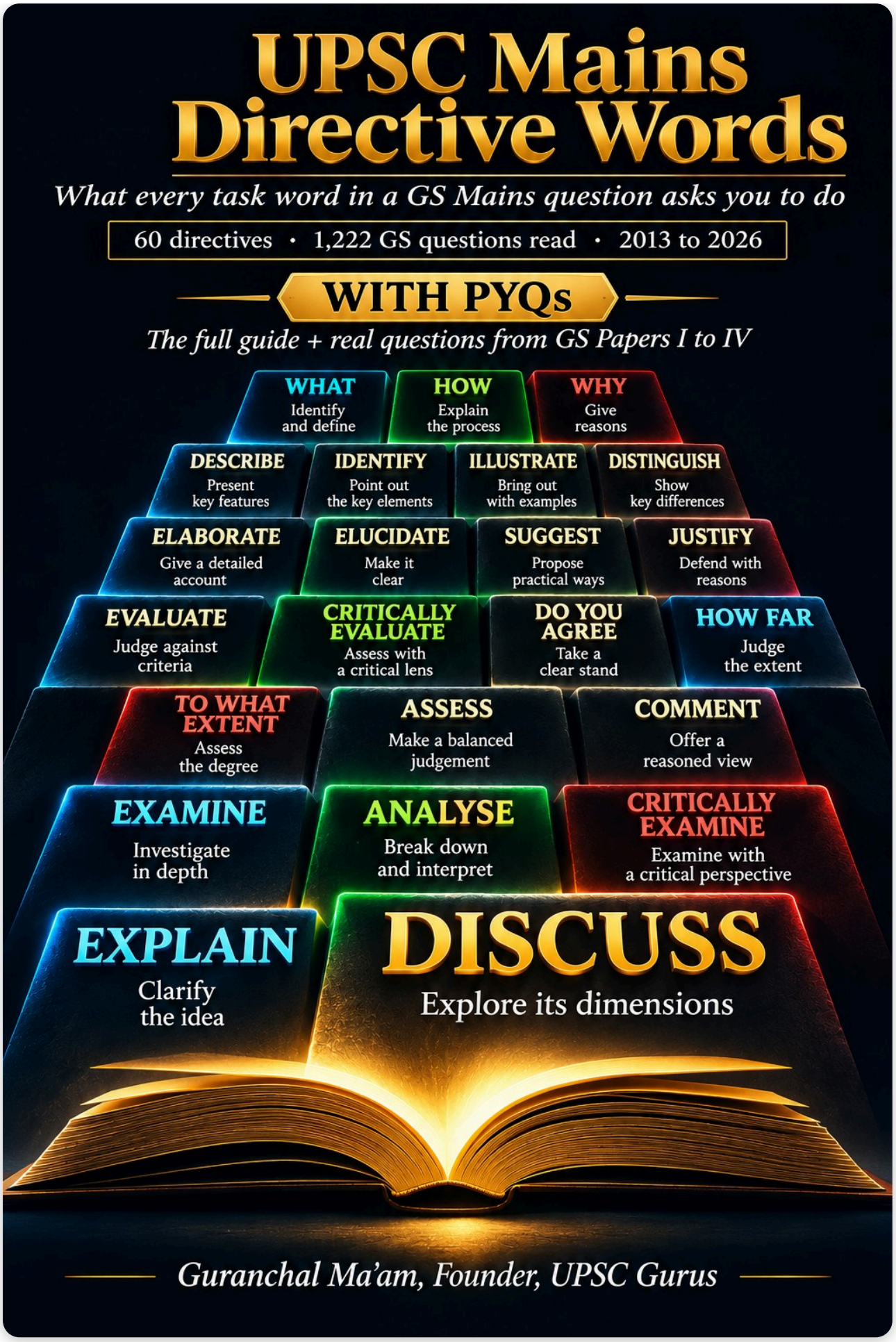

UPSC Mains
Directive Words
What every task word in a GS Mains question asks you to do
60 directives · 1,222 GS questions read · 2013 to 2026
WITH PYQs
The full guide + real questions from GS Papers I to IV
WHAT
Identify and define
HOW
Explain the process
WHY
Give reasons
DESCRIBE
Present key features
IDENTIFY
Point out the key elements
ILLUSTRATE
Bring out with examples
DISTINGUISH
Show key differences
ELABORATE
Give a detailed account
ELUCIDATE
Make it clear
SUGGEST
Propose practical ways
JUSTIFY
Defend with reasons
EVALUATE
Judge against criteria
CRITICALLY EVALUATE
Assess with a critical lens
DO YOU AGREE
Take a clear stand
HOW FAR
Judge the extent
TO WHAT EXTENT
Assess the degree
ASSESS
Make a balanced judgement
COMMENT
Offer a reasoned view
EXAMINE
Investigate in depth
ANALYSE
Break down and interpret
CRITICALLY EXAMINE
Examine with a critical perspective
EXPLAIN
Clarify the idea
DISCUSS
Explore its dimensions
Guranchal Ma'am, Founder, UPSC Gurus

Read the task before the topic

A directive word tells you what to do with what you know. Discuss, Examine and Justify set different tasks. Sometimes the question itself carries the instruction through What, How or Why. These instructions are also called task words or keywords.

The topic supplies the content, but the directive shapes the answer: explain a process, test a claim, take a position or propose a solution. This handout examines how UPSC has used these instructions across GS Papers I to IV from 2013 to 2026, with real questions that show what each one demands.

Explain and unfold

Make an idea clear through its meaning, context, working, dimensions or examples, giving the reader a fuller understanding.

14 words

Weigh and judge

Break claims into parts, examine evidence and limitations, and offer a reasoned judgement when the directive calls for one.

13 words

Reason, defend and reflect

Judge the reach of a claim, defend a position with reasons and evidence, explain causes where required, or reflect on deeper values and responsibilities.

11 words

Pinpoint, compare and propose

Identify exactly what is asked, draw clear distinctions, trace developments or offer specific proposals where required.

16 words

When the question is the directive

Read the question form or shared quotation instruction as the task, even when no separate command word appears.

6 words

How each page works

WITH PYQS EDITION

Begin with each directive's meaning, what the examiner expects, what it does not mean and the word it is most easily confused with. Check its counts across the four GS papers. Then read real UPSC questions, one from each paper where the directive has appeared, with a note on what it demands in that context. Where a paper has no recorded use of the directive, this is stated. The families are reading aids, not fixed answer templates. Use the examples to practise planning your own answers according to each question's demands. A shorter companion, UPSC Mains Directive Words: The Guide, carries the explanations without the questions.

How UPSC's directive words have changed

The two four-year periods, 2013 to 2016 and 2023 to 2026, contain 356 and 358 questions and parts respectively. Comparing their directive counts reveals changes in the relative frequency of particular instructions. These categories overlap because a single question can carry more than one instruction. The comparisons describe these two periods, not an uninterrupted year-by-year trend.

Questions using each directive, year by year (2013 to 2026)

	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Total
What	33	29	18	16	20	17	20	20	22	34	19	39	29	15	331
Discuss	38	24	35	28	13	12	16	22	14	24	18	16	15	31	306
How	11	12	12	8	12	16	11	6	13	11	11	12	16	11	162
Explain	1	10	5	7	6	14	11	5	12	9	10	9	10	12	121
Examine	2	2	2	4	8	5	6	3	6	4	2	7	11	11	73
Is, Are, Can, Does	4	10	6	8	3	2	3	4	8	2	3	2	3	8	66
Suggest	1	4	5	5	7	1	4	4	3	6	3	8	2	4	57
Comment	4	1	1	3	1	4	3	4	2	4	7	5	2	4	45
Analyse	7	3	3	2	7		2	2	5	2	2	1	2	7	45
Why	2	7	3	4	1	7			1	3	5	3	3	1	40
Critically examine	3	3	4	1	2	1	1	3	3	5		1	2	2	31
Give reasons	2	1	2	3	6		2	2	2	2	7		1		30
Justify	3	1		2	3	1	2	4	2	3		1	3	4	29
Quotations (GS IV)	3		2		1	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3		29
Do you agree	1	2	4	1	3	3	4	3	1	2	2		1		27
Describe		1	1	2	3	1		1	4	5	2	3	2	2	27
Evaluate	4	4	2	1	1			2	3	1	3	2		1	24
Elaborate	2				1	1	5	3	3	1		2	4		22
Do you think			2	1	1	2	1	4	1	3	2	1	3	1	22
Elucidate	3		2	2	1	1	2	1		1		2	3	2	20
How far	2	1	2		3	3	1	1		1	1	2	1	1	19
Critically evaluate	1	2	6						2	4			3	1	19
Which, Who		1				3		2	1	2	1	1	4	2	17
Bring out	5	3		1		1	1		1		1	1		1	15
Identify	1		1	2		1	3	1	3		1	1		1	15
Assess	1	2				3	2		1		2		1		12
To what extent		1	2	2					3	1	1	1		1	12
Mention					1	1			2	2		1	3	2	12
Distinguish		1	1		1	1		1	1		1	2	1	1	11
Highlight			1	2	1		1	3			1			2	11

Read across a row to see a word rise or fall. A question with two task words counts under both. Words used fewer than 10 times are on their own pages.

Discuss has become less frequent

Discuss fell from 125 uses in 2013 to 2016 to 80 in 2023 to 2026. It remains common, but preparation should not treat every question as an invitation to write a general discussion.

What remains a constant

What moved only slightly, from 96 to 102. Questions framed directly around what is being asked deserve the same careful reading as those carrying an explicit command word.

Explain has gained ground

Explain rose from 23 to 41. Practise showing how something works, why it happens or how its parts connect, rather than merely listing relevant facts.

Examine has grown sharply

Examine increased from 10 to 31. Build the habit of probing a claim through its supporting evidence, different dimensions and limitations before arriving at a considered view.

Critical examination has declined

Critically examine fell from 11 to 5. The skill remains important, but read the exact instruction and recognise when explicit critical scrutiny is required.

Comment has doubled

Comment rose from 9 to 18. Practise expressing a clear, evidence-based observation, developing its significance and arriving at a concise, reasoned judgement.

Four GS papers, four directive patterns

Directive words are distributed differently across the four GS papers. Some appear in every paper while others have appeared in only some papers. These patterns help identify the kinds of answer-writing demands that recur in each paper, without treating any directive as permanently restricted to a subject or paper.

GS I: its 12 most used task words (295 questions and parts)

	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Total
Discuss	11	4	8	5	2	4	5	4	3	5	4	2	6	2	65
How	2	5	4	1	4	3	4	2	3	4	4	5	7	1	49
What	3	2	1	1	4	2	4		3	1	3	8	2	1	35
Explain		3	2	4	1	5	2		3	2	2	1	3	2	30
Why	2	5	2	1	1	3			1	2	5	3			25
Comment	2	1	1	1		1		2	1		1	2	1	3	16
Is, Are, Can, Does				2		1	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	14
Examine		1		2	1		1	1	2	1			1	3	13
Elaborate	2				1		2	3	1			1			10
Analyse	5									1				3	9
Elucidate			1	1		1	1			1			2	2	9
Give reasons		1			1		1			2	1		1		7

GS II: its 12 most used task words (285 questions and parts)

	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Total
Discuss	12	10	11	9	5	5	5	5	3	9	4	4	6	5	93
What	3	4	2	6	2	5	3	2	2	2	1	3	2	3	40
Is, Are, Can, Does	3	5	3	3	2	1			5				1	6	29
Explain				2	2	3	5		6		3	4	2	1	28
Examine	1	1	1	1	3	3	2		2			1	5	5	25
Comment	2			1	1	1	2	2	1	4	2	2	1	1	20
Analyse	1	2	1		1			1	2	1	1	1	1	3	15
Critically examine	1	1	2	1	2			2	1	1			1	1	13
Suggest			1		1	1	1	1	1		1	3	1	2	13
How far	1	1	1		2	2		1			1		1	1	11
How	1	2	1		1	2			1	2			1		11
Do you think			2	1	1	1	1	3		1					10

GS III: its 12 most used task words (288 questions and parts)

	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Total
What	14	10	8	4	9	6	3	10	5	10	6	13	10	5	113
Discuss	14	9	11	8	3	2	3	5	5	6	5	6	2	12	91
How	4	2	3	3	5	9	4	4	8	4	5	2	7	4	64
Explain	1	2			1	3	3	4	3	6	3	3	4	8	41
Examine	1		1	1	2	1	2			2	2	2	2	3	19
Suggest		1		3	3			2	1	2	2	2		2	18
Describe				2	2	1		1	3	1		3		2	15
Analyse	1			1	4		2	1	3		1			1	14
Is, Are, Can, Does	1	3	1	2	1					1	1	1			11
Give reasons	1		1	2			1		2		3				10
Elaborate						1	2		1	1		1	3		9
Why				2		1				1			3	1	8

GS IV: its 12 most used task words (354 questions and parts)

	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Total
What	13	13	7	5	5	4	10	8	12	21	9	15	15	6	143
Discuss	1	1	5	6	3	1	3	8	3	4	5	4	1	12	57
How	4	3	4	4	2	2	3		1	1	2	5	1	6	38
Quotations (GS IV)	3		2		1	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3		29
Suggest	1	3	4	1	3		3		1	4		3	1		24
Explain		5	3	1	2	3	1	1		1	2	1	1	1	22
Justify	2	1			2	1	2	1	2			1	1	3	16
Examine					2	1	1	2	2	1		4	3		16
Which, Who		1				3		1	1	2		1	4	2	15
Is, Are, Can, Does		2	2	1				2	2		1		1	1	12
Evaluate	4	2	2								3				11
Critically examine						1	1		2	4		1	1		10

GS I: Explain the larger picture

Discuss leads with 65 uses, followed by How at 49 and What at 35. Prepare to connect events, processes and social or geographical patterns into coherent explanations. Practise moving beyond description to causes, relationships and significance, while keeping every discussion anchored to the question.

GS II: Build a reasoned argument

Discuss leads with 93 uses, followed by What at 40, Is, Are, Can, Does questions at 29, Explain at 28 and Examine at 25. Prepare to analyse institutions, policies and governance issues through their purposes, functioning, achievements and limitations. Build arguments from relevant evidence, give competing considerations their appropriate weight and reach a judgement where the question requires one. Discuss does not automatically demand equal treatment of opposing views or a separate verdict.

GS III: Connect concepts with mechanisms

What leads with 113 uses, followed by Discuss at 91 and How at 64. Practise defining the issue precisely, explaining how systems or processes operate, and connecting causes with consequences. Build the ability to move from technical understanding to workable responses when the question demands them.

GS IV: Make reasoning visible

What leads with 143 uses, followed by Discuss at 57 and How at 38. Quotation-based shared instructions appear 29 times, Suggest 24 times and Justify 16 times. Prepare to identify ethical concepts accurately, explain their practical implications, interpret quotations thoughtfully and develop feasible responses to administrative dilemmas. Where a question requires a defended position, make the ethical principles and reasoning behind it explicit.

FAMILY 1 OF 5

Explain and unfold

Make an idea clear through its meaning, context, working, dimensions or examples, giving the reader a fuller understanding.

Discuss

306 questions, 2013 to 2026

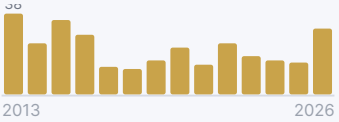
WHAT IT MEANS

To discuss is to **explore a subject through its relevant dimensions** and explain how those dimensions shape our understanding of it. The task is not simply to present different views, but to **develop a connected line of reasoning** using causes, consequences, relationships or competing considerations, as the question requires. A good discussion leaves the reader with a **considered understanding of the central issue**, not just a collection of information.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **65** | GS II **93** | GS III **91** | GS IV **57**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Discuss in 306 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **93 in GS II, 91 in GS III, 65 in GS I and 57 in GS IV**, making it prominent across all four papers.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify the central issue** and select the dimensions needed to understand it.
- ✓ **Develop each major point** by explaining its causes, implications or connection to the issue.
- ✓ **Use relevant evidence or examples** to substantiate the discussion rather than merely naming facts.
- ✓ **Draw the strands together** into a reasoned understanding, giving greater weight to what matters most.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean writing **advantages and disadvantages** for every subject, especially when the question asks about causes, developments or ethical responsibilities.
- × It does not mean **listing every related fact** without explaining its relevance to the central issue.
- × It does not require **artificial balance** where evidence clearly supports one position.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Explain concentrates on making a reason, mechanism or relationship understandable. **Discuss** develops a fuller understanding by examining the relevant dimensions of the issue and how they fit together.

Examine calls for a close inspection of a claim, arrangement or problem to establish what it reveals. **Discuss** gives greater scope to developing the connected considerations that define the issue, although both can require scrutiny and a reasoned conclusion.

How "Discuss" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2016 · Q14 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

"The Himalayas are highly prone to landslides." Discuss the causes and suggest suitable measures of mitigation.

WHAT "DISCUSS" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must discuss **why Himalayan slopes are vulnerable to landslides**, connecting geological

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

"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.

instability, steep terrain, rainfall, seismic activity and human interventions where relevant. It must then **suggest suitable mitigation measures** that address the identified causes and risks.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This geography question combines **causal discussion** with a separate **solution-oriented task**, so explaining the causes alone would leave the answer incomplete.

WHAT "DISCUSS" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must first explain **why women's political reservation is grounded in gender-based affirmative action and representative equality**, rather than treating women as a minority or backward class, with Article 15(3) providing an important constitutional basis for special provisions. It must then **trace the evolution from local bodies to Parliament**, covering the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (Articles 243D and 243T), successive parliamentary reservation proposals, and the 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2023. It should explain **the census and delimitation-linked implementation condition** and may briefly refer to the unsuccessful 2026 legislative attempt to modify that framework.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The quotation establishes **the constitutional rationale for gender-based political reservation** rather than reservation based on minority or backward-class status. The discussion must then show **how this principle developed into institutional representation**, progressing from local bodies to Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies.

GS Paper III — 2026 · Q7 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Discuss how the contradiction between 'rapid infrastructure development' and 'disaster-risk reduction' in ecologically-sensitive areas of India can be managed, with suitable examples.

WHAT "DISCUSS" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must explain **where rapid infrastructure development conflicts with disaster-risk reduction** in ecologically sensitive areas, then discuss how planning, environmental safeguards, engineering choices and governance can manage that tension. **Suitable examples** must demonstrate how the conflict arises and how it can be addressed.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This question asks for a **practical reconciliation of competing objectives**, not merely an account of **infrastructure benefits or environmental damage**.

GS Paper IV — 2026 · Q1(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

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.

WHAT "DISCUSS" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must examine whether the professor's use of AI to prepare a Ph.D. evaluation report is consistent with **personal accountability and academic integrity**, considering the duty to exercise independent judgement and verify the evaluation. It must distinguish the possible usefulness of AI assistance from **delegating a responsibility that belongs to the evaluator**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here, discussion is an **ethical appraisal of a specific professional decision**, where **time pressure, transparency, reliability and responsibility** matter more than a general debate about AI.

Critically discuss

5 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

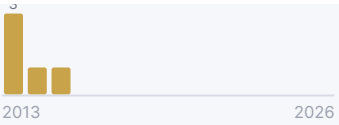
To critically discuss is to **explore an issue while testing its claims, assumptions and practical results**, rather than accepting the stated position at face value. It requires you to understand what an idea, policy or institution seeks to achieve, then **scrutinise its strengths, limitations and competing explanations** using reasoning or evidence.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 1 | GS III 3 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

The finished answer should produce a **qualified and defensible understanding** of how far the proposition holds, and why.



UPSC used **Critically discuss in 5 questions** from 2013 to 2026, all appearing in **2013 to 2015**, with 3 in GS III, 1 in GS I, 1 in GS II and none in GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Establish the proposition or objectives** before judging their merits or results.
- ✓ **Test the important claims** against evidence, practical experience or logical objections.
- ✓ **Identify strengths, weaknesses and qualifications** that genuinely affect the proposition.
- ✓ **Reach a reasoned conclusion** that reflects the relative weight of the arguments.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **finding faults alone** or assuming that criticism is the entire task.
- × It does not mean producing **two disconnected lists of pros and cons** without assessing their importance.
- × It does not mean **rejecting the proposition automatically** because the word critically appears.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Discuss develops understanding through the relevant dimensions of an issue. **Critically discuss** additionally requires sustained scrutiny of the claims, assumptions and limitations within those dimensions.

Critically evaluate places stronger emphasis on an overall judgement of merit, effectiveness or validity against suitable criteria. **Critically discuss** emphasises searching examination of the issue and its competing considerations, although a reasoned conclusion is still important.

How "Critically discuss" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2013 · Q6 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Critically discuss the objectives of Bhoodan and Gramdan Movements initiated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave and their success.

WHAT "CRITICALLY DISCUSS" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must establish the **objectives of the Bhoodan and Gramdan Movements**, including their approach to land redistribution and village-level reform, then assess **how far those objectives were achieved**. It should recognise contributions while examining limitations in implementation, sustainability and actual redistribution.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This history question explicitly connects **stated objectives with achieved outcomes**, so the critical element comes from **testing the movements' success against their own aims**.

GS Paper II — 2015 · Q3 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

In absence of a well-educated and organized local level government system, 'Panchayats' and 'Samitis' have remained mainly political institutions and not effective instruments of governance. Critically discuss.

WHAT "CRITICALLY DISCUSS" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must test the claim that weak educational and organisational capacity in local government has reduced Panchayats and Samitis to **primarily political institutions rather than effective governance bodies**. It must consider the claim's validity alongside other determinants of performance, including **powers, finances, administrative capacity and devolution**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This governance question presents a **strong causal judgement** that needs to be **examined and qualified**, rather than treated as an established description of every local body.

GS Paper III 2013 · Q12 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Adoption of PPP model for infrastructure development of the country has not been free of criticism. Critically discuss pros and cons of the model.

WHAT "CRITICALLY DISCUSS" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must assess the **advantages and disadvantages of public-private partnerships** for infrastructure development, considering financing, expertise, efficiency, public accountability, affordability and allocation of risks. It should show **when and why the model succeeds or encounters difficulties**, rather than treating all PPP projects alike.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here the question expressly requests **pros and cons**, but the word critically requires **weighing their consequences for infrastructure outcomes**, not simply placing benefits and drawbacks in separate columns.

Not used in GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Explain

121 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To explain is to **make something understandable by revealing how or why it works**. You must move from identifying a concept, cause or condition to showing the **reasoning, mechanism or connection** that produces a particular result. A successful explanation allows the reader to **follow the logic from starting conditions to outcome**, rather than merely accepting a statement as true.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **30** | GS II **28** | GS III **41** | GS IV **22**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Explain in 121 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with the highest count in **GS III at 41 questions**, followed by 30 in GS I, 28 in GS II and 22 in GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify what needs explaining**, whether a concept, process, cause or relationship.
- ✓ **Show the mechanism or reasoning** linking the relevant factors to the result.
- ✓ **Make the sequence or causal connection clear** wherever the subject involves stages or interacting influences.
- ✓ **Use a focused example or application** when it helps demonstrate the explanation.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **repeating the question in different words** or offering only a definition.
- × It does not mean **naming causes or features** without showing how they produce the stated effect.
- × It does not require an **extended merits-versus-demerits debate** unless another part of the question asks for judgement.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Describe establishes what something is like, including its characteristics or forms. **Explain** establishes how it works or why a particular feature, event or outcome arises.

Explain makes a concept, cause or mechanism understandable through reasoning. **Elucidate** is especially concerned with revealing the meaning or underlying connection in a proposition that may otherwise remain

unclear.

How "Explain" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2026 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

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

WHAT "EXPLAIN" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must define the Fujiwhara effect as **the mutual interaction and rotation of two nearby cyclonic circulations around a common centre**. It must explain **how this interaction may alter cyclone tracks, separation or merger**, and **why its effects on intensity vary** rather than necessarily causing intensification.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This physical geography question requires a **scientific mechanism followed by its effects**, with a clear distinction between **changes in movement and possible changes in intensity**.

GS Paper II — 2021 · Q14 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Explain the constitutional provisions under which Legislative Councils are established. Review the working and current status of Legislative Councils with suitable illustrations.

WHAT "EXPLAIN" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must explain **Article 169 and the process for creating or abolishing a State Legislative Council**, including the special-majority resolution of the Legislative Assembly and Parliament's role, with **Article 171 governing its composition**. It must then separately **review the functioning and status of Legislative Councils at the time of the 2021 question**, using suitable state examples.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This polity question pairs **Explain with Review**, so constitutional explanation supplies the legal foundation while the second task demands an **appraisal of actual functioning**.

GS Paper III — 2026 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Explain the factors responsible for inefficiency of agri-produce marketing. How e-commerce helps to reduce inefficiency of agri-produce marketing ? Explain.

WHAT "EXPLAIN" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must explain **what causes inefficiency in agricultural produce marketing**, such as fragmented markets, information gaps, inadequate infrastructure and intermediary costs where relevant. It must then show **how particular e-commerce mechanisms can reduce those inefficiencies**, while recognising constraints that may limit their effectiveness.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This question requires **two causal explanations**: **why agricultural marketing is inefficient** and how e-commerce may address those causes.

GS Paper IV — 2026 · Q4(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

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.

WHAT "EXPLAIN" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must explain **paternalism and beneficence through the doctor's conduct**, showing how an intention to protect the patient from harm may coexist with interference in her own treatment choice. It must examine how the reluctant consent was obtained and distinguish **acting for the patient's perceived benefit from respecting informed, voluntary autonomy**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here, explanation requires **applying ethical concepts to a concrete decision**, with the **patient's original preference and reluctance** providing the crucial facts.

