

UG HANDOUTS · GS MAINS · AFTER THE RESULT

Where did my GS Paper IV 2026 marks go?

A question-by-question reading of all 19 questions and parts of GS Paper IV: 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.

19
questions read from GS Paper IV

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

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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 IV, 2026

Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude · 19 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(a) Owing to paucity of time, a university professor generates a Ph.D. evaluation report using Artificial Intelligence and submits it with some modifications. Discuss this from the perspective of accountability and integrity. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to assess a professor's use of AI to prepare a Ph.D. evaluation report, first from the perspective of accountability and then integrity. "Discuss" requires judging whether submitting a partly modified AI-generated report fulfils the professor's professional responsibilities and ethical obligations, rather than merely assessing the usefulness of AI.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does modifying an AI-generated report establish genuine independent evaluation, or does the professor remain personally responsible for every judgement submitted under his authority?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Accountability in the professor's use of AI for a Ph.D. evaluation report (about two-fifths)
   Inside: personal responsibility for evaluation; accuracy and independent verification; answerability to the candidate and university
2. Integrity in the professor's use of AI for a Ph.D. evaluation report (about two-fifths)
   Inside: honesty and transparency; academic judgement and professional diligence; confidentiality and fairness
3. **Whether time constraints or partial modification can justify delegating academic judgement to AI** (about one-fifth)

Q1(b) A business house is working on a project that could displace a forest community from their habitat. As the administrative officer of that district, what ethical challenges are you likely to face? **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to identify the ethical challenges you would face as the district administrative officer when a business project could displace a forest community from its habitat. The focus is on competing obligations, affected interests and moral dilemmas in the officer's decision-making, not merely the legal procedure for project approval.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Who has the authority to define development in this situation, and can a decision be ethically legitimate without the meaningful participation of the community bearing its costs?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Ethical challenges faced by the district administrative officer when a business project could displace a forest community (about four-fifths)
   Inside: development interests versus community rights; livelihood, habitat and cultural identity; consent and meaningful participation; equity, rehabilitation and distributive justice; administrative impartiality and competing pressures; environmental and intergenerational responsibility
2. **Legitimacy of development decisions when affected communities lack equal power** (about one-fifth)

Q2(a) An endangered tribe has developed a severe skeletal deformity. A university research has identified a mineral supplement as a possible remedy, though clinical trials are yet to be conducted. Should the District Magistrate (DM) use this research on the tribe? Discuss from the perspective of medical and administrative ethics. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks whether the District Magistrate should use an untested mineral supplement, identified by university research as a possible remedy for a severe skeletal deformity, on an endangered tribe. "Discuss" requires judging that decision first through medical ethics and then through administrative ethics, and reaching a reasoned verdict.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does the urgency of suffering justify exposing a vulnerable community to an unproven intervention, particularly when its members may have limited power to refuse?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Medical ethics of using the untested supplement on the tribe (about two-fifths)
   Inside: beneficence and non-maleficence; evidence and safety before clinical trials; free and informed consent of a vulnerable community
2. Administrative ethics of the District Magistrate's decision (about two-fifths)
   Inside: duty of care and protection of an endangered tribe; limits of lawful authority; accountability for the outcome; the ethical alternative: an approved, consented clinical trial
3. **Whether urgency of suffering can justify an unproven intervention on a community with limited power to refuse** (about one-fifth)

Q2(b) Discuss how national security can be balanced with concerns of human rights. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks how national security can be balanced with concerns of human rights. "Discuss" requires examining the ethical tensions between security measures and rights protections, then establishing principles for reconciling them rather than treating either objective as automatically overriding the other.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND At what point do measures intended to protect the nation undermine the rights and constitutional values that national security is meant to safeguard?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Balancing national security with concerns of human rights (about four-fifths)
   Inside: legitimate security needs and human rights obligations; necessity and proportionality; legality and procedural safeguards; accountability and independent oversight; protection of vulnerable groups; ethical limits on exceptional security measures
2. **Human rights protection as a condition of legitimate and sustainable national security** (about one-fifth)

