality.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can a democracy remain genuinely pluralistic when the ability to influence decisions depends more on economic resources and political access than on the strength of excluded interests?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Extent to which pressure groups, social movements and corporate lobbies deepen pluralistic democracy by representing excluded interests (about two-fifths)
   Inside: pressure groups and interest representation; social movements and excluded voices; corporate lobbies and the limits of representation; contribution to democratic pluralism
2. Threat posed by the convergence of corporate wealth and political power to the autonomy of formal democratic institutions (about two-fifths)
   Inside: channels of corporate political influence; effects on policy and institutional autonomy; risks of unequal access and institutional capture; democratic safeguards and accountability
3. **Whether formal pluralism can survive unequal political influence** (about one-fifth)

Q16 "Transparency and accountability in governance are not about controlling corruption but about creating the trust of stakeholders in the policy process by following the Rule of Law and Participatory Governance." Comment. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether transparency and accountability in governance should be understood less as instruments for controlling corruption and more as means of creating stakeholder trust in the policy process through the Rule of Law and Participatory Governance. "Comment" requires judging this proposed distinction, examining both purposes and explaining their relationship rather than accepting the statement's contrast uncritically.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Is controlling corruption separate from building public trust, or is credible corruption control itself an essential foundation of that trust?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Transparency and accountability in controlling corruption (about three-tenths)
   Inside: prevention of arbitrary exercise of power; answerability and oversight; deterrence and corrective action
2. Transparency and accountability in creating stakeholder trust through the Rule of Law and Participatory Governance (about half)
   Inside: trust in the policy process; Rule of Law and institutional credibility; participation and stakeholder voice; responsiveness and legitimacy
3. **Corruption control and stakeholder trust as mutually reinforcing objectives** (about one-fifth)

Q17 Can the constitutional mandate of rights-based welfare be effectively realised in the context of non-integrated governance and minimal public investment? Examine. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND

The question asks whether the constitutional mandate of rights-based welfare can be effectively realised under two conditions: non-integrated governance and minimal public investment. "Examine" requires testing how each condition affects the delivery and enforceability of welfare rights, and reaching a reasoned conclusion about the feasibility of their effective realisation.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND

Can welfare genuinely be called rights-based when the State recognises entitlements but fails to create the institutional capacity and resources required to fulfil them?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Realisation of rights-based welfare in the context of non-integrated governance (about two-fifths)
   Inside: constitutional mandate and welfare entitlements; fragmentation of responsibilities; coordination and delivery gaps; consequences for access and accountability
2. Realisation of rights-based welfare in the context of minimal public investment (about two-fifths)
   Inside: adequacy of financial commitments; infrastructure and service capacity; effects on coverage and quality; equity and enforceability of entitlements
3. **Conditions for converting welfare rights into effective guarantees** (about one-fifth)

Q18 Should education be treated primarily as a welfare obligation of the state or as a strategic investment for building a globally competitive, knowledge-driven nation? Critically evaluate. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND

The question asks whether education should be treated primarily as a welfare obligation of the State or as a strategic investment in a globally competitive, knowledge-driven nation. "Critically evaluate" requires weighing the rationale, strengths and limitations of both approaches and deciding whether one should take precedence or the distinction itself is misleading.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND

Can education fulfil its strategic national purpose without first meeting the State's obligation to provide equitable access and meaningful learning?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Education as a welfare obligation of the State (about two-fifths)
   Inside: constitutional and social obligations; equitable access and inclusion; human development and citizenship; strengths and limitations of the welfare approach
2. Education as a strategic investment for a globally competitive, knowledge-driven nation (about two-fifths)
   Inside: human capital and productivity; research, innovation and knowledge creation; global competitiveness; strengths and limitations of the investment approach
3. **Whether welfare obligation and strategic investment are competing or complementary purposes** (about one-fifth)

Q19 "India's global diaspora acts as a living bridge, as a critical economic factor and knowledge network in transforming cultural heritage into geopolitical influence and strategic leverage worldwide." Critically examine this statement. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND

The question asks you to critically examine India's global diaspora as a living bridge, as an economic factor and knowledge network, and as a means of transforming cultural heritage into geopolitical influence and strategic leverage. "Critically examine" requires testing how these roles connect, how far they translate into actual influence and where the claim encounters limitations.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND

Does cultural affinity or economic contribution automatically make diaspora communities instruments of India's strategic interests, when they possess independent identities and loyalties?