Elaborate

22 questions, 2013 to 2026

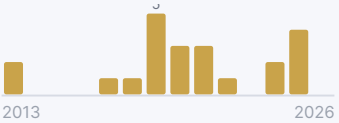
WHAT IT MEANS

To elaborate is to **take a briefly stated idea and develop its full substance** by unfolding the dimensions, details and implications that the original statement leaves compressed. The task is to show **what lies within the proposition and why its different parts matter**, using relevant connections and illustrations. A strong answer turns a short assertion into a **well-developed account with depth and breadth**, without losing sight of its central claim.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **10** | GS II **2**
GS III **9** | GS IV **1**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Elaborate in 22 questions** from 2013 to 2026, concentrated in **GS I with 10 and GS III with 9**, alongside 2 in GS II and 1 in GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify the central proposition** and the specific aspects that need development.
- ✓ **Unfold its major dimensions** with substantive detail rather than restating the assertion.
- ✓ **Connect each dimension to the main idea** through reasons, implications or illustrative evidence.
- ✓ **Give the proposition sufficient depth** while keeping the expansion relevant and proportionate.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **making the answer longer** by repeating the same point in different forms.
- × It does not mean **adding unrelated background** simply because more detail is requested.
- × It does not mean **accepting an absolute claim without qualification** where the supporting facts require nuance.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Explain concentrates on making the mechanism or reasoning understandable. **Elaborate** develops the fuller content of an idea, including its dimensions, significance and implications, even when a single causal mechanism is not central.

Elucidate brings clarity to the underlying meaning or logic of a proposition. **Elaborate** gives that proposition greater breadth and substance by developing the relevant details and dimensions.

How "Elaborate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2020 · Q16 · 15 marks

QUESTION

India has immense potential of solar energy though there are regional variations in its development. Elaborate.

WHAT "ELABORATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must develop both parts of the statement: **India's substantial solar-energy potential** and the **regional differences in its development**. It should connect geographical and climatic conditions with variations in infrastructure, investment, land availability or implementation where relevant.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This geography question contrasts **India's solar potential** with **uneven regional development**, requiring both parts of the claim to be developed together.

GS Paper II — 2025 · Q9 · 10 marks

QUESTION

India-Africa digital partnership is achieving mutual respect, co-development and long-term institutional partnerships. Elaborate.

WHAT "ELABORATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must unpack **the forms and channels of India-Africa digital cooperation** and show how they can support mutual respect, joint development and durable institutional relationships. It should explain **how specific areas of cooperation contribute to the claimed partnership outcomes**, rather than merely praising bilateral ties.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This international relations question requires the **substance behind an affirmative diplomatic proposition**, connecting practical cooperation to the **three outcomes expressly named**.

GS Paper III — 2025 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Elaborate the scope and significance of supply chain management of agricultural commodities in India.

WHAT "ELABORATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must develop the **scope of agricultural supply chain management**, covering the relevant stages and functions from aggregation and storage to processing, transportation and distribution. It must then establish its **significance for efficiency, farmer returns, market access, food availability and loss reduction**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This economy question names **scope and significance as separate but connected dimensions**, so the answer must develop both **what supply chain management covers and why it matters**.

GS Paper IV — 2021 · Q6(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

An independent and empowered social audit mechanism is an absolute must in every sphere of public service, including judiciary, to ensure performance, accountability and ethical conduct. Elaborate.

WHAT "ELABORATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must develop the case for **independent social audits as a means of public accountability**, explaining how access to information, public scrutiny and corrective action can improve performance and ethical conduct across public services. For the judiciary, it must also address **safeguards for judicial independence, confidentiality and due process**, rather than assuming that an identical audit mechanism fits every institution.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This ethics question presents a **strong normative assertion**, so elaboration means building the **institutional and ethical reasoning behind it** rather than merely defining social audit.

Elucidate

20 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

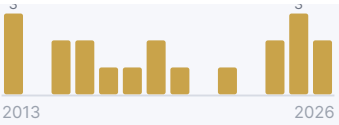
To elucidate is to **bring clarity to the underlying meaning or logic of a proposition**, especially when its important connections are not immediately obvious. You must identify what the statement is really saying, then **unfold the reasoning or relationships that make it**

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 9 | GS II 7 | GS III 3 | GS IV 1

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

intelligible through carefully chosen facts and examples. The finished answer should make a seemingly complex, compressed or contradictory idea **clear and convincing, with necessary qualifications**.



UPSC used **Elucidate in 20 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **9 in GS I and 7 in GS II**, compared with 3 in GS III and 1 in GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify the central relationship or proposition** that needs to be made clearer.
- ✓ **Uncover the underlying logic** connecting its main elements.
- ✓ **Use carefully chosen evidence or examples** to make the relationship understandable.
- ✓ **Resolve apparent tension or ambiguity** without concealing important qualifications.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **paraphrasing the statement** without revealing the reasoning behind it.
- × It does not mean **providing maximum detail on every related topic** when only the central connection needs clarification.
- × It does not require **uncritical endorsement of the proposition** if its validity depends on conditions or qualifications.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Elaborate expands an idea by developing its details and dimensions. **Elucidate** concentrates on making its essential meaning and the relationships within it especially clear.

Clarify resolves ambiguity about what a claim means or establishes. **Elucidate** goes further into the underlying reasoning that connects the elements of the claim and explains why the relationship matters.

How "Elucidate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2015 · Q4 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, despite having divergent approaches and strategies, had a common goal of amelioration of the downtrodden. Elucidate.

WHAT "ELUCIDATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must show **how Gandhi and Ambedkar shared the objective of improving the condition of disadvantaged communities** despite differing in their approaches and strategies. It must clarify the relationship between their **common concern for social justice and their substantial differences over methods, institutions and social transformation**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This history question asks you to reconcile **a shared social objective** with **distinct ideologies and methods**, without making the leaders' programmes identical.

GS Paper II — 2019 · Q7 · 10 marks

QUESTION

There is a growing divergence in the relationship between poverty and hunger in India. The shrinking of social expenditure by the government is forcing the poor to spend more on non-food essential items squeezing their food-budget. — Elucidate.

WHAT "ELUCIDATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must explain **why poverty and hunger may not change in the same direction**, particularly through the pressure that essential non-food expenditure places on the food budgets of poor households. It should make clear the proposed connection between **reduced public social expenditure, increased private spending and constrained food consumption**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This social policy question contains a **specific causal explanation for an apparently unexpected divergence**, so the answer must reveal that mechanism rather than discuss **poverty and hunger independently**.

GS Paper III 2024 · Q14 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Elucidate the importance of buffer stocks for stabilizing agricultural prices in India. What are the challenges associated with the storage of buffer stock? Discuss.

WHAT "ELUCIDATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must elucidate **how procurement and release of buffer stocks can moderate agricultural price fluctuations**, including procurement at support prices and the release of stocks when supplies are tight. It must then separately **discuss storage-related challenges**, including capacity constraints, carrying costs, losses, deterioration and management problems.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This question pairs **Elucidate with Discuss**, requiring a focused explanation of the price-stabilisation mechanism followed by a broader discussion of **storage challenges**.

GS Paper IV 2017 · Q6(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

Strength, peace and security are considered to be the pillars of international relations. Elucidate.

WHAT "ELUCIDATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must clarify **how strength, peace and security support and influence one another** in international relations, rather than merely defining the three terms. It should explain their **mutual dependence and possible tensions**, including the conditions under which strength may promote security or undermine peace.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This ethics question concerns an **abstract proposition about international relations**, so elucidation depends on revealing the **relationship among the three values**.

Describe

27 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To describe is to **present an accurate and organised picture of a subject** by setting out its defining characteristics, forms, features or identifiable aspects. Your answer must help the reader recognise **what the subject consists of and what distinguishes its important parts**, using precise categories and relevant details. A successful description provides **sufficient factual clarity and completeness** without turning an essentially descriptive task into an unnecessary argument.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 3 | GS II 3 | GS III 15 | GS IV 6

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Describe in 27 questions** from 2013 to 2026, most often in **GS III with 15 questions**, followed by 6 in GS IV and 3 each in GS I and GS II.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify the subject accurately** and establish its relevant characteristics.
- ✓ **Organise the important features or types** into clear categories where appropriate.
- ✓ **Use precise distinguishing details** to show how the parts differ or what each contributes.
- ✓ **Keep the coverage relevant and proportionate** to the particular aspects requested.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **offering only a definition** when the question asks for characteristics, forms or multiple aspects.
- × It does not mean **explaining every underlying cause** when the immediate task is to establish features or details.
- × It does not mean **evaluating merits and shortcomings automatically** unless another instruction requires it.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Describe establishes what something is, what features it has and what forms it takes. **Explain** reveals how or why those features or outcomes arise.

Give an account presents a connected account of developments, arrangements or actions. **Describe** concentrates on accurately representing the relevant features, forms or characteristics of the subject.

How "Describe" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2022 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Describe the characteristics and types of primary rocks.

WHAT "DESCRIBE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must identify **primary rocks as igneous rocks formed through the cooling and solidification of magma or lava** and describe their defining characteristics, including their mineral composition and characteristic textures. It must then **distinguish intrusive and extrusive types** through their formation conditions, cooling rates and resulting textures, using suitable examples such as granite and basalt.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This physical geography question asks for a **technical classification supported by diagnostic characteristics**, making **accurate distinctions** more important than a broad discussion of geological processes.

GS Paper II — 2023 · Q10 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Indian diaspora has scaled new heights in the West. Describe its economic and political benefits for India.

WHAT "DESCRIBE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must describe **identifiable economic and political benefits of the Indian diaspora** for India, such as financial contributions, investment links, professional networks, advocacy and diplomatic influence where relevant. It should indicate **how these benefits arise through the diaspora's activities and connections**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike a classification question, this international relations question uses Describe to establish **concrete channels of contribution**, organised under **economic and political benefits**.

GS Paper III — 2026 · Q3 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Describe the various Technology Missions initiated in Indian agriculture and examine their role in food security.

WHAT "DESCRIBE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must first describe **the relevant Technology Missions in Indian agriculture**, identifying their principal objectives and interventions. It must then **examine their contribution to food security**, considering outcomes, limitations and the extent to which they address food-security needs.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This agriculture question pairs **Describe with Examine**, making factual identification of the missions a foundation for a **separate assessment of their effectiveness**.

GS Paper IV — 2025 · Q1(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

In the present digital age, social media has revolutionised our way of communication and interaction. However, it has raised several ethical issues and challenges. Describe the key ethical dilemmas in this regard.

WHAT "DESCRIBE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must describe **the principal ethical dilemmas arising from social media**, such as tensions between free expression and harm prevention, privacy and data use, or engagement and truthful communication. It must make the **competing values and choices within each dilemma** clear, not merely identify harmful outcomes.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This ethics question uses description to identify **conflicts between legitimate values or duties**, rather than simply catalogue the **negative effects of digital communication**.

Illustrate

8 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

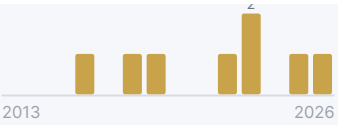
To illustrate is to **make an argument, concept or relationship clear through well-chosen examples** that show how it operates in reality. The examples must perform an intellectual task: they should **demonstrate a specific claim, distinction or implication**, not merely decorate the answer. A strong illustration helps the reader see **why**

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 2 | GS II 1 | GS III 0 | GS IV 5

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

the argument holds, how it appears in practice and where its limits may lie.



UPSC used **Illustrate in 8 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **5 in GS IV, 2 in GS I, 1 in GS II and none in GS III**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Establish the point** that each illustration is intended to demonstrate.
- ✓ **Choose specific, relevant examples** rather than broad or unrelated references.
- ✓ **Explain the link between example and argument** so the illustration actually proves or clarifies something.
- ✓ **Use contrasting or qualifying examples** where they are needed to support a fair conclusion.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **adding names, incidents or cases without interpretation**.
- × It does not mean **substituting examples for the central answer** or assuming that a collection of cases explains itself.
- × It does not mean **drawing universal conclusions from isolated examples** without recognising their limitations.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Explain establishes the reasoning or mechanism that makes a point understandable. **Illustrate** makes the point concrete by showing, through examples, how that reasoning or relationship appears in practice.

Substantiate asks for evidence sufficient to support a claim. **Illustrate** places particular emphasis on examples that make a claim visible and understandable, although those examples should still support the argument.

How "Illustrate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2026 · Q18 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Is caste disappearing in urban India? Illustrate your answer with examples.

WHAT "ILLUSTRATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must assess **whether caste is disappearing in urban India**, then illustrate the conclusion with concrete examples of changing caste practices and continuing caste influences. Examples should distinguish **declining visibility in some social settings from persistence in marriage, networks, opportunities or discrimination** where relevant.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This sociology question asks for **examples that test a broad social generalisation**, making **contrasting illustrations** important for a qualified answer.

GS Paper II — 2023 · Q11 · 15 marks

QUESTION

"The Constitution of India is a living instrument with capabilities of enormous dynamism. It is a constitution made for a progressive society." Illustrate with special reference to the expanding horizons of the right to life and personal liberty.

WHAT "ILLUSTRATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must illustrate **the Constitution's capacity to evolve as a living instrument** through relevant developments in the interpretation of the right to life and personal liberty. It should use **specific judicial decisions or constitutional developments** and explain what each demonstrates about the expanding scope of these rights.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here, illustration relies on **constitutional and judicial examples**, which must demonstrate the **evolution of rights** rather than simply provide a list of cases.

GS Paper IV — 2019 · Q1(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

What are the basic principles of public life ? Illustrate any three of these with suitable examples.

WHAT "ILLUSTRATE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must identify **the basic principles of public life**, preferably using the seven Nolan principles as a

recognised framework: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. It must then **select any three principles and illustrate each with a suitable example**, explicitly linking the example to conduct in public service.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This ethics question requires **three directly connected principle-example pairs**, so a **practical demonstration of each chosen value** matters more than a lengthy abstract discussion.

Not used in GS Paper III between 2013 and 2026.

Clarify

2 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To clarify is to **remove uncertainty about what a statement means or why it is justified**. The task is to identify the point that might otherwise remain vague and use **precise facts, distinctions and relationships** to make it understandable. A successful answer leaves the reader with **a definite and properly qualified understanding** of the assertion, without unnecessary expansion into surrounding topics.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 0 | GS III 1 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Clarify in 2 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **1 in GS I in 2017 and 1 in GS III in 2019**, and none in GS II or GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify the precise claim or uncertainty** that needs clarification.
- ✓ **Define or distinguish the essential elements** that make the claim meaningful.
- ✓ **Supply the facts and connections** that explain why the stated condition exists.
- ✓ **Resolve the ambiguity directly**, with qualifications where necessary.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **repeating an assertion more confidently** without supporting it.
- × It does not mean **providing broad historical or policy background** without resolving the specific issue.
- × It does not require a **full merits-versus-demerits assessment** when the main need is conceptual or factual clarity.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Elucidate unfolds the underlying meaning or relationships within an idea. **Clarify** focuses more directly on removing a particular ambiguity and establishing exactly what the proposition signifies.

Explain often follows a process or causal mechanism to show how or why something happens. **Clarify** may use such reasoning, but its central purpose is to resolve uncertainty about a specific statement or condition.

How "Clarify" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2017 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Clarify how mid-eighteenth century India was beset with the spectre of a fragmented polity.

WHAT "CLARIFY" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must make the expression **fragmented polity in mid-eighteenth-century India** historically concrete by explaining the weakening of Mughal central authority and the changing configuration of regional and competing political powers. It should show **how political authority became divided and contested**, rather than merely calling the period unstable.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This modern history question asks for **historical evidence that gives meaning to a broad description**, rather than an **exhaustive narrative of every eighteenth-century state**.

GS Paper III — 2019 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

The public expenditure management is a challenge to the Government of India in the context of budget making during the post-liberalization period. Clarify it.

WHAT "CLARIFY" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must clarify **why public expenditure management presents difficulties during budget-making in the post-liberalisation period**, identifying relevant fiscal, institutional and policy pressures. It should connect **competing spending priorities, resource constraints, expenditure efficiency and accountability** to the challenge named in the question.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This public finance question demands **specific budget-management pressures** in the post-liberalisation period, not **a generic discussion of liberalisation**.

Not used in GS Paper II or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Write a note

3 questions, 2013 to 2026

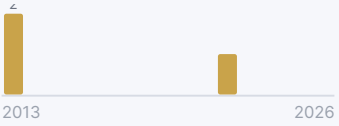
WHAT IT MEANS

To write a note is to produce a **compact, self-contained account of a specified subject** that gives the reader its essential meaning, relevant particulars and significance. The intellectual task is one of **selective completeness**: you must decide which information is necessary for understanding the subject without expanding into a full essay. The final note should be **coherent, economical and responsive to any qualifier**, such as short or critical, that changes the required treatment.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 0 | GS III 1 | GS IV 1

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **the Write a note, Write a critical note and Write short notes formulations in 3 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **2 in 2013 and 1 in 2022**, distributed equally across GS I, GS III and GS IV, and none in GS II.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Introduce the subject briefly** so the note makes sense on its own.
- ✓ **Select the most relevant facts, features or implications** within the available space.
- ✓ **Organise the content into a coherent account** rather than disconnected fragments.
- ✓ **Follow qualifiers and word limits precisely**, including any requirement for critical appraisal.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **writing everything known about the topic** regardless of relevance or space.
- × It does not mean **presenting an unconnected collection of facts** without a central focus.
- × It does not mean **ignoring words such as critical or short**, which materially alter what the note must achieve.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Describe specifies the intellectual task of presenting relevant features or characteristics. **Write a note** additionally calls for a compact, self-contained form of response whose content and depth depend on the

stated subject and qualifiers.

Discuss develops the relevant dimensions and connections of an issue through reasoning. **Write a note** prioritises an economical account, although a critical note may also require a brief, reasoned appraisal.

How "Write a note" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2013 · Q7 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Write a critical note on the evolution and significance of the slogan, 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan'.

WHAT "WRITE A NOTE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must present a **focused account of the origin, evolution and significance of the slogan Jai Jawan Jai Kisan**, relating it to the national priorities it expressed. Because the question specifies a critical note, it must also **assess the continuing relevance and limitations** of those priorities in changing circumstances.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This history question explicitly asks for a **critical note**, making **selective evaluation** necessary alongside the account of the slogan's historical development.

GS Paper III — 2013 · Q11 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Write a note on India's green energy corridor to alleviate the problem of conventional energy.

WHAT "WRITE A NOTE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must give a compact account of **India's green energy corridor initiative**, explaining its purpose, principal infrastructure features and role in integrating renewable energy into the power system. It should connect that role to **reducing dependence on conventional energy**, without treating transmission infrastructure as a complete substitute for conventional generation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This infrastructure question requires a **focused policy and technology note**, not a **broad essay on renewable energy** or every aspect of the electricity sector.

GS Paper IV — 2022 · Q5(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

Write short notes on the following in 30 words each : (i) Constitutional morality (ii) Conflict of interest (iii) Probity in public life (iv) Challenges of digitalization (v) Devotion to duty

WHAT "WRITE A NOTE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must write **five separate short notes of 30 words each**, covering constitutional morality, conflict of interest, probity in public life, challenges of digitalization and devotion to duty. Each note should convey the **defining idea and its most important ethical or administrative implication** within its individual word limit.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This ethics question makes **compression and precise selection** central to the task, because each concept has its own **strict 30-word limit**.

Not used in GS Paper II between 2013 and 2026.

Introduce

3 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To introduce is to **establish the essential identity, purpose and basic elements of a subject** so that the reader knows what is being

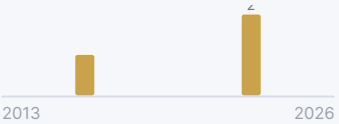
HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 0

discussed. It requires a **clear first understanding** of a concept, programme or system, including the background or features necessary to orient the reader. A successful introduction **prepares the ground for further analysis or application** without attempting to perform every subsequent task at once.

GS III 2 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Introduce in 3 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **1 in GS I in 2016 and 2 in GS III in 2023**, and none in GS II or GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify the subject accurately** and explain what it fundamentally refers to.
- ✓ **State its core purpose or defining idea** in accessible terms.
- ✓ **Present the essential features or components** needed for initial understanding.
- ✓ **Provide only the necessary background**, leaving applications or evaluation to the relevant later tasks.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **writing a decorative opening paragraph** without identifying the substance of the subject.
- × It does not mean **covering every detail or technical complexity** before the reader understands the basic idea.
- × It does not mean **treating later application or evaluation tasks as optional** simply because the question first asks for an introduction.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Introduce establishes what a subject is, why it exists and what its basic elements are. **Explain** goes further into the reasoning or mechanism that shows how or why something works.

Describe presents the relevant characteristics or forms of a subject, often in greater detail. **Introduce** is more selective and foundational, giving the reader enough information to understand the subject before proceeding.

How "Introduce" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2016 · Q11 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

With a brief background of quality of urban life in India, introduce the objectives and strategy of the 'Smart City Programme'.

WHAT "INTRODUCE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must begin with **a brief account of the quality-of-life challenges in Indian cities**, then introduce the **objectives of the Smart Cities Mission and its strategy**, especially area-based development and pan-city solutions. It should connect these measures to the urban challenges identified rather than offer only a generic description of a smart city.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This urbanisation question uses Introduce for **a specific government programme**, requiring its **policy objectives and approach** rather than only a general definition of a smart city.

GS Paper III — 2023 · Q5 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Introduce the concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI). How does AI help clinical diagnosis? Do you perceive any threat to privacy of the individual in the use of AI in healthcare?

WHAT "INTRODUCE" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must introduce **Artificial Intelligence as a concept**, establishing its essential nature and relevant capabilities in understandable terms. It must then separately explain **how AI supports clinical diagnosis** and assess the privacy risks associated with its use in healthcare.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This science and technology question places **conceptual introduction before application and risk assessment**, making the **initial definition a foundation** rather than the entire answer.

Not used in GS Paper II or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Give an account

2 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To give an account is to **present a connected factual explanation of what happened, what exists or what was undertaken** in relation to a subject. The answer must bring together the principal developments, arrangements or actions in an **order that makes the whole subject understandable**, using chronology where appropriate and functional organisation where more useful. A good account provides **a coherent picture supported by relevant particulars**, without adding evaluation unless the question separately requires it.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 0 | GS III 1 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **the Give an account and Present an account formulations in 2 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **1 in GS I in 2016 and 1 in GS III in 2020**, and none in GS II or GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Establish the relevant background or setting** needed to understand the subject.
- ✓ **Select the principal developments, provisions or actions** that form the account.
- ✓ **Organise them in a meaningful sequence**, chronological or thematic as appropriate.
- ✓ **Show how the main elements connect** to form a coherent factual picture.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **dumping facts in no particular order** or offering an unstructured list.
- × It does not mean **forcing a chronological narrative** onto a subject better explained through functions or arrangements.
- × It does not require **judging success or failure automatically** unless another directive calls for assessment.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Describe sets out the defining features or characteristics of a subject. **Give an account** connects facts, developments, arrangements or actions into a coherent account of the whole.

Trace concentrates on the progression of a subject through time, showing its stages and changes. **Give an account** may use chronology but can equally organise information around provisions, functions or actions.

How "Give an account" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I

2016 · Q18 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Present an account of the Indus Water Treaty and examine its ecological, economic and political implications in the context of changing bilateral relations.

WHAT "GIVE AN ACCOUNT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must first present a **coherent account of the Indus Water Treaty**, including its background, principal water-sharing arrangements and relevant institutional provisions. It must then separately **examine the treaty's ecological, economic and political implications** in the context of changing bilateral relations.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This question requires **an account of treaty provisions** followed by **ecological, economic and political**

GS Paper III

2020 · Q15 · 15 marks

QUESTION

COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented devastation worldwide. However, technological advancements are being availed readily to win over the crisis. Give an account of how technology was sought to aid management of the pandemic.

WHAT "GIVE AN ACCOUNT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must give an organised account of **how technological tools were sought to manage the COVID-19 pandemic**, covering relevant uses in areas such as surveillance, testing, communication, clinical care or research. It should indicate **the particular problem or function addressed by each technology**, rather than simply naming innovations.

implications; stopping at the legal arrangements would miss the second task.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This science and technology question calls for **a functional account of crisis-management applications**, making the **link between technology and pandemic response** more useful than a chronological history of the pandemic.

Not used in GS Paper II or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Throw light

3 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To throw light on a subject is to **make its important meaning, relevance or implications clearer** by focusing on the aspects that best illuminate it. The task is not to cover everything, but to **select and explain what helps the reader understand the subject more deeply**, particularly its significance, present position or practical usefulness. A strong answer makes **a previously underexplained aspect of the issue visible and meaningful** through relevant context and evidence.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 1 | GS III 1 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Throw light in 3 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **1 each in GS I, GS II and GS III**, appearing in 2016, 2018 and 2026, and none in GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify the particular aspect** whose meaning, relevance or status needs illumination.
- ✓ **Select the most revealing facts or considerations** rather than attempting exhaustive coverage.
- ✓ **Explain why those details matter** to the interpretation of the subject.
- ✓ **Connect the selected evidence to a clear understanding** of the significance or implication requested.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **mentioning important points without explaining their relevance**.
- × It does not mean **writing an exhaustive account of the entire topic** when the question asks for one specific aspect.
- × It does not mean **repeating an earlier task** when Throw light follows another directive and identifies a distinct requirement.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Highlight singles out the most salient features or distinctions. **Throw light** uses selected information to make the meaning, relevance, status or implications of a subject clearer.

Elucidate concentrates on revealing the underlying logic or relationship within a proposition. **Throw light** more broadly illuminates an aspect of a subject, often its significance, implementation or practical usefulness.

How "Throw light" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2018 · Q3 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Throw light on the significance of the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi in the present times.

GS Paper II — 2016 · Q15 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Examine the main provisions of the National Child Policy and throw light on the status of its implementation.

WHAT "THROW LIGHT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must select **important elements of Gandhian thought that remain relevant today** and explain their significance for contemporary social, political, economic or ethical concerns. It should connect **specific ideas to present-day issues**, rather than merely recount Gandhi's life or listing his principles.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This modern history question is concerned with **contemporary significance**, so the directive requires **connections between historical thought and present conditions**.

WHAT "THROW LIGHT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must first **examine the National Policy for Children, 2013**, including its four priority areas: survival, health and nutrition; education and development; protection; and participation. It must then **throw light on implementation status as of the 2016 examination**, using relevant institutional measures, achievements and gaps, rather than confusing policy provisions with their execution.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This governance question pairs **Examine with Throw light**, separating scrutiny of policy provisions from clarification of their **actual implementation**.