Q3(a) Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had cautioned that employing civil disobedience within a constitutional democracy equates to endorsing 'anarchy'. How should modern democracies navigate the ethical dilemmas posed by civil disobedience movements that aim to promote social justice against policies that may raise genuine concerns? **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks how modern democracies should navigate the ethical dilemmas of civil disobedience movements seeking social justice against policies that raise genuine concerns, in light of Ambedkar's warning about anarchy in constitutional democracy. "How" requires identifying the competing ethical claims and proposing a defensible democratic response, rather than simply endorsing or condemning civil disobedience.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Ambedkar's caution was conditional: protesters should first try open constitutional remedies, and democracy must keep those remedies genuinely open.

3. STRUCTURE

1. The ethical dilemmas (about one-third)
2. **Navigating them: duties of the State and of protesters** (about two-thirds)

Q3(b) In what ways can an Indian Administrative Officer apply Gandhi's notion of 'trusteeship' to ensure fairness in governance? **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks how an Indian Administrative Officer can apply Gandhi's notion of trusteeship to ensure fairness in governance. "In what ways" requires translating the ethical principle into specific administrative conduct and decisions, rather than merely explaining Gandhi's philosophy or listing desirable qualities of an officer.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does trusteeship require an officer to exercise benevolent discretion on behalf of citizens, or to recognise that public authority and resources are held in trust and must remain answerable to them?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Application of Gandhi's notion of trusteeship by an Indian Administrative Officer to ensure fairness in governance (about four-fifths)
   Inside: public office as a trust; fair allocation of public resources; protection of disadvantaged groups; integrity and restraint in exercising authority; participatory and accountable decision-making; fairness in public service delivery
2. **Trusteeship as accountable stewardship rather than paternalistic benevolence** (about one-fifth)

Q3(c) Shakespeare in Henry IV says, "The arms are fair when the intent of bearing them is just". What ethical implications does this have in governance? **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks for the ethical implications in governance of Shakespeare's claim that the use of arms is fair when the intention behind it is just. "What ethical implications" requires examining the relationship between intention, the exercise of coercive authority and the legitimacy of governmental action, rather than merely interpreting the quotation.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND The line is a rebel's self-justification: everyone claims a just intent, so intent is necessary but never sufficient.

3. STRUCTURE

1. What the line rightly implies for governance (about two-fifths)
2. **Why intent is not enough: evidence, fair means, accountability** (about three-fifths)

Q4(a) Citing the serious adverse effects of long-term medication, a doctor convinces the family of a female patient for surgery. This led the patient to reluctantly consent for the surgery, though her original choice was to opt for medication. Explain the concepts of paternalism and beneficence by analysing the doctor's action. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to explain paternalism and beneficence, by analysing the doctor's decision to persuade a patient's family towards surgery despite her original preference for medication. "Explain" requires demonstrating how each ethical concept operates in the doctor's conduct and judging whether the patient's reluctant consent resolves the ethical concern.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can a recommendation made for the patient's welfare become paternalistic when persuasion through her family may compromise her free and informed choice?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Beneficence in the doctor's action (about two-fifths)
2. Paternalism in the doctor's action (about one-third)
3. **The ethical course** (the rest)

Q4(b) Efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right thing. How do you strike a balance between the two to enhance productivity? **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks how efficiency, understood as doing things right, can be balanced with effectiveness, understood as doing the right thing, to enhance productivity. "How" requires explaining how an administrator should reconcile the quality of processes with the value of outcomes, rather than merely defining the two concepts.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can higher productivity be regarded as genuine administrative success if resources are used efficiently to achieve objectives that are themselves inappropriate or inequitable?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Why each alone fails (about one-third)
2. **Striking the balance to enhance productivity** (about two-thirds)

Q5(a) Usually schools, working in remote areas, do not fully comply with government regulations. However, if the rules are enforced strictly, it would lead to most schools closing down. How should an administrator strike a balance between enforcement of rules and educational rights of children? **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks how an administrator should balance enforcement of government regulations with children's educational rights when strict enforcement could close most schools in remote areas. "How" requires developing an ethically defensible administrative response that addresses non-compliance without unnecessarily depriving children of education.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Rules and the right serve the same end; the administrator helps schools comply rather than only punishing failure.