3. STRUCTURE

1. India's global diaspora as a living bridge (about one-fifth)
   Inside: cultural connections and heritage; people-to-people relationships; links between India and host societies
2. India's global diaspora as a critical economic factor and knowledge network (about two-fifths)
   Inside: economic contributions; investment and commercial networks; knowledge and professional connections; skills and innovation linkages
3. Transformation of cultural heritage into geopolitical influence and strategic leverage worldwide (about three-tenths)
   Inside: cultural influence and soft power; diplomatic and political connections; strategic opportunities; constraints on translating diaspora influence into State leverage
4. **Limits of treating a diverse diaspora as a unified instrument of national strategy** (about one-tenth)

Q20 "China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has transformed South Asia from a regional space into a theatre of great power competition." Analyse the strategic implications of the BRI for India's security and regional influence in South Asia. **15 marks**

1. DEMAND

The question asks you to analyse the claim that China's Belt and Road Initiative has transformed South Asia into a theatre of great-power competition, followed by its strategic implications for India's security and regional influence. "Analyse" requires establishing how the BRI changes the regional strategic environment and tracing the resulting consequences for each Indian interest, rather than merely listing BRI projects.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND

Are South Asian countries merely arenas of China-India competition, or do their own choices and strategic interests determine how the BRI affects India's position?

3. STRUCTURE

1. China's BRI and the transformation of South Asia into a theatre of great-power competition (about three-tenths)
   Inside: BRI's regional economic and strategic reach; changing patterns of influence; emergence and extent of great-power competition
2. Strategic implications of the BRI for India's security in South Asia (about three-tenths)
   Inside: territorial and border concerns; maritime and connectivity security; strategic vulnerabilities and dependencies
3. Strategic implications of the BRI for India's regional influence in South Asia (about three-tenths)
   Inside: bilateral relations with neighbours; economic and diplomatic influence; competition over regional connectivity; India's strategic responses
4. **Agency of South Asian states in shaping the regional strategic balance** (about one-tenth)

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

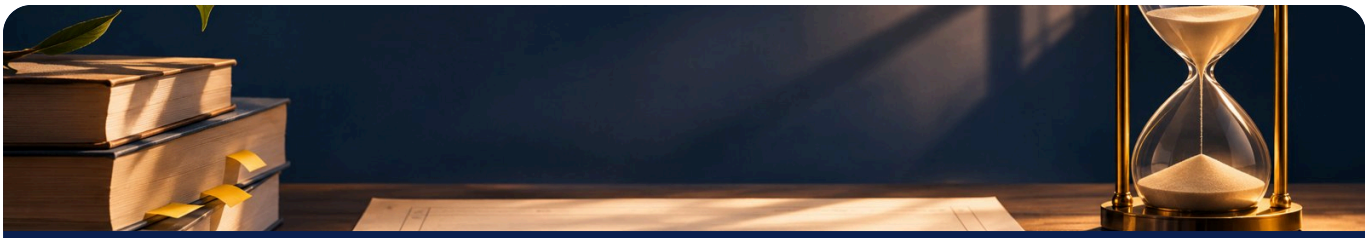
Your answers moved around the question rather than through it. Before writing, turn the question's own parts into numbered parts in the same order, and give each its share of the space.

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

FREE

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PROGRAMME

Mains Mastery

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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GS Mains PYQ Deep Decode

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

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UG Handouts and the Open Library

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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