GS Paper III 2026 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Examine the view that financial inclusion is an integral part of social and economic inclusion in a country like India. Also throw light on the usefulness of the R.B.I.'s Financial Inclusion Index.

WHAT "THROW LIGHT" DEMANDED HERE

After examining the relationship between financial inclusion and wider social and economic inclusion, the answer must explain **the usefulness of the RBI's Financial Inclusion Index** in understanding the extent and dimensions of inclusion. It should show **how the index can support assessment or policy decisions**, while recognising what an aggregate indicator may not reveal.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This economy question uses Throw light for **the practical utility of a measurement tool**, distinct from the earlier examination of the **broader inclusion proposition**.

Not used in GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Bring out

15 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To bring out is to **make important features, effects or relationships clearly visible**, especially where their significance is not immediately apparent from a simple description. You must identify the relevant elements and **draw out what they reveal about the subject**, whether a consequence, contrast, contribution or state of affairs. A strong answer makes the **specific significance of those elements unmistakable**, showing the reader what follows from them and why it matters.

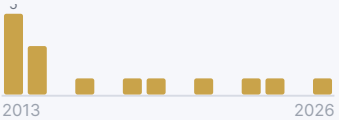
WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Identify exactly what must be brought out**, such as effects, importance, contrasts or preparedness.
- ✓ **Select the relevant facts or developments** that reveal those features.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **6** | GS II **1** | GS III **4** | GS IV **4**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Bring out in 15 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **6 in GS I, 4 in GS III, 4 in GS IV and 1 in GS II**.

- ✓ **Draw explicit connections or implications** instead of leaving the reader to infer their importance.
- ✓ **Establish the significance of each major point** in relation to the question's central concern.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **naming relevant points and leaving their significance unexplained**.
- × It does not mean **presenting broad background material** without drawing out the specific effects or relationships requested.
- × It does not require **a full critical evaluation in every question** unless another directive or qualifier asks for it.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Highlight concentrates attention on the most prominent features or distinctions. **Bring out** more explicitly develops the significance, consequences or relationships that those features reveal.

Explain focuses on how or why something happens. **Bring out** focuses on making the relevant effects, qualities, connections or implications apparent, using causal explanation wherever it helps.

How "Bring out" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2023 · Q3 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Bring out the socio-economic effects of the introduction of railways in different countries of the world.

WHAT "BRING OUT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must bring out **the major social and economic effects of railway expansion** in different countries, showing how railways influenced trade, production, mobility, labour, settlement patterns and social relationships where relevant. It should make clear **how these effects differed across national or historical contexts** rather than treating railway development as uniform.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This world history question requires **drawing out consequences across different countries**, with **comparative variation** helping to establish the significance of railway expansion.

GS Paper II — 2024 · Q5 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Analyse the role of local bodies in providing good governance at local level and bring out the pros and cons merging the rural local bodies with the urban local bodies.

WHAT "BRING OUT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must first analyse **the role of local bodies in providing good governance**, then bring out **the specific advantages and disadvantages of merging rural and urban local bodies**. It should connect each prospective benefit or drawback to governance considerations such as coordination, representation, service delivery or local needs.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This polity question combines **Analyse with Bring out**, moving from examination of an existing governance role to making the **practical implications of a proposed institutional merger** explicit.

GS Paper III — 2013 · Q23 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Cyber warfare is considered by some defense analysts to be a larger threat than even Al Qaeda or terrorism. What do you understand by Cyber warfare ? Outline the cyber threats which India is vulnerable to and bring out the state of the country's preparedness to deal with the same.

WHAT "BRING OUT" DEMANDED HERE

After defining cyber warfare and outlining India's cyber threats, the answer must bring out **the actual state of India's preparedness** through relevant institutions, capabilities, safeguards and response arrangements. It should reveal **both preparedness strengths and material gaps**, rather than merely repeating the threats.

GS Paper IV — 2018 · Q1(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

State the three basic values, universal in nature, in the context of civil services and bring out their importance.

WHAT "BRING OUT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must state **three basic values of universal relevance to civil services** and bring out why each is important. It should connect each selected value to **administrative conduct, ethical judgement, institutional credibility or public trust**, showing what its presence or absence means in practice.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This ethics question moves from **naming three values** to **showing why each matters** in public service; identifying

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This internal security question makes Bring out a **capability and preparedness assessment**, distinct from the preceding tasks of **defining cyber warfare and outlining vulnerabilities**.

virtues alone is insufficient.

Highlight

11 questions, 2013 to 2026

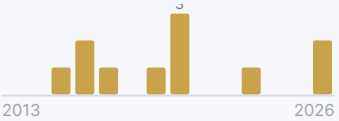
WHAT IT MEANS

To highlight is to **direct attention to the most significant features, distinctions or contributions** of a subject. The task requires judgement in selection: you must recognise **which points deserve prominence** and present them clearly enough for their importance to be understood. A successful answer gives the reader **a sharply focused picture of what matters most**, rather than an exhaustive treatment of every connected detail.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **4** | GS II **5** | GS III **2** | GS IV **0**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used **Highlight in 11 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **5 in GS II, 4 in GS I, 2 in GS III and none in GS IV**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Select the most salient points** that directly answer the question.
- ✓ **Make distinguishing features or contrasts visible** through clear organisation.
- ✓ **Explain briefly why each selected point matters** instead of merely naming it.
- ✓ **Prioritise significance over exhaustive coverage**, keeping less relevant details out.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **making a long list of every feature** without distinguishing the most important ones.
- × It does not mean **using headings or emphasis alone** without substantive explanation.
- × It does not mean **ignoring another directive** when the question separately asks for discussion, examination or explanation.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Bring out makes the relevant consequences, connections or significance explicit. **Highlight** places stronger emphasis on selecting and presenting the most distinctive or important points, without necessarily developing every underlying relationship.

Describe seeks a clear and sufficiently complete picture of the requested features or forms. **Highlight** is more selective, directing attention to the features or contrasts that are particularly significant.

How "Highlight" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2019 · Q1 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Highlight the Central Asian and Greco-Bactrian elements in the Gandhara art.

WHAT "HIGHLIGHT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must identify **the most recognisable Central Asian and Greco-Bactrian influences on Gandhara art**, using relevant features such as artistic treatment, sculptural form, drapery or representation. It should explain **how the selected elements appear in Gandhara**

GS Paper II — 2020 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

The judicial systems in India and UK seem to be converging as well as diverging in recent times. Highlight the key points of convergence and divergence between the two nations in terms of their judicial practices.

WHAT "HIGHLIGHT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must identify **the key points where Indian and UK judicial practices are converging and diverging**, organising them through meaningful areas of comparison.

artistic expression, rather than offering a general history of the school.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This art and culture question requires **selecting distinctive stylistic influences**, making **accurate examples and recognisable artistic characteristics** central to the answer.

It should give priority to **significant similarities and differences in judicial functioning or institutional practice**, rather than recounting the complete histories of both systems.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This comparative polity question uses Highlight to present **two directions of institutional comparison**, so each significant point must clearly show **convergence or divergence**.

GS Paper III 2016 · Q15 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

The frequency of urban floods due to high intensity rainfall is increasing over the years. Discussing the reasons for urban floods, highlight the mechanisms for preparedness to reduce the risk during such events.

WHAT "HIGHLIGHT" DEMANDED HERE

The answer must first discuss **the relevant causes of increasingly frequent urban floods**, including intense rainfall and urban conditions that aggravate flood risk. It must then highlight **the principal preparedness mechanisms** that can reduce risk, such as early warning, drainage readiness, land-use measures and coordinated response arrangements.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This disaster management question pairs **Discussing the reasons with Highlight**, requiring a causal discussion followed by a selective presentation of the **most important preparedness measures**.

Not used in GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

FAMILY 2 OF 5

Weigh and judge

Break claims into parts, examine evidence and limitations, and offer a reasoned judgement when the directive calls for one.

Examine

73 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To examine is to put a specific claim, issue or process under **close scrutiny**, asking what the evidence reveals about how it works, why it matters and whether its stated implications hold. The finished answer should move from **careful investigation** to a **supported finding**, making clear what closer inspection establishes rather than simply describing the subject.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 13 | GS II 25 | GS III 19 | GS IV 16

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **precise claim or issue** requiring examination, including any distinct parts of the question.
- ✓ Investigate the relevant **evidence, mechanisms and relationships** to establish what is actually happening and why.
- ✓ Consider **qualifications, exceptions or limitations** that affect the strength or reach of the explanation.
- ✓ Present a **clear finding** that follows from the examination and directly addresses the question.

2013 2026

From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Examine in 73 questions: 13 in GS I, 25 in GS II, 19 in GS III and 16 in GS IV, with 11 questions each in 2025 and 2026.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean writing a **general account** of everything known about the topic.
- × It does not mean automatically **finding faults** or rejecting the proposition.
- × It does not mean presenting evidence without explaining **what that evidence establishes**.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Analyse primarily breaks a subject into components to explain how their relationships produce an outcome. **Examine** investigates a particular issue or claim more closely to establish what the evidence supports, including its implications and limits.

Both require scrutiny, but **Critically examine** makes the deliberate testing of **assumptions, counterarguments and weaknesses** more prominent. Examine still requires care and qualification, but does not necessarily demand the same intensity of adversarial testing.

How "Examine" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2021 · Q10 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Examine the role of 'Gig Economy' in the process of empowerment of women in India.

WHAT "EXAMINE" DEMANDED HERE

Investigate **how gig work contributes to women's empowerment** through opportunities such as income, flexibility and economic participation, while examining whether insecure employment, unequal access and limited protection restrict those gains. Establish **the conditions under which participation translates into genuine empowerment**, rather than assuming that paid work automatically produces it.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **society question**, Examine requires attention to women's actual agency, social constraints and unequal experiences, rather than a general account of the platform economy.

GS Paper II — 2018 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Whether National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) can enforce the implementation of constitutional reservation for the Scheduled Castes in the religious minority institutions? Examine.

WHAT "EXAMINE" DEMANDED HERE

Determine whether the **NCSC can legally compel religious minority educational institutions to implement SC reservations**, distinguishing its investigative and recommendatory functions under Article 338 from any power to issue binding reservation directions. Examine **Article 30(1) minority educational rights and the Article 15(5) exception for minority institutions**, then reach a legally supported conclusion about the limits of the Commission's enforcement authority.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **constitutional authority question**, Examine requires a precise determination of institutional powers and competing constitutional protections, not a broad discussion of social justice.

GS Paper III — 2017 · Q3 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Examine the development of Airports in India through joint ventures under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. What are the challenges faced by the authorities in this regard ?

GS Paper IV — 2019 · Q7 · 20 marks

QUESTION

In such trying circumstances, what will be your response ? Examine the qualities of a public servant which will be required to manage the situation.

WHAT "EXAMINE" DEMANDED HERE

Examine **how airport development through PPP joint ventures has functioned**, considering investment, infrastructure improvement, operational efficiency and public oversight alongside contractual or regulatory limitations. Separately identify the **challenges faced by authorities**, including balancing commercial interests, public obligations and effective regulation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **infrastructure and governance question**, Examine investigates the working of a development model, while the additional question expressly requires a separate account of implementation challenges.

WHAT "EXAMINE" DEMANDED HERE

First explain **your operational response to the rescue crisis**, including assistance to injured personnel, protection of the rescue team, communication with angry residents and continuation of essential relief as safely as possible. Then **examine the public servant qualities required** to manage these circumstances, connecting empathy, courage, composure, impartiality and coordination to specific decisions involving damaged supply routes, delayed assistance, public hostility and risks to personnel.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In an **ethics case**, Examine tests the practical relevance of personal and administrative qualities to the given circumstances, rather than treating them as abstract definitions.

Critically examine

31 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To critically examine is to investigate a proposition while **actively testing its foundations**: the evidence supporting it, the assumptions it depends on, the objections it faces and the conditions under which it may not hold. The finished answer should give a **fair but searching judgement**, showing **how far the claim survives scrutiny** rather than treating either agreement or disagreement as the starting point.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **6** | GS II **13** | GS III **2** | GS IV **10**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Critically examine in 31 questions: 6 in GS I, 13 in GS II, 2 in GS III and 10 in GS IV, with 5 questions in 2022.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **central proposition and its underlying assumptions**, separating distinct claims where necessary.
- ✓ Test the **supporting evidence and causal reasoning**, asking whether they adequately establish the proposition.
- ✓ Confront **counterevidence, alternative explanations and limitations** rather than presenting only one side.
- ✓ Reach a **qualified judgement** that specifies what is convincing, what remains doubtful and why.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **criticising everything** or treating the proposition as necessarily false.
- × It does not mean mechanically listing **advantages and disadvantages** without testing the central argument.
- × It does not mean allowing a balanced presentation to replace a **defensible conclusion**.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Examine investigates an issue closely to establish what the evidence reveals. **Critically examine** places stronger emphasis on challenging assumptions, testing contrary evidence and exposing weaknesses before reaching a finding.

Critically analyse places particular weight on breaking down the relationships and mechanisms behind a proposition before testing them. **Critically examine** more directly investigates the strength of the claim, its evidence and its possible objections.

How "Critically examine" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2015 · Q16 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

India is well endowed with fresh water resources. Critically examine why it still suffers from water scarcity.

WHAT "CRITICALLY EXAMINE" DEMANDED HERE

Investigate the **apparent contradiction between freshwater endowment and persistent scarcity**, distinguishing total resource availability from usable, accessible and reliably distributed water. Weigh geographical inequality, seasonality, demand, pollution and management failures to judge **which factors most convincingly explain the scarcity** and where the initial assumption needs qualification.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **geography question built around a paradox**, Critically examine requires explaining why an apparently favourable natural endowment does not necessarily produce an equally favourable human outcome.

GS Paper II — 2017 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Critically examine the Supreme Court's judgement on 'National Judicial Appointments Commission Act, 2014' with reference to appointment of judges of higher judiciary in India.

WHAT "CRITICALLY EXAMINE" DEMANDED HERE

Scrutinise the Supreme Court's **constitutional reasoning for invalidating the 99th Constitutional Amendment and the NJAC Act, 2014**, particularly its finding that the proposed appointments framework threatened judicial independence, a component of the basic structure. Weigh **judicial independence against transparency and accountability concerns**, examine the limitations of the existing collegium system, and reach a reasoned judgement about the decision's constitutional strengths and unresolved institutional problems.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **constitutional judgement question**, critical examination requires weighing competing institutional principles and the Court's reasoning, not just describing the verdict.

GS Paper III — 2014 · Q3 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

There is also a point of view that Agricultural Produce Market Committees (APMCs) set up under the State Acts have not only impeded the development of agriculture but also have been the cause of food inflation in India. Critically examine.

WHAT "CRITICALLY EXAMINE" DEMANDED HERE

Test separately the claims that APMCs **impeded agricultural development** and **contributed to food inflation**, examining market restrictions, intermediation, competition and price formation. Consider the intended functions of regulated markets and other causes of agricultural underperformance or inflation before judging how much responsibility can reasonably be attributed to APMCs.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **economic causation question**, Critically examine requires testing two specific allegations against an institution, not assuming that their stated connection is established.

GS Paper IV — 2022 · Q12(b) · 20 marks

QUESTION

(b) Critically examine the options listed by you.

WHAT "CRITICALLY EXAMINE" DEMANDED HERE

Scrutinise **each proposed course of action** for environmental legality, enforceability, ethical acceptability, consequences for workers and affected communities, and the risks of non-compliance. Identify the **weaknesses and trade-offs** of apparently attractive options so that a justified choice can emerge from the examination.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In a **decision-making case**, critical examination applies to practical options and their consequences, with environmental protection, employment dependence and official responsibility creating competing considerations.

Analyse

45 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To analyse is to **break a complex subject into its important parts** and explain how those parts interact, influence one another or combine to produce a particular outcome. The finished answer should reveal the **underlying causes, mechanisms and relationships**, enabling the reader to understand **why something happens or how it works**, rather than merely knowing its characteristics.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **9** | GS II **15** | GS III **14** | GS IV **7**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Analyse in 45 questions: 9 in GS I, 15 in GS II, 14 in GS III and 7 in GS IV, with 7 questions each in 2013, 2017 and 2026.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **principal components or factors** relevant to the outcome or issue in the question.
- ✓ Explain the **causal connections and mechanisms** through which those factors operate.
- ✓ Show **interactions, dependencies or trade-offs** where individual factors cannot adequately explain the outcome alone.
- ✓ Bring the analysis together into a **coherent explanation**, supported by relevant examples or evidence.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean simply **listing factors** without explaining how they influence the outcome.
- × It does not mean breaking a topic into headings while leaving the **relationships unexplained**.
- × It does not automatically require a **final verdict for or against** something unless the question also calls for one.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Analyse concentrates on explaining the internal structure, causes and relationships of a subject. **Examine** concentrates on investigating an issue or claim to establish what closer scrutiny reveals.

Discuss develops the relevant dimensions and arguments surrounding a question. **Analyse** demands a stronger explanation of how the components are connected and why those connections produce particular consequences.

How "Analyse" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2013 · Q23(b) · 5 marks

QUESTION

Analyze the factors for the highly decentralized cotton textile industry in India.

WHAT "ANALYSE" DEMANDED HERE

Identify the **economic, technological, organisational and locational factors** that explain the decentralised structure of India's cotton textile industry. Show **how those factors encourage dispersed production**, small production units or particular divisions of work, rather than simply describing where textile activity takes place.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **economic geography question**, Analyse requires a causal explanation of industrial organisation, with each factor linked to the observed pattern of decentralisation.

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q8 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Analyse the advantages and limitations of the generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services in contemporary governance.

WHAT "ANALYSE" DEMANDED HERE

Break down the **advantages and limitations of generalist administration**, explaining how broad administrative exposure, coordination and adaptability influence governance alongside possible deficits in specialised knowledge or technical decision-making. Show **how these features affect contemporary administrative performance** and where they create trade-offs.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **public administration question**, Analyse connects institutional design to governance consequences, with the explicit advantages and limitations requiring explanation rather than separate unsupported lists.

GS Paper III — 2026 · Q18 · 15 marks

QUESTION

"Community participation is the cornerstone of effective disaster management". Analyse this statement with suitable examples from India. Also discuss the challenges to community participation and measures to strengthen it.

WHAT "ANALYSE" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **how community participation improves disaster management**, through local knowledge, preparedness, trust, early response and coordination, using suitable Indian examples to demonstrate these mechanisms. Then address the **separate demands to discuss barriers and strengthening measures**, ensuring that the proposed measures respond to identified participation problems.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **disaster management question with multiple instructions**, Analyse establishes the mechanism behind the quoted claim before the answer moves to challenges and remedies.

GS Paper IV — 2016 · Q3(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

Analyse John Rawls's concept of social justice in the Indian context.

WHAT "ANALYSE" DEMANDED HERE

Unpack **Rawls's conception of justice as fairness**, including equal basic liberties, fair equality of opportunity and the difference principle, and explain the relationships among these ideas. Apply that reasoning to **Indian inequalities, institutional arrangements and social justice concerns** rather than simply praising equality as a desirable value.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **ethical philosophy question**, Analyse requires reconstructing the logic of a normative theory and applying it to Indian conditions, rather than identifying empirical causes of an event.

Critically analyse

8 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

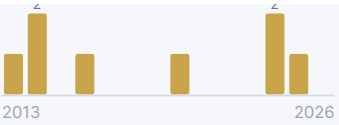
To critically analyse is to **unpack a proposition into its component claims and relationships**, explain the mechanisms connecting them, and then investigate whether those connections are convincing. The finished answer must combine **causal or conceptual explanation** with **rigorous testing of assumptions, evidence and alternative**

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 2 | GS III 1 | GS IV 4

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

explanations, ending in a judgement that reflects both what the analysis establishes and what it cannot establish.



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Critically analyse in 8 questions: 1 in GS I, 2 in GS II, 1 in GS III and 4 in GS IV, with 2 questions each in 2014 and 2024.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Separate the proposition into **distinct claims, factors or relationships** that can be investigated.
- ✓ Explain **how the proposed mechanisms work**, showing the reasoning that connects causes, processes and outcomes.
- ✓ Test the explanation against **contrary evidence, competing causes and important exceptions**.
- ✓ Reach a **qualified conclusion** that reflects the strength and limitations of the relationships examined.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean presenting a **detailed breakdown** without evaluating whether the proposed connections are valid.
- × It does not mean **rejecting the proposition** simply because the instruction says critically.
- × It does not mean assuming that an observed **correlation proves causation** or that a plausible mechanism necessarily explains every case.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Analyse explains the components and relationships that produce an outcome. **Critically analyse** additionally requires testing the assumptions, validity and limitations of those relationships against competing evidence or explanations.

Critically examine tests the strength of a claim and its supporting evidence. **Critically analyse** gives greater emphasis to first explaining the proposition's internal mechanisms and relationships, then challenging their validity.

How "Critically analyse" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2024 · Q20 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Critically analyse the proposition that there is a high correlation between India's cultural diversities and socio-economic marginalities.

WHAT "CRITICALLY ANALYSE" DEMANDED HERE

Unpack the proposed **correlation between cultural diversity and socio-economic marginality**, examining how differences of caste, tribe, language, region or community may overlap with unequal access to resources and opportunities. Test the **strength and limits of the correlation**, recognising exceptions, historical and institutional causes, and the difference between association and causation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **sociological proposition about correlation**, Critically analyse requires identifying the mechanisms and exceptions behind an observed association without treating cultural difference itself as a sufficient explanation for marginalisation.

GS Paper II — 2024 · Q10 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Critically analyse India's evolving diplomatic, economic and strategic relations with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) highlighting their increasing significance in regional and global geopolitics.

WHAT "CRITICALLY ANALYSE" DEMANDED HERE

Analyse the **diplomatic, economic and strategic dimensions** of India's relations with the Central Asian Republics, showing how connectivity, security cooperation and regional interests interact. Critically test the **extent of progress and increasing geopolitical significance** against practical constraints, competing regional influences and the limits of cooperation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **international relations question**, the directive requires connecting multiple evolving relationships and testing their significance, rather than presenting a country-wise list of agreements or visits.

GS Paper III 2013 · Q5 · 10 marks

QUESTION

What are the different types of agriculture subsidies given to farmers at the national and at state levels ? Critically analyse the agricultural subsidy regime with reference to the distortions created by it.

WHAT "CRITICALLY ANALYSE" DEMANDED HERE

First identify the **major categories of agricultural subsidies** provided at national and state levels, then analyse how particular subsidy incentives affect cropping patterns, input use, fiscal burdens and market behaviour. Critically weigh the resulting **economic and environmental distortions** against legitimate objectives of farmer support and differences among subsidy types.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **agricultural economics question with two tasks**, Critically analyse applies specifically to the subsidy regime and its distortions, while the opening task separately requires identifying subsidy types.

GS Paper IV 2016 · Q8 · 10 marks

QUESTION

"Max Weber said that it is not wise to apply to public administration the sort of moral and ethical norms we apply to matters of personal conscience. It is important to realise that the State bureaucracy might possess its own independent bureaucratic morality." Critically analyse this statement.

WHAT "CRITICALLY ANALYSE" DEMANDED HERE

Unpack the distinction between **personal conscience and the ethical obligations of public administration**, explaining why institutional duties may demand impartiality, consistency and rule-bound conduct. Test whether an **independent bureaucratic morality** can be justified without permitting officials to disregard human dignity, public accountability or fundamental ethical obligations.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **ethical argument expressed through a quotation**, Critically analyse requires examining the logic and limits of the attributed position rather than accepting the quoted statement as an authoritative moral conclusion.

Evaluate

24 questions, 2013 to 2026

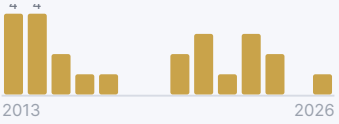
WHAT IT MEANS

To evaluate is to **judge the value, effectiveness, success or impact** of something by asking what it was meant to achieve, what results it produced and how those results compare with relevant standards. The finished answer should make an **explicit evidence-based judgement**, showing **how well, how far or for whom** the subject has delivered, rather than leaving the evidence to speak for itself.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **6** | GS II **7** | GS III **0** | GS IV **11**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Evaluate in 24 questions: 6 in GS I, 7 in GS II, none in GS III and 11 in GS IV, with 4 questions each in 2013 and 2014.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Establish the **appropriate criteria for judgement**, drawn from the subject's purpose or the outcomes named in the question.
- ✓ Examine **actual achievements, effects or performance** against those criteria using relevant evidence.
- ✓ Weigh **limitations, costs, unintended effects and differences in outcomes** where they materially affect the evaluation.
- ✓ Give a **clear overall verdict** about effectiveness, impact or worth, supported by the preceding comparison.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean describing **objectives, features or activities** without judging their results.
- × It does not mean offering an **unweighted list of positives and negatives** while avoiding a conclusion.
- × It does not mean using **personal approval or disapproval** in place of identifiable criteria and evidence.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Assess primarily establishes the extent, importance or effectiveness of a role, condition or contribution.
Evaluate more explicitly asks for a judgement of value, performance or success against suitable criteria.

Both require an evidence-based verdict, but **Critically evaluate** demands more deliberate testing of **weak assumptions, contrary evidence, risks and trade-offs** before deciding how favourable that verdict should be.

How "Evaluate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2026 · Q20 · 15 marks

QUESTION

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

WHAT "EVALUATE" DEMANDED HERE

Judge the **impact of globalisation on Indian youth across all four specified spheres**, examining changes in social relationships, political participation, economic opportunities and cultural practices. Weigh enabling and adverse effects, recognising **differences across groups of young people**, before giving an overall judgement about the nature and extent of the impact.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **Indian society question**, Evaluate requires a multidimensional judgement about lived social changes, not a general account of globalisation or an exclusively economic assessment.

GS Paper II — 2024 · Q18 · 15 marks

QUESTION

e-governance is not just about the routine application of digital technology in service delivery process. It is as much about multifarious interactions for ensuring transparency and accountability. In this context evaluate the role of the 'Interactive Service Model' of e-governance.