3. STRUCTURE

1. Values in tension (about one-third)
2. **The graded balancing method** (about two-thirds)

Q5(b) In international relations, ethical considerations are often subjugated to the strategic interests of nation-states. Discuss this from an ethical perspective. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to examine, from an ethical perspective, the tendency of nation-states to subordinate ethical considerations to strategic interests in international relations. "Discuss" requires assessing the moral justifications and consequences of this priority, rather than merely describing power politics or assuming strategic interests are necessarily unethical.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Avoid both cynicism and moralism: prudence is itself a duty to one's own citizens, while trust and legitimacy are strategic assets.

3. STRUCTURE

1. Why interest prevails (about one-third)
2. The ethical costs (about one-third)
3. **Reconciling ethics and interest** (about one-third)

Q6(a) On the request of his Personal Assistant (PA), the District Magistrate (DM) stops the transfer of a schoolteacher who takes private tuition for his daughter diagnosed with learning disability. In this context, discuss the aspects of empathy versus compliance with rules. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to discuss empathy versus compliance with rules in the District Magistrate's decision to stop a schoolteacher's transfer at his Personal Assistant's request. "Discuss" requires judging the compassionate grounds arising from the daughter's learning disability against the obligations of impartial, lawful and fair administration, not merely deciding whether the transfer should proceed.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Does an officer's empathy become ethically compromised when relief is granted through personal access and influence rather than a fair process available to everyone similarly situated?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Empathy in the District Magistrate's decision to stop the schoolteacher's transfer (about two-fifths)
   Inside: child's learning disability and need for support; compassion and sensitivity to hardship; legitimate scope of compassionate accommodation
2. Compliance with rules in the District Magistrate's transfer decision (about two-fifths)
   Inside: transfer rules and administrative discretion; impartiality and equal treatment; conflict of interest and personal influence; procedurally fair alternatives
3. **Providing compassionate relief without turning personal influence into administrative privilege** (about one-fifth)

Q6(b) Some moral philosophers argue that spending some of your resources— without significantly affecting your financial stability—to help other people who badly suffer is our moral duty and not merely a matter of charity. Justify this claim by explaining the distinction between duty and charity. **10 marks**

1. DEMAND The question asks you to justify the claim that helping people who suffer severely, when one can do so without significantly affecting one's financial stability, is a moral duty rather than mere charity. "Justify" requires giving ethical reasons for the obligation and explaining how duty differs from charity, rather than simply praising generosity.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND If preventing serious suffering at modest personal cost is a duty, where does that obligation end, and how should competing responsibilities be weighed?

3. STRUCTURE

1. Justification of helping those who suffer severely as a moral duty (about two-fifths)
   Inside: moral responsibility towards suffering; capacity to help and proportional sacrifice; ethical grounds for positive obligations; limits and competing duties
2. Distinction between duty and charity (about two-fifths)
   Inside: moral obligation versus voluntary generosity; justice and beneficence; what may legitimately be expected of an individual; ethical significance of the distinction
3. **Determining the reasonable limits of the duty to assist others** (about one-fifth)

Q7 Lata, a mother of two children, was admitted to a hospital for acute abdominal pain. Her sister-in-law, Sujatha, accompanied her. Dr. Mansi examined Lata and recommended a diagnostic laparoscopy. Lata's consent was taken to conduct the medical procedure under general anesthesia. During the laparoscopy, Dr. Mansi's team discovered a tumor in Lata's uterus. A closer examination suggested that the tumor could be malignant. One option before Dr. Mansi was to extract a sample for biopsy. In that case, if the tumor was malignant, Lata would have to undergo another surgery for removal of the uterus. An alternative was to remove the uterus immediately. Dr. Mansi had to take a quick decision. As Lata was under general anesthesia, Dr. Mansi explained the situation to Sujatha. Sujatha agreed with Dr. Mansi's recommendations for a hysterectomy, wherein Lata's uterus would be removed to avoid the risk and pain of undergoing another surgery. Dr. Mansi removed Lata's uterus after receiving Sujatha's consent in writing. Lata was informed of this the next day. She was very upset and felt betrayed as she had not consented to the removal of her uterus. Lata complained to the police who tried to convince her that Dr. Mansi had acted with good intention to help a patient. Sujatha was of the same opinion, however Lata was not convinced and decided to approach the court. (a) Discuss the ethical issues involved in this case. (b) Discuss the moral conduct of the doctor in this situation. **20 marks**

GS IV Q7: THE DECODING

1. DEMAND The question asks two things: (a) the ethical issues involved in this case, across everyone in it (Lata, Dr. Mansi, Sujatha, the hospital and the police); and (b) the moral conduct of the doctor in this situation, judged through her intention, her act and the alternatives open to her.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Good intention does not license overriding a patient's consent for an irreversible procedure that was not an emergency; a relative's signature is not the patient's consent.

3. STRUCTURE

1. (a) Ethical issues involved in the case (about half)
2. (b) Moral conduct of the doctor (about two-fifths)
3. **What the doctor should have done** (about one-tenth)

Q8 Ravi is a senior police officer with vast experience in riot control and cyber-policing. Since one year, he has been the Superintendent of Police (SP) of a district with a history of frequent rioting. Last year, Ravi had sought installation of an AI enabled software for predictive policing. This system has been operational for approximately six months. This new system employs advanced algorithms for capturing the biometric data of persons in a crowd and swiftly relating it to a data library. This has enabled the police to identify the persons involved in various crimes. The system has identified an immigrant and low-income neighbourhood as a centre for gang violence and drug trafficking. Aided by this AI analysis, the local police has focused its patrolling, preventive detentions and establishing checkposts. Consequently, public order and law enforcement has visibly improved. Last week, some community leaders, civil rights lawyers and human rights activists visited Ravi's office. They submitted a memorandum that the new system is faulty as it is based on incorrect historical data caused by social biases and discriminatory policing. The memorandum also alleges that the increased surveillance has created a climate of tension amongst residents. This feeling is aggravated by the fact that the residents are not aware of the data noted against their names. (a) What are the ethical issues including biases involved in the use of AI in data-driven policing? (b) Place yourself in Ravi's role and discuss the alternatives available. Justify the action that optimises compliance with ethics. **20 marks**

GS IV Q8: THE DECODING

1. DEMAND

The question asks two things: (a) the ethical issues, including biases, arising from Ravi's AI-based predictive policing system, considering both its reported improvements in public order and the residents' complaints; and (b) the alternatives available to Ravi as SP, followed by a justified choice that optimises ethical compliance. "Discuss" requires weighing each option's consequences and obligations; "Justify" requires demonstrating why the chosen course best meets competing ethical requirements.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND

Does improved public order establish ethical success when discriminatory historical data may determine who is surveilled, detained and treated as suspicious, without meaningful transparency or recourse?