WHAT "EVALUATE" DEMANDED HERE

Evaluate **how effectively the Interactive Service Model enables two-way engagement** between government and citizens or other stakeholders through online consultation, feedback, grievance redressal and responsive communication. Judge its contribution to **transparency, accountability and meaningful participation**, distinguishing genuine opportunities to influence decisions and obtain responses from merely digitising information or service delivery. Consider practical limitations such as digital exclusion and ineffective feedback mechanisms.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **governance model question**, Evaluate judges performance against transparency and accountability outcomes established by the question, rather than against technology adoption alone.

GS Paper IV — 2013 · Q10 · 20 marks

QUESTION

What will you do in such a situation? Some of the options are given below. Evaluate the merits and demerits of each of these options and finally suggest what course of action you would like to take, giving reasons. (i) Follow the advice of the Chief Engineer and go ahead. (ii) Make an exhaustive report of the situation bringing out all facts and analysis along with your own viewpoints stated clearly and seek for written orders from the Chief Engineer. (iii) Call for explanation from the Junior Engineers and issue orders to the contractor for necessary correction within targeted time. (iv) Highlight the issue so that it reaches superiors above the Chief Engineer. (v) Considering the rigid attitude of the Chief Engineer, seek transfer from the project or report sick.

WHAT "EVALUATE" DEMANDED HERE

Compare the **merits and demerits of all five specified options** against public safety, professional responsibility, procedural accountability, feasibility and foreseeable consequences, including the risks of proceeding despite concerns or avoiding responsibility. Finally recommend

one defensible course of action, or a justified combination of steps, explaining why it better satisfies the relevant duties than the alternatives.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **administrative ethics case involving serious defects in flyover construction**, Evaluate requires comparing five specified responses to a conflict between public safety, construction deadlines, financial consequences and pressure from a superior officer. The comparison must lead to **a justified course of action**, rather than stopping at the advantages and disadvantages of individual options.

Not used in GS Paper III between 2013 and 2026.

Critically evaluate

19 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To critically evaluate is to reach a **reasoned judgement of value, performance or desirability** while subjecting the available arguments and evidence to particularly demanding scrutiny. The finished answer should test **assumptions, counterevidence, adverse consequences and competing criteria**, then explain **whether, how far and under what conditions** the subject deserves a favourable judgement.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 3 | GS II 6 | GS III 3 | GS IV 7

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Critically evaluate in 19 questions: 3 in GS I, 6 in GS II, 3 in GS III and 7 in GS IV, with 6 questions in 2015.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify **what is being judged and by which criteria**, including any competing objectives.
- ✓ Consider the **strongest supporting arguments and evidence** without overlooking genuine achievements or benefits.
- ✓ Test **limitations, contrary evidence, hidden costs and trade-offs**, including effects on different groups.
- ✓ Reach a **defensible, qualified verdict** that explains why some considerations carry greater weight than others.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean beginning with a **negative judgement** and searching only for reasons to support it.
- × It does not mean treating all **advantages and disadvantages as equally important** regardless of their consequences.
- × It does not mean avoiding a decision by saying that **both sides have merit** without determining what follows from that comparison.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Evaluate judges performance, value or success against relevant criteria. **Critically evaluate** applies more intensive scrutiny to the evidence, assumptions, counterarguments and risks before reaching that judgement.

Critically analyse prioritises explaining and testing the components and relationships underlying a proposition. **Critically evaluate** prioritises deciding the subject's **overall merit, value or desirability** after testing the relevant evidence and competing considerations.

How "Critically evaluate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2015 · Q2 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Mesolithic rock cut architecture of India not only reflects the cultural life of the times but also a fine aesthetic sense comparable to modern painting. Critically evaluate this comment.

WHAT "CRITICALLY EVALUATE" DEMANDED HERE

Judge the claim that Mesolithic rock art reflects both **contemporary cultural life and an aesthetic quality comparable to modern painting**, examining representative artistic features and the evidence they provide about expression and social life. Test the **validity and limitations of comparing prehistoric art with modern painting**, recognising differences in historical context, purpose and standards of aesthetic judgement.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **art and culture proposition**, Critically evaluate requires a historically sensitive judgement about artistic significance, rather than accepting a modern comparison as an objective standard.

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q18 · 15 marks

QUESTION

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.

WHAT "CRITICALLY EVALUATE" DEMANDED HERE

Evaluate **education as a state welfare obligation and as a strategic national investment**, testing how each approach addresses rights, equity, access, learning quality and long-term national capabilities. Scrutinise whether the proposed **either-or choice is justified**, then determine what policy balance best serves educational and developmental objectives.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **public policy question framed as competing priorities**, Critically evaluate requires testing the framing itself, including whether social obligation and strategic investment are necessarily opposed.

GS Paper III — 2015 · Q3 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

In view of the declining average size of land holdings in India which has made agriculture non-viable for a majority of farmers, should contract farming and land leasing be promoted in agriculture ? Critically evaluate the pros and cons.

WHAT "CRITICALLY EVALUATE" DEMANDED HERE

Judge whether **contract farming and land leasing should be promoted** in response to shrinking landholdings, weighing possible benefits for investment, productivity, market access and farm viability against unequal bargaining power, insecure tenure and other risks. Reach a **conditional judgement about promotion and safeguards**, rather than merely listing the requested pros and cons.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **agricultural policy choice**, Critically evaluate requires a decision about desirability under real farming conditions, with explicit pros and cons informing the judgement.

GS Paper IV — 2022 · Q10(b) · 20 marks

QUESTION

(b) Critically evaluate each of the options listed by you.

WHAT "CRITICALLY EVALUATE" DEMANDED HERE

Critically evaluate **each proposed response to an overseas-rejected footwear consignment with known quality defects**, examining inspection integrity, consumer interests, professional obligations, organisational reputation and the consequences of clearing defective goods for domestic sale. Weigh **the threat of dismissal and dependence on employment** against the ethical and practical costs of compromising inspection standards, identifying which options remain defensible and why.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In an **inspection ethics case involving defective footwear rejected for export**, Critically evaluate tests the defensibility of practical choices when commercial pressure, consumer interests and professional integrity conflict. The threat of dismissal and the official's family responsibilities make **the personal consequences of principled action** an important part of the comparison.

Assess

12 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To assess is to **determine the extent, significance or effectiveness** of a role, condition, problem or intervention by weighing the evidence

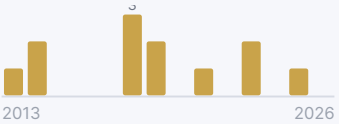
HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 5 | GS II 6

that shows how much it matters. The finished answer should establish **the degree of contribution or influence**, recognise relevant limits, and offer a **measured judgement** about its actual importance rather than merely describing its existence.

GS III 1 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Assess in 12 questions: 5 in GS I, 6 in GS II, 1 in GS III and none in GS IV, with 3 questions in 2018.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **specific role, contribution, condition or problem** whose significance must be established.
- ✓ Use **relevant evidence and examples** to determine its reach, influence, effectiveness or seriousness.
- ✓ Weigh **relative importance, limitations and variations**, including other factors that influence the outcome.
- ✓ Conclude with a **proportionate judgement** indicating how significant or effective the subject has been.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean giving a **descriptive account** of a subject without indicating its importance.
- × It does not mean crediting the subject with **every associated outcome** while ignoring other contributing factors.
- × It does not mean making an **absolute success-or-failure judgement** when the evidence supports a more limited conclusion.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Assess establishes how significant, extensive or effective something is. **Evaluate** more directly judges its performance, success or worth against defined criteria, often requiring a clearer verdict on overall value.

Appraise places particular emphasis on determining the **value of a contribution or role**. **Assess** is broader and can judge the extent or seriousness of a problem, the influence of a factor, or the effectiveness of an institution.

How "Assess" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2019 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Assess the role of British imperial power in complicating the process of transfer of power during the 1940s.

WHAT "ASSESS" DEMANDED HERE

Determine **how far British imperial policies and decisions complicated the transfer of power** during the 1940s, examining their effects on political negotiations, communal tensions and the eventual transition. Weigh the **relative responsibility of imperial actions** alongside other political and historical forces instead of attributing every difficulty to one actor.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **modern Indian history question**, Assess requires weighing an actor's contribution to a complex historical outcome, rather than narrating the entire independence movement or transfer of power.

GS Paper II — 2023 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Who are entitled to receive free legal aid ? Assess the role of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in rendering free legal aid in India.

WHAT "ASSESS" DEMANDED HERE

First identify **the categories entitled to free legal aid under Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987**, including Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe members, trafficking victims, women and children, persons with disabilities, disaster victims, industrial workmen, persons in custody and individuals meeting the applicable income criteria. Then assess **NALSA's role in converting legal entitlement into effective access to justice** through legal services institutions, legal aid counsel, legal awareness and outreach. Judge its actual reach, quality and effectiveness, recognising barriers that prevent eligible people from obtaining timely and meaningful assistance.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **rights and institutional performance question**, Assess follows a separate legal eligibility task and judges how effectively the institution translates formal entitlement into practical access.

GS Paper III 2018 · Q13 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Assess the role of National Horticulture Mission (NHM) in boosting the production, productivity and income of horticulture farms. How far has it succeeded in increasing the income of farmers?

WHAT "ASSESS" DEMANDED HERE

Assess the **NHM's contribution to horticultural production, productivity and farm income**, distinguishing improvements in agricultural output from demonstrable improvements in farmers' earnings. The additional question, **how far has it succeeded**, requires a specific judgement about the extent of income gains and the factors limiting them.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **agricultural programme question**, Assess requires distinguishing programme activities and production achievements from the final income outcome expressly highlighted by the examiner.

Not used in GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Critically assess

1 question, 2013 to 2026

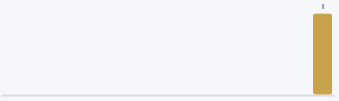
WHAT IT MEANS

To critically assess is to **determine how far a proposition or contribution is valid, significant or effective**, while rigorously testing the assumptions and evidence on which that judgement depends. The finished answer should establish **the actual degree of support for the claim**, weigh competing explanations and limitations, and state a **qualified finding** that neither accepts nor dismisses the proposition without justification.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 0 | GS II 1 | GS III 0 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



Used once, in **GS II in 2026**, through the equivalent instruction **'Make a critical assessment'**; it has not appeared in GS I, GS III or GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **precise claim and the standard** by which its validity or significance can be judged.
- ✓ Examine the **supporting evidence and practical mechanisms** that would make the proposition credible.
- ✓ Test **assumptions, contrary considerations and limitations** that may weaken or qualify the claim.
- ✓ State a **measured judgement about how far the proposition holds**, specifying the conditions or areas in which it is strongest.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **accepting the proposition as established** without testing its assumptions and supporting evidence.
- × It does not mean **rejecting every claimed benefit or contribution** merely because weaknesses, uncertainties or limitations are present.
- × It does not mean replacing a focused assessment with a **broad descriptive account** of the surrounding subject.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Assess weighs the extent, significance or effectiveness of something. **Critically assess** makes the testing of the proposition's assumptions, evidence, limitations and counterarguments an explicit part of reaching that judgement.

Critically evaluate primarily judges overall merit, success or desirability against competing criteria. **Critically assess** can focus more narrowly on **how far a particular claim is valid or a stated contribution is significant**, without necessarily delivering a broad verdict on policy desirability.

How "Critically assess" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q9 · 10 marks

QUESTION

"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.

WHAT "CRITICALLY ASSESS" DEMANDED HERE

Test the proposition that **IPMDA provides an operational bridge between India's SAGAR vision and the Quad's Indo-Pacific strategy**, examining its role in improving maritime domain awareness through information sharing, near-real-time monitoring and cooperation against illegal maritime activities. Assess **how far these capabilities advance shared maritime security objectives**, while testing limitations arising from technology access, information-sharing arrangements, partner capacities and differences between India's regional priorities and the Quad's wider strategic agenda. Reach a qualified judgement about the initiative's practical contribution without treating cooperation as complete strategic alignment.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **strategic proposition focused on one initiative**, Critically assess requires IPMDA to remain the centre of the argument, with SAGAR and the Quad examined only to establish the strength and limits of the claimed connection.

Not used in GS Paper I, GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Appraise

1 question, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To appraise is to make a **considered judgement of the value or importance of a contribution**, examining what it has added and why that contribution matters in its particular setting. The finished answer should distinguish **meaningful influence from mere participation**, weigh the reach and limitations of that influence, and establish its **overall significance** through relevant evidence.

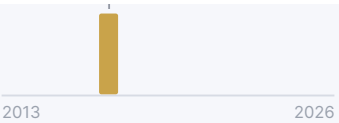
HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 0 | GS II 1 | GS III 0 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **principal contributions** directly relevant to the subject and its stated context.
- ✓ Explain **why those contributions matter** to the affected economy, society, institution or process.
- ✓ Weigh their **reach, relative importance and limitations**, recognising differences across settings where relevant.
- ✓ Offer a **supported judgement of overall significance** rather than merely acknowledging the subject's presence.



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Appraise in 1 question, in GS II in 2017, and in no questions in GS I, GS III or GS IV.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean producing an **inventory of activities** without explaining their value.
- × It does not mean offering **unqualified praise** simply because the question refers to an important role.
- × It does not mean treating a **broad global contribution** as proof of equivalent importance in the specific region or context asked about.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Assess determines the extent, significance or effectiveness of a role, condition or contribution. **Appraise** focuses more specifically on judging the **value and importance of a contribution** within its context.

Evaluate can judge the success, performance or desirability of policies, outcomes and interventions against criteria. **Appraise** places the emphasis on understanding and judging **what a person, group or institution has contributed and how much that contribution matters**.

How "Appraise" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper II — 2017 · Q20 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Indian diaspora has an important role to play in South-East Asian countries' economy and society. Appraise the role of Indian diaspora in South-East Asia in this context.

WHAT "APPRAISE" DEMANDED HERE

Appraise the **economic contribution of the Indian diaspora in South-East Asia**, including its role in enterprise, employment, trade and investment, alongside its **social and cultural contributions** through community institutions, cultural links and people-to-people connections. Judge the significance of these contributions using relevant regional examples, while recognising variations among host countries and limitations of diaspora influence.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **international relations question about a regional community**, Appraise requires judging contributions to both the economy and society of South-East Asian countries, rather than discussing the Indian diaspora worldwide.

Not used in GS Paper I, GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Review

1 question, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To review is to **take stock of a subject's actual working, development and present position**, examining what has happened, what has been achieved and what remains unsatisfactory. The finished answer should provide an **organised assessment of the record**, using relevant evidence and illustrations to show **where the subject now stands**, rather than repeating its formal design or original purpose.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **0** | GS II **1** | GS III **0** | GS IV **0**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Review in 1 question, in GS II in 2021, and in no questions in GS I, GS III or GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Establish the **relevant scope and period** of the subject whose record is to be reviewed.
- ✓ Examine **actual functioning, developments and outcomes**, not merely constitutional or administrative provisions.
- ✓ Identify **achievements, shortcomings and variations**, using suitable examples to illustrate the evidence.
- ✓ Present a **measured account of the present position** and the most important findings from the review.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean reproducing the **formal rules or structure** without examining actual functioning.
- × It does not mean offering a **chronological list of events** with no assessment of their significance.
- × It does not mean treating the **original purpose of an institution as proof of its present performance**.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Examine investigates a particular claim or issue to establish what the evidence reveals. **Review** takes stock of a subject's record, functioning, developments and current position, often across several dimensions.

Evaluate directly judges effectiveness, success or value against relevant criteria. **Review** gives greater emphasis to examining **what has happened, how something has worked and where it currently stands**, while still allowing a measured judgement about the findings.

How "Review" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper II — 2021 · Q14 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Explain the constitutional provisions under which Legislative Councils are established. Review the working and current status of Legislative Councils with suitable illustrations.

WHAT "REVIEW" DEMANDED HERE

First explain **the constitutional framework governing Legislative Councils**, particularly Article 169 on their creation or abolition and Article 171 on their composition. Then review **their actual functioning and status in 2021**, when six states had Legislative Councils: Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh. Use suitable state-level illustrations to examine their contribution to legislative scrutiny and representation, their institutional limitations, and debates concerning effectiveness, political use and public expenditure.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **constitutional institution question with two distinct tasks**, Review moves beyond the preliminary legal explanation to the actual working and status of Legislative Councils across states.

Not used in GS Paper I, GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Estimate

1 question, 2013 to 2026

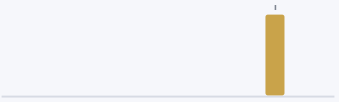
WHAT IT MEANS

To estimate is to make a **reasoned approximation of the magnitude or significance** of something when its full value may not be directly measurable. In historical and cultural questions, this means using representative evidence to **gauge the scale, influence and lasting importance of a contribution**, producing a **proportionate judgement** rather than merely describing achievements.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 0 | GS III 0 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Estimate in 1 question, in GS I in 2024, and in no questions in GS II, GS III or GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **specific fields of contribution** whose importance must be estimated.
- ✓ Select **representative achievements and supporting evidence** that reveal the contribution's reach and quality.
- ✓ Judge its **relative significance and lasting influence**, distinguishing attributable contributions from wider developments.
- ✓ Present a **reasoned estimate of importance** that matches the strength and scope of the available evidence.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not necessarily mean performing a **numerical calculation** when the subject calls for qualitative historical judgement.
- × It does not mean listing **famous achievements** without gauging their significance.
- × It does not mean making an **exaggerated claim of unique or total credit** where a contribution forms part of a broader historical process.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Assess weighs the importance, extent or effectiveness of a subject more broadly. **Estimate** places particular emphasis on gauging **how substantial a contribution is**, using the available evidence even when a precise measurement is impossible.

Quantify asks for a magnitude expressed numerically, using appropriate measures or data. **Estimate** asks for a reasoned approximation and may also require a qualitative judgement when numerical measurement is unsuitable. In the Pallavas question, the task is to gauge historical and cultural significance, not to invent numerical values.

How "Estimate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2024 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Estimate the contribution of Pallavas of Kanchi for the development of art and literature of South India.

WHAT "ESTIMATE" DEMANDED HERE

Gauge the **significance of Pallava contributions to South Indian art and literature**, using representative achievements in temple architecture, sculpture and literary patronage to establish their influence. Consider **both art and literature**, distinguishing lasting contributions from achievements that merely occurred during the Pallava period.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **art and culture question**, Estimate asks for a qualitative judgement about historical influence and contribution, rather than a numerical valuation or a descriptive catalogue of monuments and texts.

Not used in GS Paper II, GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Comment

45 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To comment is to offer an **informed and reasoned position** on a specific statement, development or issue, making clear what you think the evidence allows you to conclude. The finished answer should combine **a clear judgement with supporting explanation**, acknowledge necessary qualifications and show **why that position is justified**, rather than simply repeating the proposition or surveying the entire topic.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 16 | GS II 20 | GS III 8 | GS IV 1

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Comment in 45 questions: 16 in GS I, 20 in GS II, 8 in GS III and 1 in GS IV, with 7 questions in 2023.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **exact claim or issue** on which a reasoned view is requested.
- ✓ State a **clear position** that responds directly to that claim rather than remaining indefinitely neutral.
- ✓ Support the position with **relevant reasoning, evidence and examples**, not unsupported opinion.
- ✓ Recognise **important qualifications or limits** and finish with a judgement consistent with the reasoning.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean expressing a **casual personal opinion** without evidence.
- × It does not mean **paraphrasing the statement** and treating agreement as a complete answer.
- × It does not mean writing a **general discussion of every related dimension** while leaving the requested position unclear.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Discuss explores the important dimensions, arguments and implications surrounding a subject. **Comment** more directly asks the writer to **take and defend a reasoned position** on a particular claim or issue.

Comment requires an informed, supported judgement with appropriate qualifications. **Critically comment** adds a stronger obligation to test the claim's **assumptions, factual basis, weaknesses and alternative explanations** before stating that judgement.

How "Comment" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2020 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Persian literary sources of medieval India reflect the spirit of the age. Comment.

WHAT "COMMENT" DEMANDED HERE

Take a reasoned position on whether **Persian literary sources genuinely reflect the spirit of medieval India**, using evidence of political life, court culture, social attitudes or intellectual concerns represented in the texts. Recognise **the selective perspective of elite or court-centred writing**, explaining both its historical value and the aspects of society it may overlook.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **historical source interpretation question**, Comment requires judging the representativeness of literary evidence, rather than merely naming Persian works or describing medieval literary traditions.

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q16 · 15 marks

QUESTION

"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.

WHAT "COMMENT" DEMANDED HERE

Comment on the proposition that **transparency and accountability are fundamentally about building stakeholder trust** through the rule of law and participatory governance, rather than being confined to corruption control. Defend a reasoned view of **how openness, lawful conduct, answerability and participation contribute to trust**, while recognising that controlling corruption remains an important part of accountable governance.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **governance proposition framed through a contrast**, Comment requires taking a position on the broader purpose of transparency and accountability while qualifying the claim's apparent separation from anti-corruption objectives.

GS Paper III — 2024 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

What are the causes of persistent high food inflation in India? Comment on the effectiveness of the monetary policy of the RBI to control this type of inflation.

WHAT "COMMENT" DEMANDED HERE

First identify **the principal causes of persistent food inflation**, distinguishing supply disruptions, production constraints, distribution problems and other relevant pressures. Then comment specifically on **how effective RBI monetary policy can be against those causes**, recognising its ability to influence demand and inflation expectations alongside its limits in resolving supply-side bottlenecks.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **economic question with two tasks**, Comment applies to the effectiveness of monetary policy, and the judgement must follow from the inflation causes identified in the first part.

GS Paper IV — 2023 · Q1(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

'International aid' is an accepted form of helping 'resource-challenged' nations. Comment on 'ethics in contemporary international aid'. Support your answer with suitable examples.

WHAT "COMMENT" DEMANDED HERE

Offer a reasoned ethical position on **how international aid should be designed and delivered**, considering humanitarian need, recipient dignity, fairness, accountability, sovereignty and donor influence. Support the judgement with **concrete examples of ethical practice or ethical dilemmas**, such as needs-based emergency assistance or aid tied to donor interests.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As an **applied ethics question**, Comment requires a normative position about acceptable conduct in international aid, with examples demonstrating ethical principles rather than merely describing aid programmes.

Critically comment

1 question, 2013 to 2026

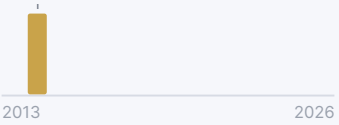
WHAT IT MEANS

To critically comment is to **take a reasoned position on a proposition after testing whether its claims deserve acceptance**, including the factual assumptions and causal explanations on which it rests. The finished answer should expose **weak or incomplete reasoning**, consider credible alternatives and deliver **a clear, qualified judgement** that explains which parts of the claim are convincing and which are not.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 0 | GS II 0 | GS III 1 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used Critically comment in 1 question, in GS III in 2014, and in no questions in GS I, GS II or GS IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Separate the proposition into **testable factual and causal claims**, rather than accepting its framing as established.
- ✓ Examine the **evidence supporting each claim**, distinguishing observed developments from explanations offered for them.
- ✓ Consider **counterevidence, competing causes and overlooked factors** that might change the interpretation.
- ✓ State a **clear, qualified position** about the credibility and explanatory strength of the proposition.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean assuming that the **problem described in the statement is an established fact**.
- × It does not mean accepting the **proposed causes as the only possible explanation**.
- × It does not mean replacing an evidence-based judgement with **general criticism or personal dissatisfaction**.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Comment asks for a supported position on a specific issue or statement. **Critically comment** requires more deliberate examination of the **truth of the premise, the strength of its reasoning and the adequacy of its proposed explanation** before forming that position.

Critically examine focuses on investigating the validity of a claim through supporting and opposing evidence. **Critically comment** similarly scrutinises the claim but gives particular prominence to presenting **the writer's clear, reasoned position** on what should be accepted, rejected or qualified.

How "Critically comment" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper III — 2014 · Q10 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Scientific research in Indian universities is declining, because a career in science is not as attractive as are business professions, engineering or administration, and the universities are becoming consumer-oriented. Critically comment.

WHAT "CRITICALLY COMMENT" DEMANDED HERE

Test separately the **claim that scientific research in Indian universities is declining** and the explanations that science careers have become less attractive than other professions and universities more consumer-oriented. Consider **alternative institutional, funding and research-environment factors**, then judge how convincingly the stated explanations account for the alleged trend, without treating the question's premises as proven.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

As a **science and higher education proposition combining a claimed trend with proposed causes**, Critically comment requires testing both the factual premise and the causal explanation before offering a reasoned position.

Not used in GS Paper I, GS Paper II or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

FAMILY 3 OF 5

Reason, defend and reflect

Judge the reach of a claim, defend a position with reasons and evidence, explain causes where required, or reflect on deeper values and responsibilities.

How far

19 questions, 2013 to 2026

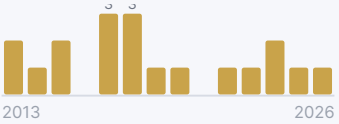
WHAT IT MEANS

Determine **how much of a claim actually holds** when tested against evidence, rather than treating it as wholly true or false. The task is to establish the claim's **valid reach and its limits**, then give a clear judgment about its accuracy, explanatory strength or practical success. A good answer shows not merely that exceptions exist, but whether those exceptions materially change the overall conclusion.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **3** | GS II **11** | GS III **4** | GS IV **1**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'How far' in 19 questions**, with **11 in GS Paper II**, 4 in GS Paper III, 3 in GS Paper I and 1 in GS Paper IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **precise claim or outcome** whose validity or success must be assessed.
- ✓ Establish **where and why it holds**, using relevant evidence, mechanisms or examples.
- ✓ Test its **limits and competing explanations**, distinguishing substantial qualifications from minor exceptions.
- ✓ Give a **calibrated final judgment** that makes the degree of validity or success unmistakable.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean writing a **yes-or-no answer** followed by a general description of the topic.
- × It does not require **equal space for both sides** when the evidence supports one side more strongly.
- × It does not mean identifying a few limitations and leaving the **degree of validity** unresolved.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Both demand a qualified judgment. **How far** often tests how successfully a particular proposition or initiative holds up, while **To what extent** more explicitly invites assessment of the scope, degree or contribution involved; in practice, their central requirement of an evidence-based judgment substantially overlaps.