3. STRUCTURE

1. (a) Ethical issues, including biases, involved in AI-based data-driven policing (about two-fifths)
   Inside: historical data bias and discriminatory profiling; privacy and biometric surveillance; fairness in preventive detention and policing; transparency, consent and accountability; public safety versus community trust
2. (b) Alternatives available to Ravi and justification of the action optimising ethical compliance (about half)
   Inside: continuation of the existing system; suspension or withdrawal of the system; conditional use with independent scrutiny and safeguards; assessment of consequences for public order and rights; selection and ethical justification of the preferred action
3. **Ensuring that improved public order does not conceal discriminatory policing or deny residents effective remedies** (about one-tenth)

Q9 Seema is a senior bureaucrat with a reputation of honesty and professional efficiency. She has recently been posted as the District Collector (DC) to Surinder Nagar, where a large industrial area is being established. The new industrial area had caused many farmers to submit applications for change of land use (CLU) to convert their farmlands into residential areas. There is an unusually large backlog of these applications awaiting processing. Seema noticed that some applications had been approved selectively with no visible chronological pattern. The case files showed a few complaints of some approvals being subject to receipt of large bribes from the applicants. On further fact-finding, Seema realized that a small group of touts was controlling this illegal activity through some subordinate officials in the Collectorate. This had created a fear in the other employees who were reluctant to process any application. The resultant backlog has been piling up thereby hindering local economic progress and causing public dissatisfaction. Seema was faced with a major moral and administrative challenge of dismantling this corruption network without hampering daily administrative operations. An aggressive internal investigation would result in institutional resistance and, possibly, a backlash from labour unions. Conversely, ignoring this situation would encourage the wrongdoers and unnecessarily continue this avoidable harassment to the populace. (a) What are the ethical issues involved in this case? (b) Discuss the options open to Seema. Identify the recommended option and justify it. **20 marks**

GS IV Q9: THE DECODING

1. DEMAND The question asks two things: (a) the ethical issues arising from selective approvals, bribery, intimidation and the growing CLU backlog in Seema's Collectorate; and (b) the options available to her, followed by identification and justification of the recommended option. "Discuss" requires evaluating how each option affects integrity, employee confidence and uninterrupted public service, while "Justify" requires defending the most ethically and administratively sound response.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND How can Seema dismantle a corruption network without creating indiscriminate suspicion, paralysing honest employees or denying due process to those accused?

3. STRUCTURE

1. (a) Ethical issues involved in the CLU approval corruption case (about two-fifths)
   Inside: corruption and abuse of public office; selective approvals and procedural unfairness; intimidation and organisational integrity; public hardship and delayed service delivery; institutional accountability and public trust
2. (b) Options open to Seema, recommended option and its justification (about half)
   Inside: aggressive internal investigation; inaction or limited intervention; targeted investigation with procedural safeguards; protection of employees and continuity of operations; recommended course and ethical justification
3. **Restoring both institutional integrity and normal public service without sacrificing fairness** (about one-tenth)

Q10 Vikas is a government officer with over a decade of service in public administration. He has recently moved as the District Collector (DC) of Nainipura, a remote hilly district bordering a forest. Due to Nainipura's low levels of economic development, one of his major duties is to ensure proper functioning of the public distribution system (PDS) amongst the economically weaker sections (EWS). During his on-site visits, Vikas was apprised of a typical administrative challenge in operating the PDS. To prevent leakages, all distributors were required to carry out real-time biometric identification of the beneficiaries, whose fingerprints were tallied with identity card records. This was creating problems as the operating system sometimes rejected fingerprint matching in the cases of growing children, manual labourers and senior citizens. The problem was further compounded in periods of low WiFi connectivity. The distributors, in such cases, resorted to personal discretion when they could identify the recipient. Vikas had to address this problem on priority. Strictly adhering to government regulations would ensure fiscal probity but would greatly trouble the proposed beneficiary, i.e., EWS. It may even impinge on their fundamental right to life as per Article 21 of the Constitution. Conversely, leaving the resolution solely to the discretion of the distributors could lead to misuse and leakages. (a) What are the options open to Vikas? How should he balance fiscal probity with empathy towards the designated beneficiaries? (b) Discuss the ethics of using technology as a gatekeeper for welfare schemes. **20 marks**

GS IV Q10: THE DECODING

1. DEMAND The question asks two things: (a) the options available to Vikas when biometric authentication failures obstruct PDS access, and how he should balance fiscal probity with empathy for eligible beneficiaries; and (b) the ethics of using technology as a gatekeeper for welfare schemes. The first requires comparing workable administrative choices and reaching a justified balance; "Discuss" requires assessing the ethical legitimacy of making welfare access dependent on technology.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND If technology intended to prevent leakages excludes rightful beneficiaries from essential food, can procedural compliance be considered ethical when it threatens the very right the scheme is designed to protect?

3. STRUCTURE

1. (a) Options open to Vikas and balancing fiscal probity with empathy towards designated beneficiaries (about half)
   Inside: strict biometric authentication; distributor discretion without additional safeguards; alternative verification and monitored exceptions; prevention of leakages and misuse; protection of eligible beneficiaries and justified choice
2. (b) Ethics of using technology as a gatekeeper for welfare schemes (about two-fifths)
   Inside: efficiency and prevention of fraud; exclusion caused by technological failure; equity, dignity and the right to life; accountability for automated decisions; human oversight and accessible grievance redressal
3. **Ensuring that technological verification remains a means of welfare delivery rather than a barrier to entitlement** (about one-tenth)

Q11 Rajapuram is a border district. Jhara and Biru, its two major communities are in continual conflict with each other. The social fabric is fractured and demands mending. Ethnic tensions between the two communities have erupted into violence resulting in a large number of deaths. The stated causes are conflicting land claims, uneven resource allocation and inadequate political representation in government bodies. Separate relief camps had to be created for the two communities. The situation is volatile and appears to be getting out of control. Rajan has been appointed the District Magistrate (DM) of Rajapuram and tasked to quickly get the situation under control. His immediate tasks include restoring administrative authority, reopening the highway and initiating peace talks. On taking over his appointment, Rajan realized that the inter-community rivalry had even seeped into the local administration and police. With functional neutrality being the immediate casualty, it had made both communities distrustful of the government. The neighbouring country could utilize the opportunity

to spur insurgent activity and further aggravate the situation. Rajan favoured a controlled approach starting with opening the highway to restore food and medical supplies. He toyed with the idea of requisitioning CRPF units to help restore administrative control. (a) Discuss the ethical issues that need to be addressed in this case. (b) What are the options open to Rajan? Which option would ensure protection of his non-partisan image without compromising ethics? **20 marks**

GS IV Q11: THE DECODING

1. DEMAND The question asks two things: (a) the ethical issues Rajan must address amid communal violence, displacement, administrative bias and threats to security in Rajapuram; and (b) his available options, followed by a choice that protects his non-partisan image without compromising ethics. "Discuss" requires examining the duties and conflicts facing the DM; the second part requires comparing responses and determining which best restores order, neutrality and public confidence.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND Can Rajan establish genuine impartiality merely by appearing neutral, when the administration itself has become partisan and the communities have unequal confidence in State protection?

3. STRUCTURE

1. (a) Ethical issues that need to be addressed in the Rajapuram conflict (about two-fifths)
   Inside: protection of life and humanitarian relief; administrative and police impartiality; equity in land, resources and political representation; restoration of public order and essential supplies; community trust and risk of external interference
2. (b) Options open to Rajan and the choice that protects his non-partisan image without compromising ethics (about half)
   Inside: restoration of the highway and essential supplies; requisitioning CRPF and use of lawful force; correction of administrative and police bias; peace talks and impartial community engagement; comparison of options and justification of the preferred approach
3. **Establishing neutrality through demonstrably equal protection and fair action rather than the appearance of impartiality alone** (about one-tenth)