How "How far" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2024 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

How far is it correct to say that the First World War was fought essentially for the preservation of balance of power?

WHAT "HOW FAR" DEMANDED HERE

Test whether the preservation of the **European balance of power** was genuinely the central purpose of the First World War. Weigh that explanation against imperial competition, alliance commitments, nationalism and immediate triggers, then judge whether the word **essentially** gives the balance-of-power argument more importance than the evidence supports.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **historical interpretation** question, the task is to judge **the relative explanatory weight of causes** rather than measure an institution's performance or a policy's benefits.

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q13 · 15 marks

QUESTION

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.

WHAT "HOW FAR" DEMANDED HERE

Assess the **actual success of Indian federalism** in accommodating regional and cultural diversity, identifying achievements alongside unresolved tensions and disputes. Then separately explain how **asymmetric federalism** responds to differing regional needs and propose improvements to dispute resolution mechanisms.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike a single-claim question, this **institutional assessment** combines a **degree-of-success judgment** with two additional tasks that must receive distinct treatment.

GS Paper III — 2019 · Q3 · 10 marks

QUESTION

How far is Integrated Farming System (IFS) helpful in sustaining agricultural production?

WHAT "HOW FAR" DEMANDED HERE

Judge how substantially **Integrated Farming System sustains agricultural production** through resource recycling, complementary farm enterprises, soil improvement, risk reduction and income diversification. Examine constraints such as capital, skills, labour and local suitability before deciding **under what conditions** its contribution is significant.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here the judgment concerns the **practical effectiveness of an agricultural system**, so the answer must connect production benefits to **specific mechanisms and implementation conditions**.

GS Paper IV — 2022 · Q4(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

What do you understand by the term 'good governance'? How far recent initiatives in terms of e-Governance steps taken by the State have helped the beneficiaries? Discuss with suitable examples.

WHAT "HOW FAR" DEMANDED HERE

After explaining good governance, assess **how far e-Governance initiatives have actually benefited people** through improved access, efficiency, transparency and accountability. Use suitable examples to distinguish **demonstrable improvements** from persistent problems such as digital exclusion, inaccessible services and weak grievance redressal.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The ethics and governance setting shifts attention from technological provision to **beneficiary experience and public-service outcomes**, while the question separately requires **a definition and examples**.

To what extent

12 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

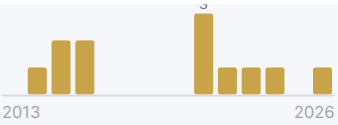
Establish **the degree and scope of a contribution, relationship, achievement or claim** by examining how strongly the available evidence supports it. The answer must distinguish what the stated factor genuinely explains or accomplishes from what lies **beyond its influence or reach**. Its conclusion should tell the reader how

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 4 | GS II 6 | GS III 2 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

significant the contribution is, not simply whether some contribution exists.



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'To what extent' in 12 questions**, comprising **6 in GS Paper II**, 4 in GS Paper I, 2 in GS Paper III and none in GS Paper IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Specify **what is being measured or judged**, whether influence, responsibility, contribution or achievement.
- ✓ Demonstrate the **strength and scope** of the stated relationship using evidence and examples.
- ✓ Separate its contribution from **other causes, actors or conditions** that also shape the outcome.
- ✓ Reach a **proportionate judgment** about how substantial, limited or conditional the contribution is.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean proving merely that a factor **played some role** without judging its importance.
- × It does not mean assigning **exclusive credit or blame** when several forces contributed to an outcome.
- × It does not require a **numerical percentage** when a reasoned qualitative assessment is more appropriate.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Both ask for an evidence-based assessment of degree. **To what extent** particularly encourages you to establish the **scope and relative significance** of a contribution or effect, while 'How far' often frames the same intellectual task as a test of how well a claim holds.

How "To what extent" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2021 · Q11 · 15 marks

QUESTION

To what extent did the role of the Moderates prepare a base for the wider freedom movement ? Comment.

WHAT "TO WHAT EXTENT" DEMANDED HERE

Assess **how substantially the Moderates prepared the foundations** of the wider Indian freedom movement through political education, constitutional methods, organisation and nationalist consciousness. Distinguish these foundations from the strategies, mass participation and political developments introduced by later phases, then give a **qualified judgment** on the Moderates' historical contribution.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The historical question measures **foundational contribution across successive phases**, while the additional word 'Comment' requires **a concise, reasoned assessment** rather than a chronology.

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q15 · 15 marks

QUESTION

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.

WHAT "TO WHAT EXTENT" DEMANDED HERE

Judge **how far pressure groups, social movements and corporate lobbies deepen pluralistic democracy** by giving excluded interests representation and influence, distinguishing inclusive participation from unequal access and elite capture. Then separately analyse whether the **concentration of corporate wealth and political power** threatens the independence of democratic institutions.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This question combines a **degree-of-contribution assessment** with a distinct analysis of **institutional autonomy**, requiring differentiation among the three types of political actors.

GS Paper III 2024 · Q1 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Examine the pattern and trend of public expenditure on social services in the post-reforms period in India. To what extent this has been in consonance with achieving the objective of inclusive growth?

WHAT "TO WHAT EXTENT" DEMANDED HERE

After examining the pattern and trend of social-service expenditure since economic reforms, judge **how closely that expenditure has advanced inclusive growth** through access, distribution and outcomes in areas such as health and education. Identify **gaps between spending and inclusion**, including uneven provision, implementation problems and persistent inequalities.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The economic question tests **alignment between policy inputs and development outcomes**, while the preceding directive 'Examine' separately requires **analysis of expenditure patterns and trends**.

Not used in GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Do you agree

27 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

You are given an identifiable proposition and must **take a defensible position** on whether it is correct. Your answer should test the proposition against relevant evidence, principles or examples and explain **why you accept, reject or partly accept it**. The finished response must make your position clear while qualifying any part of the claim that is exaggerated, incomplete or conditional.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 5 | GS II 8 | GS III 5 | GS IV 9

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Do you agree' in 27 questions**, with **9 in GS Paper IV**, 8 in GS Paper II and 5 each in GS Papers I and III.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ State a **clear position** on the precise proposition, preferably near the beginning.
- ✓ Build the case for that position using **relevant reasons, evidence or principles**.
- ✓ Examine **serious counterarguments or qualifications** that could alter the verdict.
- ✓ Finish with a **consistent judgment** that follows from the reasoning rather than contradicting it.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **automatically agreeing** because the question presents a statement confidently.
- × It does not mean remaining **neutral throughout** without answering whether you agree.
- × It does not mean treating **partial agreement as indecision**; a qualified position can be the strongest conclusion.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Do you agree asks you to assess and respond to an existing claim. **Do you think** can demand a wider independent judgment about a possibility, choice, comparison or future outcome without first requiring acceptance or rejection of a stated proposition.

How "Do you agree" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2020 · Q10 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Do you agree that regionalism in India appears to be a consequence of rising cultural assertiveness ? Argue.

WHAT "DO YOU AGREE" DEMANDED HERE

Decide whether **rising cultural assertiveness adequately explains regionalism** in India, using linguistic, cultural and identity-based mobilisation where relevant. Test that explanation against **political, economic and historical influences**, then defend the resulting degree of agreement through a coherent argument.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The added instruction **'Argue'** requires **connected reasoning about a proposed social cause**, not merely a statement of agreement followed by examples.

GS Paper II — 2025 · Q8 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Civil Society Organizations are often perceived as being anti-State actors than non-State actors. Do you agree? Justify.

WHAT "DO YOU AGREE" DEMANDED HERE

Assess whether calling civil society organisations **anti-State actors** is a fair characterisation or an overgeneralisation of their criticism and scrutiny of government. Distinguish **legitimate democratic accountability** from activities genuinely directed against the State, then justify the position using constitutional reasoning and appropriate examples.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This governance question turns on a **conceptual distinction between opposition to government policies and opposition to the State**, and the additional word 'Justify' requires **a defensible institutional argument**.

GS Paper III — 2021 · Q11 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Do you agree that the Indian economy has recently experienced V-shaped recovery ? Give reasons in support of your answer.

WHAT "DO YOU AGREE" DEMANDED HERE

Judge whether India's recent economic performance at the time genuinely displayed a **V-shaped recovery**, using the depth of contraction, speed of rebound and relevant indicators of output, demand, employment and investment. Determine whether the evidence supports a **broad and sustained recovery** or merely a rebound in selected indicators, giving reasons for the verdict.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike a primarily conceptual disagreement, this is an **empirical economic claim** whose validity depends on **the relevant period, indicators and breadth of recovery**.

GS Paper IV — 2023 · Q4(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

"What really matters for success, character, happiness and lifelong achievements is a definite set of emotional skills — your EQ — not just purely cognitive abilities that are measured by conventional IQ tests." Do you agree with this view ? Give reasons in support of your answer.

WHAT "DO YOU AGREE" DEMANDED HERE

Take a reasoned position on the claim that **emotional intelligence matters more than conventional IQ** for success, character, happiness and lifelong achievement. Explain how emotional skills shape conduct, relationships and decisions while assessing the **continuing role of cognitive ability**, supporting the conclusion with ethical and practical examples.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The quoted proposition invites an **ethical and psychological judgment**, so the answer should evaluate **what each set of abilities contributes** rather than simply praise emotional intelligence.

Do you think

22 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

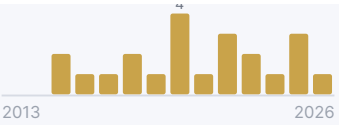
Form an **independent, reasoned judgment** about a possibility, proposition, comparison, prediction or preferred course of action. Decide what criteria should govern the answer, examine the evidence or principles against those criteria, and explain **why your conclusion**

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 4	GS II 10
GS III 1	GS IV 7

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

is more convincing than plausible alternatives. Unlike a request for personal preference, the finished answer must be intellectually defensible to a reader who may initially disagree.



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Do you think' in 22 questions**, including **10 in GS Paper II**, 7 in GS Paper IV, 4 in GS Paper I and 1 in GS Paper III.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✔ Identify the **exact decision or judgment** the question asks you to make.
- ✔ Apply **relevant criteria and evidence** rather than relying on intuition or personal preference.
- ✔ Consider **realistic alternatives, limitations or uncertainties** that affect the conclusion.
- ✔ Express a **clear, supported verdict** and complete any additional tasks separately.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean offering an **unsupported personal opinion** simply because the wording asks what you think.
- × It does not require **agreement with a given statement** when the question asks you to assess a possibility or choose between alternatives.
- × It does not mean making an **absolute prediction** when the available evidence supports only a conditional conclusion.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Do you think allows a more independent assessment, including a prediction, comparison or choice. **Do you agree** specifically asks you to accept, reject or qualify an identifiable statement already placed before you.

How "Do you think" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2026 · Q10 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Do you think digital technology promotes social empowerment? Explain with examples.

WHAT "DO YOU THINK" DEMANDED HERE

Judge whether **digital technology produces meaningful social empowerment** through improved access to information, education, services, opportunities and participation. Use examples to explain how empowerment occurs while recognising **digital exclusion, unequal capabilities and structural inequalities** that may limit its benefits.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The social question asks for a **conditional judgment about empowerment**, and 'Explain with examples' requires **concrete mechanisms** rather than a general account of technological progress.

GS Paper II — 2022 · Q10 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Do you think that BIMSTEC is a parallel organisation like the SAARC ? What are the similarities and dissimilarities between the two ? How are Indian foreign policy objectives realized by forming this new organisation ?

WHAT "DO YOU THINK" DEMANDED HERE

Decide whether **BIMSTEC can reasonably be considered parallel to SAARC**, examining similarities and differences in membership, geographic focus, institutional purpose and regional cooperation. Then separately explain **how BIMSTEC advances India's foreign policy objectives**, including regional connectivity, neighbourhood engagement and strategic cooperation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This international relations question begins with a **comparison-based judgment** but expressly adds comparative analysis and an assessment of **India's foreign policy interests**.

GS Paper III 2022 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Do you think India will meet 50 percent of its energy needs from renewable energy by 2030 ? Justify your answer. How will the shift of subsidies from fossil fuels to renewables help achieve the above objective ? Explain.

WHAT "DO YOU THINK" DEMANDED HERE

Assess whether India could meet **50 percent of its energy needs from renewables by 2030**, as the question actually phrases the target. Clarify that **energy consumption, electricity generation and installed capacity are different metrics** and that India's announced 2030 non-fossil electricity capacity commitment cannot by itself prove the stated renewable energy share. Justify a conditional forecast using progress, grid integration, storage, investment and policy constraints, then explain separately how shifting subsidies towards renewables would affect the outcome.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This technical policy question combines a **future-oriented feasibility judgment** with 'Justify' and 'Explain', making **the target's measurement and the subsidy mechanism** central to a sound answer.

GS Paper IV 2018 · Q4(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

With regard to morality of actions, one view is that means are of paramount importance and the other view is that the ends justify the means. Which view do you think is more appropriate ? Justify your answer.

WHAT "DO YOU THINK" DEMANDED HERE

Choose whether **the morality of means** or the justification of means by desirable ends offers the more appropriate ethical position. Defend the choice using principles such as dignity, rights, consequences and moral responsibility, while recognising **the strongest argument for the opposing view**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike an empirical or predictive question, this one requires a **normative choice between competing ethical approaches**, with 'Justify' demanding **principled defence of the selected position**.

Justify

29 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

Establish **why a particular claim, decision, principle or course of action deserves acceptance** by building a defensible case for it. Identify the proposition that needs support, supply reasons and evidence that genuinely establish its validity or appropriateness, and address objections that could undermine it. The finished answer should show **why the proposed position can be defended**, not simply repeat what the position says.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **5** | GS II **5** | GS III **3** | GS IV **16**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Justify' in 29 questions**, with **16 in GS Paper IV**, 5 each in GS Papers I and II and 3 in GS Paper III.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **specific claim or action requiring justification**, including any qualification in its wording.
- ✓ Build a **logical defence** using the most relevant evidence, examples, principles or mechanisms.
- ✓ Respond to **substantial objections or apparent contradictions** without losing the central argument.
- ✓ Show **why the supporting grounds are sufficient** and complete any separately requested explanation or recommendation.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **blindly endorsing** every word of a proposition without examining its scope or assumptions.
- × It does not mean providing **unconnected examples** that fail to establish the claim.
- × It does not mean treating a **moral or constitutional defence** as identical to proving a purely factual statement.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Substantiate chiefly asks whether a claim has sufficient evidence behind it. **Justify** asks why the claim, decision or course of action is defensible, which may require factual evidence, ethical principles, institutional reasoning or a combination of these.

Giving reasons identifies the grounds supporting an answer or explaining an outcome. **Justify** goes further by using those grounds to establish **the validity or appropriateness** of a particular position or action.

How "Justify" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2020 · Q5 · 10 marks

QUESTION

The process of desertification does not have climatic boundaries. Justify with examples.

WHAT "JUSTIFY" DEMANDED HERE

Justify **why desertification is not restricted to hot desert margins** by explaining how overgrazing, deforestation, unsustainable cultivation and poorly managed irrigation degrade land across different dryland climatic settings. Use **specific geographical examples**, such as the Sahel, Rajasthan's drylands and Australia's Murray-Darling Basin, connecting each example to the processes responsible for declining land productivity. Clarify that the UNCCD formally defines desertification as land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry subhumid areas, while similar degradation in humid regions should not automatically be classified as desertification.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The geography question requires **a process-based scientific defence** supported by **geographically accurate examples**, rather than a policy recommendation or a purely normative argument.

GS Paper II — 2020 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Judicial Legislation is antithetical to the doctrine of separation of powers as envisaged in the Indian Constitution. In this context justify the filing of large number of public interest petitions praying for issuing guidelines to executive authorities.

WHAT "JUSTIFY" DEMANDED HERE

Explain why **public interest petitions seeking judicial directions** may be justified despite the concern that judicial legislation conflicts with separation of powers. Build the defence around **constitutional rights, executive inaction, judicial responsibilities and institutional limits**, acknowledging when court-issued guidelines could amount to excessive intervention.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The constitutional question presents an **apparent institutional contradiction**, so the justification must **reconcile legitimate judicial remedies** with the separation-of-powers principle.

GS Paper III — 2016 · Q5 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Justify the need for FDI for the development of the Indian economy. Why there is gap between MOUs signed and actual FDIs? Suggest remedial steps to be taken for increasing actual FDIs in India.

WHAT "JUSTIFY" DEMANDED HERE

Establish **why FDI is needed for India's economic development**, considering capital formation, technology, productive capacity, infrastructure, employment and integration with global production networks. Then separately diagnose **why investment commitments do not always become realised inflows** and suggest remedies matched to the identified barriers.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This economics question requires **justification of a development need** before **two distinct diagnostic and remedial tasks**, rather than a general endorsement of foreign investment.

GS Paper IV — 2026 · Q6(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

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.

WHAT "JUSTIFY" DEMANDED HERE

Defend the claim that helping people in severe need, when doing so does not seriously threaten one's financial stability, can be a **moral duty rather than optional charity**. Explain the distinction between **obligation and voluntary generosity** and show why duties arising from human need, capacity and moral responsibility may be compelling but not unlimited.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The ethics question requires a **normative defence through conceptual distinction**, with **the financial-**

stability qualification setting an important boundary on the proposed obligation.

Substantiate

6 questions, 2013 to 2026

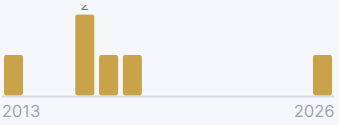
WHAT IT MEANS

Demonstrate that a claim or interpretation has a **solid evidential foundation** by presenting facts, examples and reasoning that directly support it. Each piece of evidence must be connected to the specific part of the proposition it helps establish, so the answer becomes **a demonstrated argument rather than an asserted conclusion**. Where the proposition is broad or contested, credible substantiation also recognises evidence that qualifies its reach.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 6 | GS II 0 | GS III 0 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Substantiate' in 6 questions**, all in **GS Paper I**, with 2 in 2016 and 1 each in 2013, 2017, 2018 and 2026.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Break the proposition into **specific claims that can be supported**.
- ✓ Choose **directly relevant historical, social or other evidence** rather than general background information.
- ✓ Explain **how each example supports the proposition**, making the link between evidence and conclusion explicit.
- ✓ Recognise **significant exceptions or contrary evidence** where they affect the strength of the original claim.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **repeating the statement in different words** and treating repetition as proof.
- × It does not mean offering **examples without explaining their relevance** to the claim.
- × It does not require **uncritical acceptance of an absolute claim** when the evidence supports only a qualified interpretation.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Substantiate concentrates on establishing that a proposition is supported by adequate evidence. **Justify** concentrates on establishing why a claim or action is valid or defensible, sometimes through ethical or conceptual reasoning that goes beyond empirical proof.

How "Substantiate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2013 · Q13 · 10 marks

QUESTION

"American Revolution was an economic revolt against mercantilism." Substantiate.

WHAT "SUBSTANTIATE" DEMANDED HERE

Demonstrate the importance of **colonial resistance to British mercantilism** in the American Revolution using evidence such as trade restrictions, taxation disputes, commercial grievances and resistance to imperial economic control. Connect these grievances to revolutionary mobilisation while recognising **political and ideological motives** that prevent an exclusively economic interpretation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This modern history question asks for **evidence supporting a particular interpretation**, while **the**

sweeping description of the Revolution as an economic revolt requires careful qualification.

Not used in GS Paper II, GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Argue

3 questions, 2013 to 2026

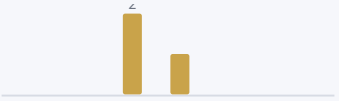
WHAT IT MEANS

Construct and defend **a coherent line of reasoning** on a proposition, contested explanation or institutional choice. Your answer should move logically from a clear position through supporting grounds, relevant illustrations and engagement with objections towards **a persuasive, reasoned conclusion**. The examiner is testing not merely what evidence you know, but whether you can use it to make an argument that holds together.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **2**	GS II **1**
GS III **0**	GS IV **0**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Argue' in 3 questions**, with **2 in GS Paper I and 1 in GS Paper II**, all appearing in 2018 and 2020.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Establish a **clear central position or contention** that the answer will defend.
- ✓ Develop **connected reasons** showing how each point strengthens the overall case.
- ✓ Engage with **important alternative explanations or objections** rather than ignoring them.
- ✓ Use **illustrations as evidence** and close with a conclusion that follows logically from the argument.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean taking an **aggressive or one-sided tone** or dismissing opposing views.
- × It does not mean presenting a **disconnected list of advantages and disadvantages** without a defensible position.
- × It does not require **absolute certainty** when the best argument supports a qualified conclusion.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Argue primarily requires building and defending a coherent position, even while considering objections. **Debate** places competing positions and their relative merits more explicitly at the centre of the examination before a judgment is reached.

Argue emphasises the construction and defence of a connected case on a contested issue. **Justify** emphasises establishing the validity or defensibility of the particular claim, action or principle under consideration.

How "Argue" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2018 · Q20 · 15 marks

QUESTION

'Communalism arises either due to power struggle or relative deprivation.' Argue by giving suitable illustrations.

WHAT "ARGUE" DEMANDED HERE

Build an argument assessing whether **power struggles and relative deprivation** explain the rise of communalism, showing how competition for political influence and perceived disadvantage can generate communal mobilisation. Use suitable illustrations to establish whether these explanations are **alternatives,**

GS Paper II — 2018 · Q16 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Multiplicity of various commissions for the vulnerable sections of the society leads to problems of overlapping jurisdiction and duplication of functions. Is it better to merge all commissions into an umbrella Human Rights Commission? Argue your case.

WHAT "ARGUE" DEMANDED HERE

Take a position on whether merging commissions for vulnerable groups into **one umbrella Human Rights Commission** would improve institutional functioning.

overlapping causes or incomplete accounts of the phenomenon.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This sociology-oriented history and society question tests **competing causal explanations**, and the instruction to give illustrations makes **concrete support essential** to the argument.

Defend that position by weighing the advantages of coordination and reduced duplication against the risks to **specialised expertise, independent representation and accessibility**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike the GS I causal question, this governance question requires an **institutional recommendation** supported by **a comparison of alternative organisational arrangements**.

Not used in GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Debate

1 question, 2013 to 2026

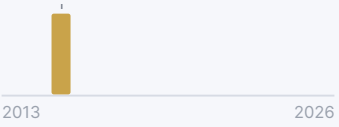
WHAT IT MEANS

Bring **competing interpretations or positions into direct examination** rather than discussing an issue from only one angle. Establish what each side claims, test the strength of its evidence and assumptions, and identify where the positions conflict, overlap or depend on particular conditions. A successful answer reaches **an informed judgment after weighing the disagreement**, without assuming that every position deserves equal acceptance.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 0 | GS III 0 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Debate' in 1 question**, which appeared in **GS Paper I in 2015**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **central disagreement** and the distinct positions involved.
- ✓ Present the **strongest relevant reasoning** supporting each major position.
- ✓ Test **assumptions, evidence, limitations and implications** through direct comparison.
- ✓ Arrive at a **reasoned resolution or qualified judgment** that reflects the relative strength of the arguments.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean listing **pros and cons mechanically** without examining how the arguments challenge one another.
- × It does not require **false equivalence** when one position has substantially stronger support.
- × It does not mean avoiding **a reasoned conclusion** merely to appear impartial.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Discuss calls for an organised examination of relevant dimensions, which may not involve explicit disagreement. **Debate** makes the clash between competing claims and the assessment of their relative merits the organising principle of the answer.

Argue centres on defending a position through connected reasoning. **Debate** requires more sustained examination of **opposing positions** before deciding which interpretation is stronger or how they can be reconciled.

How "Debate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2015 · Q13 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Debate the issue of whether and how contemporary movements for assertion of Dalit identity work towards annihilation of caste.

WHAT "DEBATE" DEMANDED HERE

Examine competing views on **whether contemporary Dalit identity assertion advances the annihilation of caste**, weighing arguments about dignity, resistance, representation and political mobilisation against concerns about the continued reproduction of caste boundaries. Then explain **how such movements can transform caste relations**, identifying both the mechanisms of change and the limits of identity-based mobilisation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The wording **'whether and how'** requires both **a debate about the claimed outcome** and an examination of the social and political mechanisms through which that outcome might be achieved.

Not used in GS Paper II, GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Give reasons

30 questions, 2013 to 2026

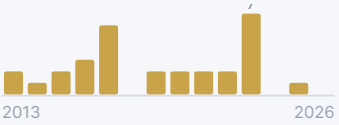
WHAT IT MEANS

Provide the **specific grounds that explain an outcome or support a conclusion**, making the logical connection between each reason and what the question asks. When the question asks why something happened, identify the factors and mechanisms responsible; when it asks for a judgment, present arguments that **make the chosen position credible**. A complete answer shows why the reasons matter, how they operate and which ones carry the greatest explanatory or persuasive weight.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 7 | GS II 6 | GS III 10 | GS IV 7

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Give reasons/arguments' in 30 questions**, including **10 in GS Paper III**, 7 each in GS Papers I and IV and 6 in GS Paper II.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Determine whether the task seeks **causal explanations or supporting arguments**, or both.
- ✓ Identify the **most relevant factors or grounds** instead of collecting every possible point.
- ✓ Explain the **cause-and-effect or logical connection** between each reason and the outcome or position.
- ✓ Use **evidence and examples selectively** and link the reasoning to any further task, such as proposing remedies.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean giving a **bare list of factors** without showing how they explain or support the answer.
- × It does not mean repeating the **question's claim as its own evidence**.
- × It does not mean using **generic arguments** that could support almost any conclusion.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Give reasons/arguments asks for the explanatory or supporting grounds behind an answer. **Justify** specifically asks you to establish why the resulting claim, decision or action deserves acceptance as valid or defensible.

Account for focuses on explaining why an observed outcome, trend or discrepancy has arisen. **Give reasons/arguments** is broader because it can also demand logical support for an opinion, prediction or judgment that does not concern an already observed outcome.

How "Give reasons" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2022 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Why did the armies of the British East India Company — mostly comprising of Indian soldiers — win consistently against the more numerous and better equipped armies of the then Indian rulers ? Give reasons.

WHAT "GIVE REASONS" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **why the East India Company's armies repeatedly defeated** Indian rulers despite often facing larger and better-equipped forces. Connect factors such as **organisation, military discipline, command, financing, diplomacy and political divisions** to the actual advantages that enabled those victories.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The history question seeks a **causal explanation of a recurring military outcome**, so the answer must show how **organisational and political factors** translated into battlefield success.

GS Paper II — 2023 · Q19 · 15 marks

QUESTION

'The expansion and strengthening of NATO and a stronger US-Europe strategic partnership works well for India.' What is your opinion about this statement ? Give reasons and examples to support your answer.

WHAT "GIVE REASONS" DEMANDED HERE

Take a clear position on whether **NATO expansion and stronger US-Europe cooperation serve India's interests**, assessing potential benefits and costs for India's security, strategic autonomy and international relationships. Support the judgment with **specific geopolitical reasoning and examples**, including considerations that might qualify the claim.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here the instruction supports an **independent foreign policy opinion** rather than explaining a historical event, and the explicit requirement for examples tests **the practical relevance of the arguments**.

GS Paper III — 2019 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Do you agree with the view that steady GDP growth and low inflation have left the Indian economy in good shape? Give reasons in support of your arguments.

WHAT "GIVE REASONS" DEMANDED HERE

Decide whether **steady GDP growth and low inflation** are sufficient grounds for considering the Indian economy to be in good shape. Give reasons explaining what these indicators reveal, and test that conclusion against **employment, investment, demand, distribution and structural economic conditions**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The economics question combines **'Do you agree' with a demand for supporting reasons**, requiring an assessment of whether **favourable headline indicators** justify the broader economic conclusion.

GS Paper IV — 2017 · Q13 · 20 marks

QUESTION

Give reasons for such incidents taking place across the country. Suggest measures to prevent their occurrence.

WHAT "GIVE REASONS" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **why illegal building extensions and fatal construction failures occur**, linking weak enforcement, regulatory failures, corruption, unsafe construction practices and labour vulnerability to the resulting harm. Then propose **preventive measures matched to those causes**, including effective inspections, accountability, construction safety and protection of workers.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The case-study format requires **diagnosis of administrative and ethical failures** before **targeted prevention**, rather than a general expression of concern or condemnation of the builder alone.

Account for

7 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

Explain **why an observed outcome, pattern, change or discrepancy has occurred**, identifying the forces that produced it. Begin with the specific phenomenon that needs explaining, then trace the relevant causes and show **how they combine to produce the result**, distinguishing decisive drivers from background conditions. The

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 5 | GS II 1 | GS III 1 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

finished answer should make an otherwise surprising or unexplained outcome intelligible.



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Account for' in 7 questions**, with **5 in GS Paper I**, 1 each in GS Papers II and III and none in GS Paper IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Define the **specific observed pattern or change** that requires explanation.
- ✓ Identify the **underlying causal factors** rather than merely describing the phenomenon.
- ✓ Show **how the causes operate and interact**, explaining their relative importance where relevant.
- ✓ Connect the explanation to **appropriate evidence or examples** and address any separately requested remedies.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean giving a **descriptive account or chronology** without explaining why the outcome occurred.
- × It does not mean listing **general characteristics of the subject** that do not cause the observed pattern.
- × It does not mean jumping to **suggested solutions before establishing the causes** when the question asks for both.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Explain can ask you to clarify a concept, demonstrate a process or establish a causal relationship. **Account for** more specifically begins with an observed result, pattern or discrepancy and requires you to identify why it came about.

Both can require causal reasoning. **Account for** emphasises a complete explanation of the **particular outcome or change**, whereas 'Give reasons' can also ask for supporting grounds behind an opinion or judgment.

How "Account for" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2020 · Q7 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Account for the present location of iron and steel industries away from the source of raw material, by giving examples.

WHAT "ACCOUNT FOR" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **why some iron and steel industries are located away from raw-material sources**, examining the growing importance of markets, transport networks, energy availability, ports, technology and infrastructure. Use suitable industrial examples to demonstrate **how changing location factors** can outweigh the traditional advantages of proximity to iron ore and coal.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The geography question requires an explanation of a **spatial departure from conventional industrial-location expectations**, supported by **concrete location examples**.

GS Paper II — 2023 · Q13 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Account for the legal and political factors responsible for the reduced frequency of using Article 356 by the Union Governments since mid 1990s.

WHAT "ACCOUNT FOR" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **why the Union's use of Article 356 became less frequent** from the mid-1990s, distinguishing legal influences such as judicial scrutiny and constitutional safeguards from political influences such as coalition politics, regional parties and changing Centre-State relations. Show **how these developments constrained or discouraged** the use of President's Rule.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The polity question asks for an explanation of **institutional change over a defined period**, with the wording expressly requiring **both legal and political causes**.

GS Paper III — 2017 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Account for the failure of manufacturing sector in achieving the goal of labour-intensive exports. Suggest measures for more labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive exports.

WHAT "ACCOUNT FOR" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **why Indian manufacturing fell short of labour-intensive export objectives**, examining structural, infrastructural, regulatory, skill-related and competitiveness constraints. Then recommend **measures that directly address those causes** and support a shift towards more employment-intensive manufacturing exports.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This economic policy question starts with **diagnosis of a development shortfall** and adds **a remedial task**, so the proposed measures should emerge from the causal explanation.

Not used in GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Reflect

1 question, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

Think beyond the surface meaning of an idea or role and offer **a considered interpretation of its deeper significance, responsibilities and implications**. Examine the principles and tensions within the subject, connect them to practical conduct, and develop **an ethically grounded understanding** of what the idea demands. The finished answer should reveal thoughtful judgment, not merely familiarity with definitions or accepted virtues.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **0** | GS II **0** | GS III **0** | GS IV **1**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, UPSC used **'Reflect' in 1 question**, which appeared in **GS Paper IV in 2019**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Begin with the **essential meaning or underlying purpose** of the idea or role.
- ✓ Examine its **values, obligations and deeper implications** rather than stopping at description.
- ✓ Consider **important tensions or competing responsibilities** that arise in practice.
- ✓ Show **what the reflection means for real decisions and conduct**, arriving at a coherent ethical understanding.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean giving only a **dictionary definition or list of desirable qualities**.
- × It does not mean expressing **unexamined personal feelings** without grounding them in relevant principles.
- × It does not mean offering **abstract moral statements** without connecting them to practical responsibilities and choices.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Discuss requires an organised examination of relevant aspects, arguments or dimensions of a topic. **Reflect** specifically asks for a considered interpretation of the subject's **meaning, values and practical implications**, with greater attention to thoughtful ethical judgment.

Comment generally calls for a concise, reasoned observation or assessment of a proposition. **Reflect** calls for deeper consideration of the underlying responsibilities, values or tensions and what they imply for conduct.

How "Reflect" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper IV 2019 · Q1(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

What do you understand by the term 'public servant' ? Reflect on the expected role of public servant.

WHAT "REFLECT" DEMANDED HERE

After explaining what a public servant is, reflect on **the ethical purpose and expected responsibilities of public service**, including constitutional commitment, integrity, impartiality, accountability and responsiveness to citizens. Examine **how these responsibilities shape actual administrative conduct**, particularly when authority must be balanced with service, rules with compassion and institutional obligations with public welfare.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The ethics question moves explicitly **from definition to normative reflection**, asking **what the public servant's role ought to mean in practice** rather than requesting an inventory of official functions.

Not used in GS Paper I, GS Paper II or GS Paper III between 2013 and 2026.

FAMILY 4 OF 5

Pinpoint, compare and propose

Identify exactly what is asked, draw clear distinctions, trace developments or offer specific proposals where required.

Suggest

57 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To suggest is to move from understanding a situation to **designing a useful response** to it. The answer must offer **specific, feasible measures** that address the problem's actual causes, constraints or institutional gaps, and make clear what could change in practice. A strong suggestion is not merely desirable; it has a **credible route to implementation**.

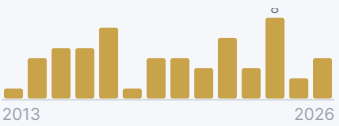
WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Problem-linked proposals** that respond to the causes or gaps identified in the question.
- ✓ **Concrete actions** explaining what should be done, rather than naming broad goals.
- ✓ **Implementation clarity**, including responsible institutions, mechanisms or practical conditions where relevant.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **2**	GS II **13**
GS III **18**	GS IV **24**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Suggest appeared in 57 questions**, with the largest shares in **GS Paper IV (24 questions)** and **GS Paper III (18 questions)**, and its highest annual count was **8 questions in 2024**.

✓ **Workable choices** supported by brief reasoning, with a coherent model when one is explicitly requested.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

× It does not mean offering **generic solutions** such as improving awareness or strengthening coordination without explaining how.

× It does not mean **repeating the problem** in the language of recommendations.

× It does not necessarily mean selecting **one best solution** when several complementary measures are appropriate.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Both ask for action, but **Suggest opens up workable measures**, while **Recommend places greater weight on choosing and justifying** a preferred course. Suggest can accommodate several complementary proposals without ranking them.

How "Suggest" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2020 · Q15 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Account for the huge flooding of million cities in India including the smart ones like Hyderabad and Pune. Suggest lasting remedial measures.

WHAT "SUGGEST" DEMANDED HERE

After accounting for urban flooding, propose **lasting structural and governance measures** such as drainage improvements, protection of water bodies, land-use controls and coordinated flood management. Each measure should address an **identified cause** of flooding in large cities, including smart cities.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **geography and urbanisation question**, Suggest follows Account for, so the remedies must arise from the **earlier causal explanation**, rather than form an independent list of urban improvements.

GS Paper II — 2024 · Q17 · 15 marks

QUESTION

In a crucial domain like the public healthcare system the Indian State should play a vital role to contain the adverse impact of marketisation of the system. Suggest some measures through which the State can enhance the reach of public healthcare at the grassroots level.

WHAT "SUGGEST" DEMANDED HERE

Propose **State-led measures** that improve affordable, equitable access to public healthcare at the grassroots, including stronger primary facilities, personnel, essential services and local accountability. Show how these interventions can **reduce the adverse effects of marketisation** on access and delivery.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **governance and social justice question**, Suggest requires an **institutional delivery approach**, with particular attention to the State's role and the grassroots level specified by the examiner.

GS Paper III — 2021 · Q20 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Analyse the complexity and intensity of terrorism, its causes, linkages and obnoxious nexus. Also suggest measures required to be taken to eradicate the menace of terrorism.

WHAT "SUGGEST" DEMANDED HERE

Following the analysis of terrorism's causes and networks, propose **targeted counterterrorism measures** addressing financing, recruitment, cross-border linkages, intelligence gaps and associated criminal networks. The measures should combine **prevention, enforcement and institutional cooperation** rather than rely solely on force.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **internal security question**, Suggest comes after Analyse and must translate a **multidimensional**

GS Paper IV — 2024 · Q5(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

'The 'Code of Conduct' and 'Code of Ethics' are the sources of guidance in public administration. There is code of conduct already in operation, whereas code of ethics is not yet put in place. Suggest a suitable model for code of ethics to maintain integrity, probity and transparency in governance.

WHAT "SUGGEST" DEMANDED HERE

Design a **suitable code of ethics model** for public administration, specifying its guiding values, expected ethical standards, mechanisms for addressing dilemmas and arrangements for implementation and accountability. Explain how the model would promote **integrity, probity and transparency** beyond existing conduct rules.

diagnosis into responses suited to the different sources of the threat.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **ethics and institutional design question**, Suggest asks for a **coherent operating framework**, not simply a set of desirable reforms or moral principles.

Identify

15 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To identify is to **recognise and isolate the specific elements** that satisfy the question's description or arise from its facts. The intellectual task is one of **accurate selection and classification**: deciding what genuinely belongs in the answer, rather than presenting everything known about the subject. The finished answer should leave no doubt about **which factors, issues, features or choices** matter in the stated context.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **1** | GS II **4** | GS III **1** | GS IV **9**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Identify appeared in 15 questions**, including **9 questions in GS Paper IV**, and its highest annual counts were **3 questions each in 2019 and 2021**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Relevant selection** of factors, traits or issues that directly match the question's scope.
- ✓ **Precise naming** of each element, avoiding vague or overlapping labels.
- ✓ **Clear separation** between distinct factors, categories or ethical dimensions.
- ✓ **Completion of accompanying tasks**, such as discussing the identified factors or justifying their inclusion.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean providing an **unfiltered catalogue** of everything associated with the topic.
- × It does not mean **retelling the background** instead of recognising the requested elements.
- × It does not mean that **naming alone completes** a question that also asks for discussion, justification or suggestions.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

List focuses on presenting requested items, whereas **Identify emphasises recognising which items genuinely qualify** in the particular situation. Identification therefore requires careful relevance and accuracy even when the final presentation is brief.

How "Identify" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2023 · Q15 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Identify and discuss the factors responsible for diversity of natural vegetation in India. Assess the significance of wildlife sanctuaries in rain forest regions of India.

WHAT "IDENTIFY" DEMANDED HERE

Recognise the **specific environmental and geographical factors** responsible for India's vegetation diversity, including climatic variation, rainfall, temperature, relief and soils. These factors must then be **discussed in relation to vegetation patterns**, rather than merely named.

GS Paper II — 2024 · Q16 · 15 marks

QUESTION

The Citizens' charter has been a landmark initiative in ensuring citizen-centric administration. But it is yet to reach its full potential. Identify the factors hindering the realisation of its promise and suggest measures to overcome them.

WHAT "IDENTIFY" DEMANDED HERE

Isolate the **actual barriers to the Citizens' Charter's effectiveness**, such as weak enforceability, unclear service standards, limited public awareness and inadequate monitoring or grievance redressal. Keep these **institutional weaknesses** distinct from the corrective measures requested afterwards.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **physical geography question**, Identify selects the relevant causes, while Discuss requires **explaining how those factors produce vegetation diversity**. Assess separately requires an evaluation of the significance of wildlife sanctuaries in India's rainforest regions.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **public administration question**, Identify is a **diagnostic instruction** that must establish why the initiative falls short before Suggest introduces remedies.

GS Paper III 2016 · Q9 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Discuss the role of land reforms in agricultural development. Identify the factors that were responsible for the success of land reforms in India.

WHAT "IDENTIFY" DEMANDED HERE

Recognise the **conditions that enabled land reforms to succeed in particular parts of India**, including political commitment, effective implementation, tenancy mobilisation, reliable land records and administrative capacity. Explain how these **success-enabling factors varied across states**, while distinguishing them from the broader contribution of land reforms to agricultural development.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **agriculture and institutional reform question**, Identify asks for the **determinants of success**, whereas Discuss separately addresses the role and effects of land reforms.

GS Paper IV 2021 · Q1(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

Identify five ethical traits on which one can plot the performance of a civil servant. Justify their inclusion in the matrix.

WHAT "IDENTIFY" DEMANDED HERE

Select **exactly five distinct ethical traits** suitable for assessing a civil servant's performance, such as integrity, impartiality, empathy, accountability and moral courage. Then **justify each trait's inclusion** by explaining what aspect of ethical public service it measures.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **ethics assessment question**, Identify demands a **defensible selection for a performance matrix**, while Justify requires reasoning for each selected trait rather than definitions alone.

Distinguish

11 questions, 2013 to 2026

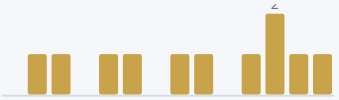
WHAT IT MEANS

To distinguish is to establish **where and how related things differ** by examining them against meaningful common criteria. The answer should make their **conceptual, functional or operational boundaries** unmistakable, especially when they appear similar at first glance. Its purpose is to produce **clarity through direct contrasts**, not two independent descriptions.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 2 | GS II 1 | GS III 5 | GS IV 3

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Distinguish appeared in 11 questions**, including **5 in GS Paper III** and **3 in GS Paper IV**, with **2 questions in 2024**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Common comparison criteria** that allow differences to be examined directly.
- ✓ **Decisive contrasts** that explain what separates the concepts, institutions or processes.
- ✓ **Technical and contextual accuracy**, including qualifications where boundaries are not absolute.
- ✓ **Illustrative examples or additional analysis** when the question expressly requires them.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean writing **two separate descriptions** and expecting the examiner to infer the differences.
- × It does not mean focusing mainly on **similarities** while leaving the boundaries unclear.
- × It does not mean forcing **false oppositions** between ideas that share some features.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Compare examines relevant similarities and differences, whereas **Distinguish concentrates on the differences** needed to separate related items. Similarities may establish context, but they should not dominate a distinction.

In UPSC answer writing, **Distinguish and Differentiate have essentially the same practical demand**. Both require **direct contrasts on relevant common criteria**. Neither imposes an exclusive answer format; the question's subject and accompanying instructions determine the appropriate presentation.

How "Distinguish" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2024 · Q8 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Distinguish between gender equality, gender equity and women's empowerment. Why is it important to take gender concerns into account in programme design and implementation?

WHAT "DISTINGUISH" DEMANDED HERE

Distinguish **gender equality, gender equity and women's empowerment** through their objectives, principles and practical implications. Explain equality in terms of equal rights, opportunities and substantive parity, equity as context-sensitive fairness that addresses disadvantages, and empowerment as increased agency, capabilities and decision-making power. Establish **clear distinctions among all three concepts** without implying that gender equality simply means identical treatment.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **society question**, the distinctions provide a **conceptual foundation** for the separate explanation of why gender concerns matter in programme design and implementation.

GS Paper II — 2024 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Explain and distinguish between Lok Adalats and Arbitration Tribunals. Whether they entertain civil as well as criminal cases ?

WHAT "DISTINGUISH" DEMANDED HERE

Distinguish Lok Adalats from Arbitration Tribunals through **legal basis, purpose, procedure, jurisdiction and outcomes**. Clarify that Lok Adalats may deal with eligible civil matters and compoundable criminal matters, whereas **arbitration concerns arbitrable civil disputes**, not criminal prosecution.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **polity and legal institutions question**, Distinguish works alongside Explain and the **specific jurisdictional question**, making legally accurate limits more important than general institutional descriptions.

GS Paper III — 2026 · Q6 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Distinguish between a Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) and a thermal nuclear reactor. In the context of first indigenously developed prototype FBR at Kalpakkam, explain the term 'criticality'. What are its implications for clean energy future of our country ?

WHAT "DISTINGUISH" DEMANDED HERE

Distinguish **Fast Breeder Reactors from thermal nuclear reactors** through neutron energy, moderation, fuel cycles, breeding capability and reactor operation. Explain criticality in the Kalpakkam prototype FBR as the attainment of a **self-sustaining nuclear fission chain reaction**, distinguishing this milestone from commercial electricity generation, and address its implications for India's clean energy future.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **science and technology question**, Distinguish demands **scientific precision**, while the references to

GS Paper IV — 2018 · Q1(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

Distinguish between "Code of ethics" and "Code of conduct" with suitable examples.

WHAT "DISTINGUISH" DEMANDED HERE

Differentiate a code of ethics from a code of conduct through **values versus prescribed behavioural rules**, their purposes, scope and means of securing compliance. Use **suitable public service examples** to illustrate the contrast between ethical guidance and specific enforceable standards.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **administrative ethics question**, Distinguish concerns **overlapping forms of professional guidance**, so examples must clarify their different functions without implying that conduct rules have no ethical foundation.

Kalpakkam, criticality and clean energy create additional application and explanation tasks.

Differentiate

4 questions, 2013 to 2026

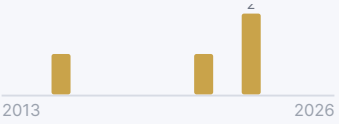
WHAT IT MEANS

To differentiate is to **make the meaningful differences visible** between related concepts, situations, processes or causes. The answer must place them on **shared, relevant criteria** and explain the contrasts that change how each should be understood. Its success lies in **clear separation without artificial differences**, supported by examples when necessary.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1 | GS II 0 | GS III 0 | GS IV 3

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Differentiate appeared in 4 questions**, with **3 in GS Paper IV** and **1 in GS Paper I**, including **2 questions in 2023**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Direct comparative structure** using criteria relevant to the particular subject.
- ✓ **Specific distinguishing features**, not merely differences in wording.
- ✓ **Accurate treatment of overlaps** without presenting related ideas as complete opposites.
- ✓ **Contrasting examples or conditions** when they help demonstrate how the difference operates.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean giving **isolated definitions** without showing their relationship.
- × It does not mean inventing a **rigid distinction** where two concepts substantially overlap.
- × It does not mean treating **every difference as equally important** rather than selecting decisive ones.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Both demand **direct, meaningful contrasts**, and UPSC usage does not establish a reliable technical difference between them. Apply **the same disciplined comparison method** to either word, adapting the criteria to the question.

Differentiate foregrounds differences, while **Compare also gives deliberate attention to similarities** where they help answer the question. A differentiation answer need not devote equal space to common features.

How "Differentiate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2021 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Differentiate the causes of landslides in the Himalayan region and Western Ghats.

WHAT "DIFFERENTIATE" DEMANDED HERE

Differentiate the **causal mechanisms of landslides in the Himalayas and Western Ghats**, examining how active tectonics, seismicity, young and unstable mountain formations, and intense precipitation affect Himalayan slopes, while deep weathering, heavy monsoon rainfall, slope saturation and human modifications influence the Western Ghats. Establish **region-specific differences and their relative importance**, recognising that rainfall and human interference contribute to landslides in both regions.

GS Paper IV — 2023 · Q2(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

In the context of work environment, differentiate between 'coercion' and 'undue influence' with suitable examples.

WHAT "DIFFERENTIATE" DEMANDED HERE

Separate **coercion**, where compliance is secured through threats or pressure, from **undue influence**, where a position of authority, trust or dependency is improperly used to sway another's decision. Illustrate both through **contrasting workplace situations** that clarify the source and operation of the pressure.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **workplace ethics question**, Differentiate requires **behavioural and ethical boundaries** supported by

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **physical geography question**, Differentiate operates on the **causes of the same hazard across two regions**, rather than on definitions of two separate concepts.

examples, while recognising that coercion and undue influence may coexist in some situations.

Not used in GS Paper II or GS Paper III between 2013 and 2026.

Compare

6 questions, 2013 to 2026

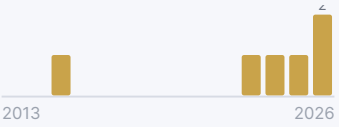
WHAT IT MEANS

To compare is to examine two or more subjects through **the same relevant lenses** so that their relationship becomes clear. The answer should reveal **meaningful similarities and differences**, showing which characteristics are shared, which are distinctive and why those observations matter. The finished comparison must offer **one integrated understanding**, rather than parallel accounts that never meet.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **2** | GS II **4** | GS III **0** | GS IV **0**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Compare appeared in 6 questions**, with **4 in GS Paper II** and **2 in GS Paper I**, including **2 questions in 2026**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Common criteria** applied consistently to every subject being compared.
- ✓ **Relevant similarities** that establish shared characteristics or functions.
- ✓ **Significant differences** that clarify variations in nature, operation or consequences.
- ✓ **Balanced coverage** of all named subjects and any specifically prescribed dimensions.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean writing **one full description followed by another** without direct comparison.
- × It does not mean searching only for **differences** while ignoring important common ground.
- × It does not mean imposing **false equivalence** between subjects with substantially different contexts.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Distinguish primarily establishes differences, whereas **Compare deliberately examines common ground as well as contrasts**. The exact dimensions named in a comparison question take precedence over a generic format.

Contrast concentrates on differences. When UPSC writes **Compare and contrast**, it explicitly asks for both the shared features and the significant differences.

How "Compare" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2026 · Q14 · 15 marks

QUESTION

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

WHAT "COMPARE" DEMANDED HERE

Compare the Loo, Chinook and Foehn across **all three prescribed dimensions**: regions of prevalence, nature and climatic impacts. Establish their shared warm and dry characteristics while distinguishing the **surface-heating**

GS Paper II — 2025 · Q3 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Compare and contrast the President's power to pardon in India and in the USA. Are there any limits to it in both the countries? What are 'preemptive pardons'?

WHAT "COMPARE" DEMANDED HERE

Compare and contrast the **constitutional basis, jurisdiction, scope, exercise and limitations** of presidential pardoning powers in India and the USA.

origin of the Loo from the downslope warming mechanisms of the Chinook and Foehn. Explain how these different origins produce distinct geographical and climatic effects.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **climatology question**, Compare follows **examiner-specified criteria**, making a consistent three-way geographical and meteorological comparison essential.

Identify similarities and differences, including the Indian President's exercise of constitutional powers within the framework of ministerial advice and judicial review, and the US President's federal jurisdiction and constitutional limitations. Separately explain **preemptive pardons as pardons concerning past offences granted before charges or conviction**, where legally permissible, distinguishing them from prospective immunity for future offences.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **comparative constitutional law question**, Compare is strengthened by the explicit instruction to **contrast**, and the follow-up questions require separate attention to limitations and preemptive pardons.

Not used in GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Enumerate

7 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To enumerate is to **set out the relevant points systematically**, covering the categories, reasons, provisions or developments that answer the question. It asks for **disciplined completeness**, with distinct items arranged logically and briefly clarified where their relevance is not self-evident. The result should give the examiner **a clear and sufficiently comprehensive account** without turning every point into a lengthy discussion.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 3 | GS II 1 | GS III 3 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Enumerate appeared in 7 questions**, including **3 each in GS Papers I and III**, with **1 question in each year from 2016 to 2021**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Systematic coverage** of the main items required by the question.
- ✓ **Distinct and non-repetitive points** arranged through numbering, grouping or another clear structure.
- ✓ **Brief clarifications** where necessary to establish each item's meaning or relevance.
- ✓ **Correct treatment of categories, exceptions and follow-up tasks** expressly included in the question.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean presenting a **random collection of facts** without clear coverage.
- × It does not mean developing **a lengthy essay for every item** when compact treatment is sufficient.
- × It does not mean ignoring **exceptions or parallel categories** that the question explicitly requests.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

List generally permits concise naming, whereas **Enumerate calls for a more systematic and sufficiently complete presentation**, often with a short explanation of each point. Neither automatically demands detailed evaluation.