Q12 Ajit has been recently promoted as the Head of the Department of Weapon Sales (DWS) in the Ministry of Defence Production (MDP). His charter of duties includes international sales of weapons produced domestically by MDP. In two recent wars, MDP weapons have performed admirably, resulting in many countries showing interest in buying them, particularly long-range artillery and missiles. Country A and country B have asked for these weapons. However, production constraints restrict DWS to accept only one purchase order. Country A is a developing nation with a sound technology base. MDP is planning R&D collaboration with it for the next generation of weapons. It is not part of any security alliance and needs weapons for protection from a troublesome neighbour. It seeks a large acquisition on a long-term loan. Country B is also a developing nation. Military strength is its priority, with the military budget often ingressing into allocations for human resources and infrastructure development. It is in security alliance with a superpower who has a large military base there and periodically allots it financial grants. It is a member of an economic bloc with which the government is currently negotiating a free trade agreement. It is not a signatory of NPT but possesses smaller nuclear weapons and delivery systems. It supports some guerrilla forces abroad. It has sought a smaller acquisition and is prepared to make some advance payment. It is currently negotiating arms purchases from another nation too. Ajit discussed this case with his counterparts in the related departments. Therein, the significant economic benefits, employment generation and stronger diplomatic relations arising from this sale were highlighted. It was also emphasized that refusing the deal could result in country B purchasing weapons from some other supplier. Ajit was aware that in arms sales, due diligence at each stage was pivotal to ensure conformity to national policy and international treaties. (a) Discuss the options available to Ajit. Which option should he select and why? (b) How can Ajit balance nation's economic and strategic interests with ethical considerations? **20 marks**

GS IV Q12: THE DECODING

1. DEMAND

The question asks two things: (a) the options available to Ajit when only one weapons order can be accepted from Countries A and B, which option he should select and why; and (b) how he can balance the nation's economic and strategic interests with ethical considerations. "Discuss" requires comparing both countries' circumstances, risks and benefits, and justifying the choice through due diligence; the second part requires establishing principles for responsible arms sales.

2. HIDDEN DEMAND

Does the possibility that a rejected buyer will obtain weapons elsewhere reduce the seller's moral responsibility for foreseeable misuse, or must ethical accountability remain independent of commercial opportunity?

3. STRUCTURE

1. (a) Options available to Ajit, selection of the preferred option and justification (about half)
   Inside: sale to Country A: benefits, risks and conditions; sale to Country B: benefits, risks and conditions; deferral or refusal pending satisfactory due diligence; comparison of economic, strategic and ethical consequences; recommended option and reasoned justification
2. (b) Balancing the nation's economic and strategic interests with ethical considerations (about two-fifths)
   Inside: economic benefits and employment; strategic and diplomatic interests; national policy and international treaty obligations; humanitarian risks and possible diversion; end-use verification and accountability; principles for responsible defence exports
3. **Moral responsibility for foreseeable consequences of arms exports despite commercial and geopolitical pressures** (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

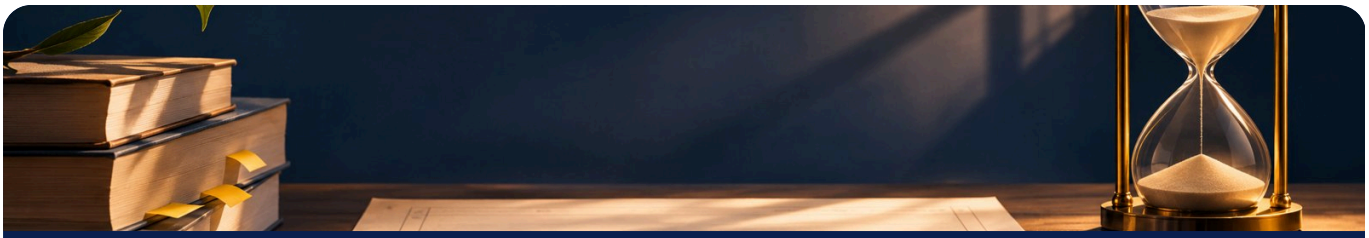
Your answers moved around the question rather than through it. Before writing, turn the question's own parts into numbered parts in the same order, and give each its share of the space.

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

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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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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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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