Enumerate establishes what the relevant points are, whereas **Discuss develops their meaning, connections and implications**. When both appear, the structured set of points must support a fuller discussion rather than replace it.

How "Enumerate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2020 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Pala period is the most significant phase in the history of Buddhism in India. Enumerate.

WHAT "ENUMERATE" DEMANDED HERE

Set out the **principal contributions of the Pala period to Buddhism**, including patronage, monasteries and centres of learning, scholarship, artistic traditions and wider religious connections. Arrange them as **distinct developments supporting the proposition** about the period's significance.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **history question**, Enumerate is attached to a **historical claim**, so the selected contributions must substantiate that claim rather than simply describe the Pala rulers.

GS Paper II — 2017 · Q13 · 15 marks

QUESTION

The Indian Constitution has provisions for holding joint session of the two Houses of the Parliament. Enumerate the occasions when this would normally happen and also the occasions when it cannot, with reason thereof.

WHAT "ENUMERATE" DEMANDED HERE

Systematically enumerate the **three constitutional grounds for a joint sitting under Article 108**: rejection of a Bill by the other House, final disagreement between the Houses over amendments, and a delay of more than six months without passage by the other House, subject to the constitutional rules for computing that period. Separately identify **Money Bills and Constitution Amendment Bills as exclusions**, explaining their distinct constitutional procedures under Articles 109 and 368 respectively.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **constitutional procedure question**, Enumerate explicitly requires **two opposing categories and their reasons**, making exceptions as important as the normal occasions.

GS Paper III — 2019 · Q1 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Enumerate the indirect taxes which have been subsumed in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in India. Also, comment on the revenue implications of the GST introduced in India since July 2017.

WHAT "ENUMERATE" DEMANDED HERE

Present an **organised account of the central and State indirect taxes subsumed under GST**, distinguishing the relevant categories accurately. Keep the enumeration separate from the required **comment on GST's revenue implications** since its introduction.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **economic policy question**, Enumerate is a **classification task** followed by Comment, which separately requires a reasoned assessment of revenue implications.

Not used in GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

List

4 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To list is to **provide the requested items directly**, using clear, concise and individually identifiable entries. It places the emphasis on **correct selection, number and coverage**, not on developing a detailed argument for each entry. A good list lets the examiner verify **every required item quickly** while leaving space for any additional tasks.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 0 | GS II 0 | GS III 2 | GS IV 2

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **List appeared in 4 questions**, divided equally between **GS Paper III (2 questions)** and **GS Paper IV (2 questions)**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Accurate naming** of the items, factors or considerations requested.
- ✓ **The specified number of entries**, where the question imposes a numerical limit.
- ✓ **Distinct and relevant items** without repetition or unnecessary overlap.
- ✓ **Concise presentation** that preserves room for accompanying explanation or analysis.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean providing **lengthy explanations** for every item unless separately requested.
- × It does not mean adding **more entries than specified** when the question asks for an exact number.
- × It does not mean including **loosely related facts** merely to make the list longer.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

List prioritises concise identification, while **Enumerate more often calls for systematic coverage with brief clarification**. The question's scope, specified number and other directives determine how much detail is appropriate.

Identify emphasises recognising the qualifying elements within a topic or situation, while **List emphasises presenting those elements directly**. A List question still requires accurate selection, but does not by itself demand a detailed explanation of why each entry qualifies.

How "List" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper III

2023 · Q16 · 15 marks

QUESTION

What is the main task of India's third moon mission which could not be achieved in its earlier mission? List the countries that have achieved this task. Introduce the subsystems in the spacecraft launched and explain the role of the 'Virtual Launch Control Centre' at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre which contributed to the successful launch from Sriharikota.

WHAT "LIST" DEMANDED HERE

Identify the main unachieved objective of Chandrayaan-2 as **a successful soft landing on the lunar surface**, subsequently accomplished by Chandrayaan-3. For the requested list, identify the countries that had achieved lunar soft landings by the time of the 2023 examination: **the Soviet Union, the United States, China and India**. Keep this factual enumeration separate from the spacecraft subsystems and the Virtual Launch Control Centre's contribution.

GS Paper IV

2020 · Q8(b) · 20 marks

QUESTION

(b) List five ethical factors that would influence the decision to sell arms to foreign governments.

WHAT "LIST" DEMANDED HERE

Provide **exactly five distinct ethical considerations** relevant to selling arms to foreign governments, such as risks to civilians, human rights, end-use accountability, national security consequences and integrity of the export decision. Each entry should be **directly relevant to the arms export dilemma**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **ethics case study**, List requires **a fixed number of decision-relevant ethical factors**, rather than a general essay on defence production, arms trade or national self-reliance.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **space technology question**, List requires **precise factual recall**, while the remaining instructions separately ask for the mission objective, spacecraft subsystems and launch-control contribution.

Not used in GS Paper I or GS Paper II between 2013 and 2026.

Mention

12 questions, 2013 to 2026

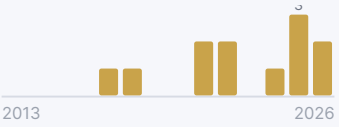
WHAT IT MEANS

To mention is to **bring the specifically requested information into the answer briefly and clearly**. It requires selecting the **most relevant facts, features, reasons or contributions** without developing each into a complete explanation. When used alongside a stronger analytical instruction, Mention establishes **the essential points that must be covered**, while the other instruction determines where deeper reasoning is needed.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 4 | GS II 0 | GS III 8 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Mention appeared in 12 questions**, with **8 in GS Paper III** and **4 in GS Paper I**, including **3 questions in 2025**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Direct inclusion** of the information or features the examiner has asked for.
- ✓ **Priority to defining or salient points**, especially when the question uses those qualifiers.
- ✓ **Brief, accurate statements** instead of unnecessarily extended descriptions.
- ✓ **Proportionate space allocation** when Mention accompanies Explain, Discuss or another substantial task.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean offering **every available detail** about the subject.
- × It does not mean giving **vague references** that leave the requested information unidentified.
- × It does not mean allowing a **brief mention task to displace** the question's main analytical demand.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Both seek direct information, but **Mention particularly signals brief inclusion** of relevant points. **State emphasises clear and explicit formulation** of each requested fact, objective, principle or measure.

Mention identifies the important point, while **Explain develops how or why that point works or matters**. When both appear, the answer should not treat a brief mention as sufficient explanation.

How "Mention" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2022 · Q16 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Mention the significance of straits and isthmus in international trade.

WHAT "MENTION" DEMANDED HERE

Briefly establish the **distinct trade significance of straits and isthmuses**. Explain how straits provide natural maritime passages, shorten shipping routes and create strategic chokepoints, while isthmuses connect landmasses and may support canals, overland transport corridors and transshipment infrastructure. Use **specific**

GS Paper III — 2025 · Q16 · 15 marks

QUESTION

India aims to become a semiconductor manufacturing hub. What are the challenges faced by the semiconductor industry in India ? Mention the salient features of the India Semiconductor Mission.

WHAT "MENTION" DEMANDED HERE

Briefly present the **salient institutional and operational features of the India Semiconductor Mission**, including its role as the nodal agency for implementing schemes under the Semicon India Programme, its support for

geographical examples to connect both features to international trade, transport costs and strategic vulnerability.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **economic geography question**, Mention asks for **principal dimensions of significance**, with enough geographical specificity to show why these landforms matter for global trade.

semiconductor and display manufacturing, chip design and packaging capabilities, and its objective of developing a domestic semiconductor ecosystem. Distinguish **the Mission's implementing role from the programme's financial support schemes**, without attempting an exhaustive account of every scheme provision.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **industrial policy and technology question**, Mention requires a **focused account of the India Semiconductor Mission's institutional role and salient features**, following the separate task of identifying challenges facing India's semiconductor industry. The Mission's implementation responsibilities should remain distinct from the financial incentives provided under the Semicon India Programme.

Not used in GS Paper II or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

State

5 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To state is to **express the requested information explicitly and without ambiguity**. The answer should formulate the relevant facts, objectives, measures, principles or values so that **each stands as a clear proposition**, rather than being buried inside a lengthy discussion. State establishes **what must be known or asserted**, leaving further reasoning to accompanying directives when present.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 0 | GS II 0 | GS III 4 | GS IV 1

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **State appeared in 5 questions**, with **4 in GS Paper III** and **1 in GS Paper IV**, across **five separate years**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Clear and explicit statements** of every required point.
- ✓ **Accurate terminology** suited to the concept, policy or professional context.
- ✓ **Separation of requested categories**, such as objectives and measures.
- ✓ **Observance of specified numbers and follow-up instructions** without unnecessary expansion of the stating task.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean offering **vague hints** from which the examiner must infer the answer.
- × It does not mean developing **lengthy causal explanations** when only direct statements are requested.
- × It does not mean **merging distinct categories** that the examiner has expressly separated.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

State makes the point explicit, whereas **Explain develops how or why it is true, operates or matters**. A statement can be complete in one sentence, while an explanation usually requires supporting reasoning.

Mention gives brief attention to relevant information, whereas **State requires the requested proposition to be clearly formulated**. The distinction is one of emphasis, not a fixed difference in answer length.

How "State" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper III — 2023 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

State the objectives and measures of land reforms in India. Discuss how land ceiling policy on landholding can be considered as an effective reform under economic criteria.

WHAT "STATE" DEMANDED HERE

Clearly specify the **objectives of land reforms** and distinguish them from the **measures adopted to achieve those objectives**, such as tenancy reforms, abolition of intermediaries, land ceilings and consolidation. Keep these statements separate from the evaluation of land ceilings under economic criteria.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **agricultural economics question**, State requires **organised policy knowledge**, while Discuss separately demands an economic argument about the effectiveness of land ceiling policy.

GS Paper IV — 2018 · Q1(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

State the three basic values, universal in nature, in the context of civil services and bring out their importance.

WHAT "STATE" DEMANDED HERE

Name **three basic, universally applicable values** relevant to civil services, choosing defensible principles such as integrity, impartiality and objectivity. Then **bring out the importance of each** by connecting it to trustworthy, fair and reasoned public administration.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **civil service ethics question**, State fixes the **number and clarity of the values**, while the additional instruction requires their professional significance to be established.

Not used in GS Paper I or GS Paper II between 2013 and 2026.

Indicate

6 questions, 2013 to 2026

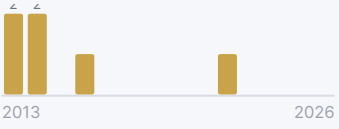
WHAT IT MEANS

To indicate is to **direct attention to the particular provisions, issues, circumstances or options** that matter in the stated situation. It requires **selective and accurate specification**, often without the depth of explanation demanded by Discuss or Analyse. The finished answer should make the **relevant possibilities or elements clearly visible**, so that any subsequent evaluation can proceed from them.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **2** | GS II **0** | GS III **0** | GS IV **4**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Indicate appeared in 6 questions**, including **4 in GS Paper IV** and **2 in GS Paper I**, with **2 questions each in 2013 and 2014**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Clear identification** of the provisions, issues or alternatives directly relevant to the question.
- ✓ **Selective coverage** that gives priority to the most pertinent elements.
- ✓ **Accurate contextual placement** of each provision, issue or possible action.
- ✓ **Separation of options from evaluation** when the question asks for both.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean making **indirect allusions** without identifying the requested items.
- × It does not mean providing an **unrelated catalogue** of laws, problems or possible actions.
- × It does not mean presenting **one preferred option as the only available choice** when alternatives are requested.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Mention briefly presents requested information, while **Indicate emphasises pointing to the elements most pertinent to a specific context**. The difference is especially useful when the question asks for possible options, applicable provisions or particular issues.

Indicate can ask the writer to identify available choices, whereas **Suggest asks the writer to formulate useful measures or courses of action**. Indicating options does not by itself amount to evaluating or recommending them.

How "Indicate" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2016 · Q10 · 12.5 marks

QUESTION

Why are the tribals in India referred to as 'the Scheduled Tribes'? Indicate the major provisions enshrined in the Constitution of India for their upliftment.

WHAT "INDICATE" DEMANDED HERE

Specify the **major constitutional provisions for the protection and upliftment of Scheduled Tribes**, including relevant protective, educational, representative and administrative safeguards. Indicate their **constitutional relevance to tribal welfare** rather than presenting an indiscriminate list of welfare schemes.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **society and constitutional safeguards question**, Indicate calls for **selected constitutional provisions**, distinct from the earlier explanation of why certain tribal communities are designated Scheduled Tribes.

GS Paper IV — 2014 · Q13 · 20 marks

QUESTION

Indicate various options that you think are available in this situation. How would you help him to evaluate these options and choose the most appropriate path to be adopted?

WHAT "INDICATE" DEMANDED HERE

Set out the **realistic courses of action available to Rameshwar** when confronted with departmental malpractices, such as documenting wrongdoing, seeking appropriate internal remedies or reporting through authorised channels. Present **genuinely available alternatives** before assessing their ethical, professional and practical consequences.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **administrative ethics case study**, Indicate establishes an **options map**, while the subsequent instructions require evaluation and selection of the most appropriate path.

Not used in GS Paper II or GS Paper III between 2013 and 2026.

Point out

3 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To point out is to **bring particular facts, consequences, measures or roles into clear focus** because they answer the specific issue raised. The writer must select **what deserves attention in that context** and state it directly, adding supporting explanation when the question requires it. A successful answer makes the **relevant result or contribution unmistakable** without drifting into an account of the entire subject.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I	GS II	GS III	GS IV
2	1	0	0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Point out appeared in 3 questions**, with **2 in GS Paper I** and **1 in GS Paper II**, in **2021, 2023 and 2024**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Direct identification** of the particular results, measures or roles requested.
- ✓ **Close relevance** to the proposition, event or problem in the question.
- ✓ **Clear distinction between causes, actions and outcomes** where the question separates them.
- ✓ **Supporting explanation or evidence** proportionate to any additional wording.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean offering a **general overview** of everything associated with the topic.
- × It does not mean **repeating preceding information** when the question asks for its consequences.
- × It does not mean limiting the answer to **bare names** when the wording requires detail or substantiation.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Mention briefly includes relevant information, while **Point out foregrounds the particular results, measures or roles** that need to be noticed in the stated context. Both can be concise, but Point out often carries a stronger emphasis on the specific significance of the selected points.

Both direct attention to important material. **Highlight stresses significance and prominence**, while **Point out stresses clearly identifying the particular matter requested**; UPSC usage does not justify treating them as rigidly separate methods.

How "Point out" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2024 · Q3 · 10 marks

QUESTION

What were the events that led to the Quit India Movement? Point out its results.

WHAT "POINT OUT" DEMANDED HERE

After explaining the events preceding the Quit India Movement, identify its **principal immediate and longer-term results**, including public mobilisation, colonial repression, political consequences and its contribution to the final phase of the independence struggle. Separate **what followed the movement** from the circumstances that produced it.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **modern Indian history question**, Point out shifts the answer from **preceding events to historical consequences**, making the distinction between causes and results central.

GS Paper II — 2023 · Q9 · 10 marks

QUESTION

'Virus of Conflict is affecting the functioning of the SCO' In the light of the above statement point out the role of India in mitigating the problems.

WHAT "POINT OUT" DEMANDED HERE

Specify **India's role in reducing problems affecting the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, including the potential for dialogue, regional cooperation, counterterrorism engagement and constructive multilateral initiatives. Connect each role to **the conflicts or divisions** that constrain the organisation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **international relations question**, Point out requires **actor-specific contributions within a stated problem**, not merely a description of the SCO or its institutional structure.

Not used in GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Define

3 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To define is to establish **what a term or concept precisely means** by stating its essential characteristics. A strong definition identifies the **features that make the concept what it is** and, where necessary, separates it from related ideas. The finished definition should provide **a reliable conceptual starting point** for any further explanation, application or analysis demanded by the question.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **1** | GS II **0** | GS III **2** | GS IV **0**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Define appeared in 3 questions**, with **2 in GS Paper III** and **1 in GS Paper I**, in **2018, 2019 and 2020**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Precise conceptual meaning** expressed in accurate subject-specific language.
- ✓ **Essential defining characteristics** rather than secondary details or consequences.
- ✓ **Clear conceptual boundaries** that prevent confusion with related terms.
- ✓ **A concise foundation for subsequent tasks**, such as explaining causes, determinants or applications.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean replacing a definition with **an example or illustration alone**.

× It does not mean giving a **vague description** that could apply equally to several concepts.
× It does not mean allowing **extended background discussion** to obscure the exact meaning.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Define establishes what the concept is, whereas **Explain shows how or why it works, arises or matters**. When combined, the definition should be accurate but concise, leaving room for the substantive explanation.

Define identifies the essential meaning and boundaries, while **Describe presents the characteristics or features** of the subject, potentially in greater detail. A description may contain a definition but is not necessarily a precise definition.

How "Define" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2018 · Q6 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Define mantle plume and explain its role in plate tectonics.

WHAT "DEFINE" DEMANDED HERE

Give the **scientifically accurate meaning of a mantle plume** as an upwelling of unusually hot, buoyant mantle material, distinguishing the concept from ordinary plate-boundary processes. Use this definition as the foundation for explaining **its role in tectonic and volcanic processes**.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **physical geography question**, Define establishes the **geological concept**, while Explain separately requires the processes connecting mantle plumes with plate tectonics.

GS Paper III — 2020 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Define potential GDP and explain its determinants. What are the factors that have been inhibiting India from realizing its potential GDP?

WHAT "DEFINE" DEMANDED HERE

Define **potential GDP as the level of output an economy can sustainably produce** using its productive resources under normal conditions, without generating accelerating inflationary pressure. Keep this meaning distinct from **its determinants and the barriers to India's realisation** of that potential.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **macroeconomics question**, Define supplies the **precise economic benchmark**, while the following instructions require separate treatment of productive capacity and the constraints preventing its achievement.

Not used in GS Paper II or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Outline

1 question, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To outline is to present **the main contours of a subject in an organised overview**. It calls for identifying the **major categories, features or dimensions** and showing how they fit within the larger topic, without pursuing every detail. A strong outline gives the reader **a complete structural picture at the appropriate level**, making the subject intelligible through careful selection and arrangement.

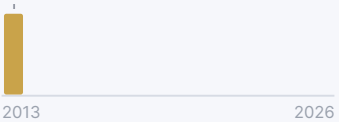
WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

✓ **Major categories or dimensions** that collectively capture the subject's scope.
✓ **Logical organisation** that shows the relationship between the principal elements.
✓ **Brief explanatory substance** sufficient to make each element understandable.
✓ **Proportionate coverage** without excessive detail or illustrative digressions.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 0 | GS II 0 | GS III 1 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Outline appeared in 1 question**, in **GS Paper III in 2013**.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean producing **a single vague summary sentence** that leaves out major dimensions.
- × It does not mean attempting **an exhaustive treatment** of every subtopic or example.
- × It does not mean replacing a **structured overview with a random list** of facts.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Outline presents the principal contours and structure, whereas **Describe can provide a fuller account of the subject's characteristics**. An outline should be informative enough to stand independently without becoming exhaustive.

Enumerate systematically presents the requested points, while **Outline organises the major dimensions into an overall picture**. An outline may use numbered points, but the relationship between categories matters as much as their inclusion.

How "Outline" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper III — 2013 · Q23 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Cyber warfare is considered by some defense analysts to be a larger threat than even Al Qaeda or terrorism. What do you understand by Cyber warfare ? Outline the cyber threats which India is vulnerable to and bring out the state of the country's preparedness to deal with the same.

WHAT "OUTLINE" DEMANDED HERE

Present a **structured overview of the major cyber threats facing India**, such as attacks on critical infrastructure, government and defence networks, financial systems and sensitive information. Clarify the **principal forms and vulnerabilities** without attempting to catalogue individual cyber incidents.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **internal security question**, Outline serves as the **threat-mapping stage** between defining cyber warfare and separately assessing India's preparedness to respond.

Not used in GS Paper I, GS Paper II or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Trace

2 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

To trace is to **reconstruct how a development unfolded over time**, from its origins through significant stages to the period specified in the question. The answer must connect **turning points, changes and their consequences**, explaining how one stage contributed to the next rather than merely arranging dates chronologically. A successful trace reveals **the process of transformation**, not just its beginning and final condition.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 2 | GS II 0 | GS III 0 | GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Trace appeared in 2 questions**, both in

GS Paper I, in **2021 and 2025**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **A clear chronological framework** with the appropriate starting point and endpoint.
- ✓ **Major stages and turning points** selected for their importance to the development.
- ✓ **Connections between stages** showing continuity, change or cumulative effects.
- ✓ **Coverage of specified dimensions** within the overall sequence of development.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean providing **an unconnected timeline** of names, dates and events.
- × It does not mean describing **only the initial and final states** while skipping the intervening process.
- × It does not mean giving **separate static descriptions** when the examiner asks how a process developed.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Describe presents what a subject is or was like, while **Trace follows how it emerged and changed through successive stages**. Chronology and meaningful development are essential to Trace.

Explain establishes how or why something happened, whereas **Trace follows its development over time**. A strong trace often incorporates explanation, particularly at turning points, but retains the chronological progression.

How "Trace" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2025 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Trace India's consolidation process during early phase of independence in terms of polity, economy, education and international relations.

WHAT "TRACE" DEMANDED HERE

Reconstruct **India's early post-independence consolidation** through important developments in polity, economy, education and international relations. Show the **sequence and connections** through which political integration, institutional establishment, economic planning, educational initiatives and foreign policy helped shape the new nation.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **post-independence history question**, Trace requires **chronological development across four named sectors**, linking their individual progress to the broader process of national consolidation.

Not used in GS Paper II, GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Underline

1 question, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

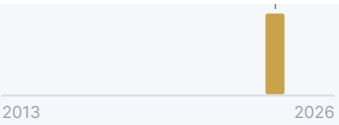
To underline is to **bring the most significant features or changes into sharp focus** so that the central point of the question stands out. The answer must **select and emphasise the developments that matter most**, using precise contrasts or relevant evidence rather than a comprehensive narrative. When the question concerns two periods,

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 1	GS II 0
GS III 0	GS IV 0

QUESTIONS PER YEAR

the finished answer should make **the direction and substance of change** unmistakable.



From 2013 to 2026, **Underline appeared in 1 question**, in **GS Paper I in 2024**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **Selection of the most important changes or features** rather than exhaustive coverage.
- ✓ **Direct contrasts** where the question concerns different periods or conditions.
- ✓ **Concrete supporting facts** that demonstrate the significance of the highlighted points.
- ✓ **Coverage of all named dimensions** with clear emphasis on the central transformation.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **physically underlining words** or merely formatting an answer.
- × It does not mean giving **a complete historical narrative** in which the important changes become difficult to find.
- × It does not mean offering **unsupported claims of change** without identifying what actually became different.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Underline and Highlight both emphasise significant points, and UPSC usage does not establish a reliable technical distinction between them. Both require **selecting and substantiating the most important features or changes** rather than providing an undifferentiated account of the subject.

Trace reconstructs the stages of development, whereas **Underline concentrates on the most important differences or features**. When two historical periods are named, Underline may be answered through direct contrasts without narrating every intervening stage.

How "Underline" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2024 · Q1 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Underline the changes in the field of society and economy from the Rig Vedic to the later Vedic period.

WHAT "UNDERLINE" DEMANDED HERE

Emphasise the **major social and economic transformations** from the Rig Vedic to the later Vedic period, such as changes in social organisation, varna stratification, women's position, agriculture, pastoral activity and material production. Use **direct contrasts between the periods** to reveal the direction and significance of these changes.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **ancient history question**, Underline requires **a selective before-and-after comparison** across society and economy, rather than a continuous chronology of Vedic civilisation.

Not used in GS Paper II, GS Paper III or GS Paper IV between 2013 and 2026.

Show

1 question, 2013 to 2026

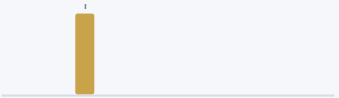
WHAT IT MEANS

To show is to **demonstrate that a particular relationship, difference or proposition is valid**, rather than merely asserting it. The answer must use **clear reasoning, relevant evidence or concrete illustrations** that allow the examiner to see how the point operates. A successful response makes **the claimed distinction or connection observable and convincing** through the material presented.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 0 | GS II 0 | GS III 0 | GS IV 1

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



From 2013 to 2026, **Show appeared in 1 question**, in **GS Paper IV in 2016**.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ **A clearly established proposition or difference** that the answer is demonstrating.
- ✓ **Relevant evidence or examples** chosen specifically to establish that point.
- ✓ **Reasoning that connects the illustration to the claim**, rather than leaving the example unexplained.
- ✓ **Visible demonstration of the relationship or contrast** requested in the question.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **asserting a difference** without showing how it operates.
- × It does not mean providing **examples without interpretation** of what they demonstrate.
- × It does not mean replacing **a focused demonstration with broad descriptive material**.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

Explain develops the reasoning behind a point, while **Show emphasises demonstrating the point through an illustration, evidence or a clear contrast**. A strong Show answer often includes explanation, but the demonstration must remain visible.

Illustrate uses examples to make an idea understandable, while **Show uses reasoning or examples to establish a particular claim or relationship**. When the question explicitly says Giving examples, concrete illustrations become part of the required demonstration.

How "Show" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper IV 2016 · Q5(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

(b) Giving examples, show how the two differ in their approaches.

WHAT "SHOW" DEMANDED HERE

Demonstrate **how law and ethics differ in regulating human conduct**, using concrete examples that reveal differences in their sources of authority, standards, motivation and consequences. Each example should **make the contrast visible**, such as conduct that satisfies a legal rule but still raises ethical concerns.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this **applied ethics question**, Show is expressly qualified by **Giving examples**, so the answer must demonstrate how the two approaches differ rather than merely define law and ethics.

Not used in GS Paper I, GS Paper II or GS Paper III between 2013 and 2026.

FAMILY 5 OF 5

When the question is the directive

Read the question form or shared quotation instruction as the task, even when no separate command word appears.

What

331 questions, 2013 to 2026

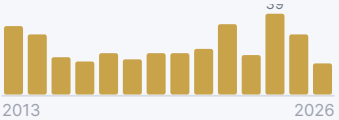
WHAT IT MEANS

A 'What' question asks you to **identify the precise thing being sought**, whether it is the meaning of a concept, the principal causes of a problem, the provisions of a law or the ethical challenges in a situation. The intellectual task is to **recognise the kind of answer required** and supply the relevant information with enough explanation to establish its significance, without drifting into a general account of the topic. A strong answer leaves the examiner with a **clear and specific response** to the question actually asked.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **35** | GS II **40** | GS III **113** | GS IV **143**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used 'What' in **331 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with the largest numbers in **GS Paper IV (143) and GS Paper III (113)**, compared with 35 in GS Paper I and 40 in GS Paper II.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **object of the question**: a definition, set of causes, legal provisions, consequences, challenges or possible actions.
- ✓ For 'What is', establish the **essential meaning and distinguishing features** of the concept before moving to any additional task.
- ✓ For 'What are', select the **principal relevant items** and briefly establish how each relates to the problem or situation.

✓ When another instruction follows, **complete both tasks distinctly** rather than allowing the initial identification to consume the answer.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

× It does not mean writing **everything known about the subject** without identifying what the question specifically seeks.

× It does not mean that every 'What' question requires only a **dictionary definition**; some seek causes, provisions, consequences or ethical judgements.

× It does not mean that **naming items is always sufficient**; their relevance or function may need to be established, especially when another task follows.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

'What' primarily establishes **what something is or which elements are involved**. 'How' establishes **the process or mechanism** through which something happens, works or produces an outcome.

'What' can request the **identification or specification of a subject** across several possible kinds of information. 'Which/Who' more directly requires identifying **particular eligible persons, categories or choices** under stated conditions.

How "What" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2026 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

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

WHAT "WHAT" DEMANDED HERE

The word 'What' requires an **accurate explanation of the Fujiwhara effect** as the interaction of nearby cyclonic vortices that can rotate around a common centre. The separate instruction 'Explain' requires showing **how that interaction affects cyclone tracks and intensity**, rather than stopping at the definition.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this physical geography question, 'What' establishes the **scientific concept**, while 'Explain' turns the answer towards its **meteorological consequences**.

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

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

WHAT "WHAT" DEMANDED HERE

Define **judicial legislation** and distinguish court-made guidelines or judge-developed norms from ordinary statutory interpretation and lawmaking by the legislature. Then discuss **the Supreme Court's passive euthanasia and living-will rulings**, including Aruna Shanbaug (2011), Common Cause (2018) and subsequent procedural clarification, linking the right to die with dignity under Article 21 to patient autonomy, advance directives and medical safeguards without confusing passive and active euthanasia.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike a physical concept in GS I, 'What is meant by' here requires a **legally precise distinction** that becomes the framework for examining **judicial decisions**.

GS Paper III — 2017 · Q14 · 15 marks

QUESTION

What are the major reasons for declining rice and wheat yield in the cropping system ? How crop diversification is helpful to stabilise the yield of the crops in the system ?

WHAT "WHAT" DEMANDED HERE

Identify the **major causes of declining rice and wheat yields** within the cropping system, such as soil degradation, resource stress, pest pressures or climatic variability, and connect them to reduced productivity.

GS Paper IV — 2026 · Q1(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

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?

WHAT "WHAT" DEMANDED HERE

Identify the **specific ethical conflicts** an administrative officer could face when a business project threatens to displace a forest community, including development interests, community rights, livelihoods, informed

The second question requires explaining **how crop diversification can stabilise yields** by addressing relevant risks and production constraints.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here, 'What are' demands a **diagnosis of the principal causes**, while the accompanying 'How' demands an explanation of a **practical agricultural response**.

participation and administrative impartiality. Explain why these are **ethical challenges for the officer**, rather than merely listing general environmental or economic concerns.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this administrative situation, 'What' requires recognising **competing duties and values** in the given circumstances, not defining a technical concept or prescribing an entire **action plan**.

How

162 questions, 2013 to 2026

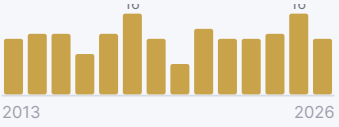
WHAT IT MEANS

'How' asks you to reveal **the working connection between a cause, action or condition and its result**. Instead of merely establishing that something happens or is desirable, you must show the **mechanism, sequence, channels or practical means** through which it happens or can be achieved. The finished answer should make the relationship intelligible enough for the reader to understand **how the stated outcome follows**, or how a proposed course of action could realistically produce it.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **49** | GS II **11** | GS III **64** | GS IV **38**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used 'How' in **162 questions** from 2013 to 2026, most often in **GS Paper III (64) and GS Paper I (49)**, followed by GS Paper IV (38) and GS Paper II (11).

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **starting condition and intended outcome**, then establish the connection between them.
- ✓ Explain the **specific mechanisms or channels** through which the effect is produced, rather than merely naming contributing factors.
- ✓ For 'How would you' or 'How can', provide **feasible steps or strategies** and show how they advance the stated objective.
- ✓ Where several outcomes or additional tasks are named, **address each distinctly** and complete accompanying instructions such as 'Discuss' or 'Suggest'.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean simply listing **why something happens** without explaining the process connecting causes to results.
- × It does not mean describing **features, advantages or desirable goals** as substitutes for mechanisms or practical methods.
- × It does not mean proposing **general recommendations without showing how they would work**.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

'Why' establishes **the reasons behind an outcome or judgement**. 'How' follows the **mechanism or process** through which the outcome emerges or the objective can be achieved; a factor identified under 'Why' may need a further explanation under 'How'.

'Suggest' asks you to **propose suitable measures**. 'How' requires explaining **how those measures would operate or achieve the objective**, especially when the question asks how a future course of action should be undertaken.

How "How" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2017 · Q5 · 10 marks

QUESTION

How does the Juno Mission of NASA help to understand the origin and evolution of the Earth ?

WHAT "HOW" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **how observations from NASA's Juno Mission**, including evidence about Jupiter's composition, interior and formation, contribute to understanding conditions in the early solar system. Establish the **chain of scientific inference** connecting knowledge of Jupiter's origin and evolution to broader understanding of planetary formation, including Earth's origin and evolution.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In GS I, 'How' requires an **evidence-to-understanding explanation** in which the contribution to knowledge about Earth is **indirect**, rather than a descriptive account of the spacecraft.

GS Paper II — 2025 · Q19 · 15 marks

QUESTION

"Energy security constitutes the dominant kingpin of India's foreign policy, and is linked with India's overarching influence in Middle Eastern countries." How would you integrate energy security with India's foreign policy trajectories in the coming years?

WHAT "HOW" DEMANDED HERE

Develop a **forward-looking foreign policy approach** that integrates energy security into India's diplomatic priorities through measures such as supply diversification, strategic partnerships, energy trade and cooperation on the energy transition. Explain **how each policy choice strengthens energy security** while advancing India's wider foreign policy interests, particularly in relation to the Middle East.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here, 'How would you' requires a **reasoned policy strategy** for the coming years, not merely an explanation of existing **energy-related diplomatic relationships**.

GS Paper III — 2026 · Q12 · 15 marks

QUESTION

How are startups in India promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and employment ? Discuss the global and domestic challenges in their working and suggest suitable measures to overcome these challenges.

WHAT "HOW" DEMANDED HERE

Show the **distinct channels through which startups** foster entrepreneurship, turn ideas into innovations and create direct or indirect employment in India. Then separately discuss **domestic and global challenges** affecting startups and suggest measures that address those identified constraints.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this economic question, 'How' is a **contribution and mechanism question** covering three outcomes, while 'Discuss' and 'Suggest' add **diagnosis and policy response**.

GS Paper IV — 2016 · Q6(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

(b) How can such undesirable attitudes be changed and socio-ethical values considered necessary in public services be cultivated in the aspiring and serving civil servants ?

WHAT "HOW" DEMANDED HERE

Propose **realistic methods for changing undesirable attitudes** among aspiring and serving civil servants, including reflective learning, exposure to diverse social experiences, ethical training, role modelling and institutional accountability. Explain **how these interventions can reshape assumptions, values and conduct**, rather than merely naming the values civil servants should possess.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike questions about scientific or economic mechanisms, 'How can' here requires a **behavioural and institutional pathway** from unconsciously acquired attitudes to **ethical public service conduct**.

Why

40 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

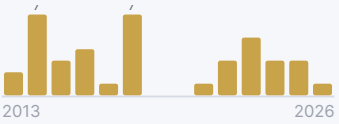
'Why' asks you to uncover **the reasons that explain a situation or support a judgement**, rather than merely describe what is happening. The task is to identify the **underlying causes, conditions or grounds**

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **25**	GS II **2**
GS III **8**	GS IV **5**

and demonstrate why they produce the observed pattern, make a particular institution valuable or support an ethical position. A convincing answer should establish **explanatory or justificatory connections**, so that each reason genuinely advances the answer rather than appearing as an unrelated fact.

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used 'Why' in **40 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **25 in GS Paper I**, compared with 2 in GS Paper II, 8 in GS Paper III and 5 in GS Paper IV.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **central outcome, pattern or proposition** whose reasons must be established.
- ✓ Present the **principal explanatory factors or grounds**, giving priority to those most relevant to the question.
- ✓ Show **why each factor matters**, connecting it to the specified outcome, institutional value or ethical conclusion.
- ✓ Match the reasoning to the subject: **causal explanation** for physical and social outcomes, or **reasoned justification** for institutional and ethical judgements.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean **restating the situation** in different words or providing background information without explaining its causes.
- × It does not mean offering an **unconnected list of possible factors** without showing their contribution to the outcome.
- × It does not mean treating an **ethical or institutional judgement as self-evident** when the question specifically asks for its grounds.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

'Why' asks for **the factors or reasons responsible** for something. 'How' asks for **the process through which those factors operate**; a question may require both when identifying causes alone does not explain their effects.

'Why' may seek either **causal explanation or grounds for a judgement**, depending on the question. 'Justify' specifically requires a **reasoned defence of a position or claim**, normally with supporting arguments and attention to relevant objections.

How "Why" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2024 · Q5 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Why do large cities tend to attract more migrants than smaller towns? Discuss in the light of conditions in developing countries.

WHAT "WHY" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **why large cities attract more migrants than smaller towns**, considering differences in employment opportunities, earning potential, services, social networks and perceived prospects. Relate those factors to **conditions in developing countries**, including patterns of uneven urban development and concentration of opportunities, and discuss how they reinforce migration towards larger urban centres.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this human geography question, 'Why' calls for a **comparative causal explanation** of a migration pattern, while 'Discuss' requires the explanation to be situated within **developing-country conditions**.

GS Paper II — 2018 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Why do you think the committees are considered to be useful for parliamentary work? Discuss, in this context, the role of the Estimates Committee.

WHAT "WHY" DEMANDED HERE

Establish **why parliamentary committees are useful** by connecting their functions, such as detailed scrutiny, specialised examination and executive accountability, to the quality of parliamentary work. Then discuss **the Estimates Committee's particular role** in examining expenditure estimates and promoting economy and efficiency in public spending.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here, 'Why' is primarily a question of **institutional value and justification**, with the Estimates Committee providing a **specific application** of the broader reasoning.

GS Paper III 2025 · Q17 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Mineral resources are fundamental to the country's economy and these are exploited by mining. Why is mining considered an environmental hazard ? Explain the remedial measures required to reduce the environmental hazard due to mining.

WHAT "WHY" DEMANDED HERE

Explain **why mining creates environmental hazards** by identifying processes such as land disturbance, habitat destruction, waste generation, pollution and interference with water systems, and connecting each to environmental harm. Then explain **remedial measures matched to those hazards**, such as improved extraction practices, waste management, pollution control and ecological restoration.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In GS III, 'Why' requires an **activity-to-environmental-harm explanation**, while 'Explain' adds a **problem-specific remedial response**.

GS Paper IV 2016 · Q1(b) · 10 marks

QUESTION

Why should impartiality and non-partisanship be considered as foundational values in public services, especially in the present day socio-political context ? Illustrate your answer with examples.

WHAT "WHY" DEMANDED HERE

Give **ethical and administrative reasons** why impartiality and non-partisanship are foundational to public service, connecting them to equal treatment, fairness, constitutional responsibility and public trust. Explain their **particular importance in the contemporary socio-political context** and illustrate the reasoning with relevant examples of administrative decisions.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike a causal question about migration or environmental harm, 'Why' here requires a **normative defence of public service values**, reinforced by **practical illustrations**.

Which, Who

17 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

'Which/Who' asks you to move from a general subject to **a specific identification or selection**: who qualifies, which requirements apply or which available option is most appropriate. 'Who' commonly requires identifying persons or categories under **defined eligibility conditions**, while 'Which' may require choosing between alternatives using relevant legal, procedural, practical or ethical criteria. A complete answer must **make the identification or choice explicit** and, where the question asks for judgement, establish why that choice is preferable.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I 0 | GS II 2 | GS III 0 | GS IV 15

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used 'Which/Who' in **17 questions** from 2013 to 2026, with **15 in GS Paper IV and 2 in GS Paper II**, and none in GS Papers I or III.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Determine **exactly what must be identified or selected**, including whether the question concerns persons, eligible groups, procedures or alternatives.
- ✓ Apply the **relevant eligibility rules, conditions or decision criteria** rather than relying on broad impressions.
- ✓ Where alternatives are involved, **compare them against the situation's requirements** before making a clear selection.
- ✓ When justification is required, **defend the selected answer** and separately address any additional task in the question.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean providing a **general description of the topic** without identifying the persons, categories or choices requested.
- × It does not mean selecting an option through **personal preference or convenience** when legal, factual or ethical criteria are relevant.
- × It does not mean that **identifying an option completes the answer** when the question also asks for reasons, assessment or comparison.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

'What' can ask for **a concept, set of factors or other information** without necessarily requiring a choice. 'Which/Who' directs attention to **particular eligible persons, categories or selected alternatives**, often under explicit conditions.

'Should' asks whether **a proposed action ought to be taken**. 'Which' asks **which option ought to be selected** when alternatives must be considered, so comparative suitability becomes central to the judgement.

How "Which, Who" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper II — 2023 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Who are entitled to receive free legal aid ? Assess the role of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) in rendering free legal aid in India.

WHAT "WHICH, WHO" DEMANDED HERE

Identify **who is legally entitled to free legal aid** under the applicable framework, including the eligible categories recognised under Section 12 of the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and the relevant eligibility conditions. Then separately **assess NALSA's role** in delivering free legal aid by examining its functions and effectiveness rather than merely describing its establishment.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In GS II, 'Who' is a **legal eligibility question** requiring accurate identification of entitled persons, while 'Assess' introduces a distinct **institutional evaluation**.

GS Paper IV — 2025 · Q7(d) · 20 marks

QUESTION

(d) Which of the options, do you think, would be most appropriate for Vijay to adopt and why ?

WHAT "WHICH, WHO" DEMANDED HERE

Choose **the most appropriate course for Vijay after his mother's death** while his flood-hit district still needs urgent rescue and relief, and his family is pressing him to attend her last rites. Compare immediate departure, responsible delegation and delaying travel until critical operations stabilise. Justify the choice by balancing **filial duty with public responsibility for lives**, continuity of command, the feasibility of a handover and the risk of diverting disaster-relief resources.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

This disaster case turns on **the collision of filial duty and public responsibility** after Vijay's mother's death, not simply a choice under disrupted travel conditions. The question requires **a justified decision about departure, delegation and emergency continuity**.

Not used in GS Paper I or GS Paper III between 2013 and 2026.

Is, Are, Can, Does

66 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

A yes/no question asks you to **test a particular proposition and reach a reasoned position** on whether it is true, possible, justified or advisable. The intellectual task is to examine the proposition against **relevant evidence, conditions, legal rules or ethical principles**, recognising qualifications that genuinely affect the judgement. The finished answer must communicate **an identifiable conclusion**, even when the defensible response is conditional, and then satisfy any accompanying instructions.

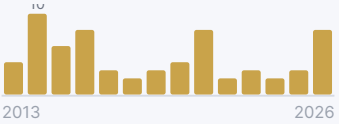
WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **exact claim or proposed action being tested** before deciding how to answer.
- ✓ State a **clear position**, which may be yes, no or a carefully qualified conclusion supported by reasoning.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **14** | GS II **29** | GS III **11** | GS IV **12**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used yes/no questions in **66 questions** from 2013 to 2026, most frequently in **GS Paper II (29)**, followed by GS Paper I (14), GS Paper IV (12) and GS Paper III (11).

- ✔ Examine the **decisive evidence, conditions or competing considerations** that determine whether the proposition holds.
- ✔ Complete additional tasks such as **Illustrate, Discuss, State or Suggest** instead of treating the initial judgement as the entire answer.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean giving a **one-word answer** or an unsupported declaration of agreement or disagreement.
- × It does not mean presenting **both sides without reaching a position** when the question expressly asks whether something is true or appropriate.
- × It does not mean forcing an **absolute yes or no** where the evidence or ethical conditions require a precise qualification.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

'Discuss' requires a **reasoned examination of relevant dimensions and arguments**. A yes/no question additionally requires a **recognisable judgement on the proposition**, even when 'Discuss' appears as a second instruction.

'Assess' asks for an **evidence-based judgement of merit, extent or performance**. A yes/no question centres that judgement on **whether a stated proposition can be accepted**, although the reasoning may involve assessment.

How "Is, Are, Can, Does" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper I — 2026 · Q18 · 15 marks

QUESTION

Is caste disappearing in urban India? Illustrate your answer with examples.

WHAT "IS, ARE, CAN, DOES" DEMANDED HERE

Reach a **qualified judgement on whether caste is disappearing in urban India**, distinguishing changes in visible practices and social interactions from the continuing influence of caste on marriage, networks, opportunities or discrimination. Use **concrete examples of continuity and change** to substantiate the judgement, as required by 'Illustrate'.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this Indian society question, 'Is' requires evaluating a **broad social change claim**, while 'Illustrate' makes **examples supporting the conclusion** an essential part of the answer.

GS Paper II — 2026 · Q4 · 10 marks

QUESTION

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 ?

WHAT "IS, ARE, CAN, DOES" DEMANDED HERE

Answer the first proposition clearly: the **right to vote is not a fundamental right**, although it has a constitutional foundation in Article 326 and is governed by electoral legislation. Then discuss **the Election Commission's role in electoral roll revision** and separately address whether, and within what legal limits, it can examine questions of voters' citizenship.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Here, the yes/no form tests **legal accuracy rather than personal judgement**, and the subsequent instructions introduce **distinct constitutional and institutional questions**.

GS Paper III — 2022 · Q2 · 10 marks

QUESTION

Is inclusive growth possible under market economy ? State the significance of financial inclusion in achieving economic growth in India.

WHAT "IS, ARE, CAN, DOES" DEMANDED HERE

Judge **whether inclusive growth is achievable under a market economy**, explaining the conditions under which markets can support growth and the limitations that may prevent benefits from reaching disadvantaged groups.

GS Paper IV — 2026 · Q2(a) · 10 marks

QUESTION

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.

Then state **how financial inclusion contributes to economic growth in India**, including access to savings, credit, payment systems and productive opportunities.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

In this economic question, 'Is' calls for a **conditional feasibility judgement**, while 'State' requires a focused account of **financial inclusion's significance**.

WHAT "IS, ARE, CAN, DOES" DEMANDED HERE

Decide **whether the District Magistrate should use an untested mineral supplement** on an endangered tribe, explicitly addressing the absence of clinical trials, scientific uncertainty, possible harm, informed consent and the vulnerability of the community. A defensible answer should distinguish **immediate unapproved use from ethically authorised research**, and explain the safeguards and alternatives consistent with medical and administrative ethics.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

Unlike questions testing factual or economic propositions, 'Should' here requires **an ethically defensible administrative decision** in which **safety, consent and procedural safeguards** are decisive.

Quotations (GS IV)

29 questions, 2013 to 2026

WHAT IT MEANS

A quotation question asks you to **interpret the ethical idea conveyed by a statement**, including the deeper distinction, tension or insight expressed through its language. You must move beyond literal paraphrasing to explain **what moral principle the statement communicates and why it matters**, while developing a thoughtful understanding of its relevance to contemporary life and public service. The finished answer should bring together **accurate interpretation, reasoned reflection and meaningful application**, particularly when the shared instruction asks what the quotation means to you in the present context.

HOW UPSC HAS USED IT

GS I **0** | GS II **0** | GS III **0** | GS IV **29**

QUESTIONS PER YEAR



UPSC used the quotation-based shared instruction in **29 questions** from 2013 to 2026, **all in GS Paper IV**, with none in GS Papers I, II or III.

WHAT THE EXAMINER EXPECTS

- ✓ Identify the **central ethical insight** of the quotation, paying attention to contrasts, metaphors or qualifications in its wording.
- ✓ Explain **the moral reasoning behind the statement**, not merely its literal meaning or the reputation of the person quoted.
- ✓ Connect the principle to **recognisable contemporary situations**, especially choices, duties and dilemmas in public life.
- ✓ Where the instruction asks what it means to you, develop **a considered personal interpretation** supported by ethical reasoning and relevant examples.

WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

- × It does not mean offering only a **literal paraphrase or literary interpretation** without identifying the ethical principle.
- × It does not mean writing a **biography of the thinker** or listing philosophical theories that do not illuminate the quotation.
- × It does not mean replacing interpretation with **general moral statements or unrelated examples** that could fit almost any quotation.

NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH

An ordinary 'Explain' question primarily requires **clarifying a concept, relationship or process**. A quotation question requires **interpreting the ethical insight within a particular statement**, including its wording and relevance to the present context.

'Comment' usually invites **a reasoned observation or judgement on a statement or issue**, which may include agreement, qualification or criticism. A quotation question under the shared GS IV instruction primarily asks you to **bring out its meaning and contemporary ethical significance**, rather than treating agreement or disagreement as the main task.

How "Quotations (GS IV)" worked in each GS paper

GS Paper IV — 2013 · Q6(c) · 10 marks

QUESTION

"I count him braver who overcomes his desires than him who overcomes his enemies."—Aristotle

WHAT "QUOTATIONS (GS IV)" DEMANDED HERE

Interpret Aristotle's comparison as distinguishing **the courage needed to overcome external enemies** from the deeper moral strength required to control one's own desires and impulses. Explain why **self-mastery and restraint** are ethically significant, and connect the insight to present-day situations such as resisting temptation, avoiding conflicts of interest, maintaining integrity and exercising public authority responsibly.

HOW IT WORKED IN THIS PAPER

The shared instruction, 'bring out what it means to you in the present context', requires **a reasoned personal interpretation and contemporary application**, while Aristotle's contrast makes **inner moral discipline** the central idea rather than physical bravery alone.

Not used in GS Paper I, GS Paper II or GS Paper III between 2013 and 2026.

When one question sets two tasks

Of 1,222 GS questions and parts, 445 contain more than one task word. The most common consecutive combinations show how UPSC builds layered demands. Identify every instruction and the relationship between them, then give each task appropriate attention. The order of words helps reveal the question's structure, but it does not prescribe a fixed sequence or proportion for every answer.

What then How: 43 questions

The first task establishes what something is or identifies its features. The second asks how it works, happens or produces an effect. Make the identification precise, then explain the process, mechanism or consequences requested. Allocate space according to the actual scope of each task rather than assuming the definition must always be shorter.

What then Discuss: 25 questions

First identify or explain the subject of the question. Then open it up for a fuller discussion of the relevant dimensions, arguments or implications. Use the first task to establish the foundation and the second to develop the substantive answer.

What then Explain: 20 questions

What asks you to establish the concept, issue or facts. Explain asks you to make the reasons, working or relationships clear. Separate the initial identification from the explanation that follows, using examples or evidence to illuminate the latter.

Is, Are, Can, Does then Discuss: 17 questions

First determine whether the proposition can be accepted, rejected or accepted with qualifications. Then examine the evidence, relevant dimensions and competing considerations that inform that judgement. Make the position recognisable and support it through a reasoned discussion. Give each consideration the weight warranted by the evidence rather than imposing an artificially balanced argument.

What then Suggest: 16 questions

First identify the problem, requirement or situation specified in the question. Then propose measures that respond directly to it. Establish the issue accurately enough to make the recommendations meaningful, and ensure that each suggestion is specific, feasible and relevant. Give the two tasks space according to their actual scope rather than following a fixed allocation.

How then Discuss: 12 questions

How asks you to explain a process, relationship or manner of working. Discuss asks you to explore the wider dimensions of that process or issue. Establish the mechanism first, then develop the relevant arguments, implications or qualifications without repeating the explanation.

Quick reference: every directive on one page

Directive	Uses	What it asks you to do
Explain and unfold		
Discuss	306	To discuss is to **explore a subject through its relevant dimensions** and explain how those dimensions shape our understanding of it.
Critically discuss	5	To critically discuss is to **explore an issue while testing its claims, assumptions and practical results**, rather than accepting the stated position at face value.
Explain	121	To explain is to **make something understandable by revealing how or why it works**.
Elaborate	22	To elaborate is to **take a briefly stated idea and develop its full substance** by unfolding the dimensions, details and implications that the original statement leaves compressed.
Elucidate	20	To elucidate is to **bring clarity to the underlying meaning or logic of a proposition**, especially when its important connections are not immediately obvious.
Describe	27	To describe is to **present an accurate and organised picture of a subject** by setting out its defining characteristics, forms, features or identifiable aspects.
Illustrate	8	To illustrate is to **make an argument, concept or relationship clear through well-chosen examples** that show how it operates in reality.
Clarify	2	To clarify is to **remove uncertainty about what a statement means or why it is justified**.
Write a note	3	To write a note is to produce a **compact, self-contained account of a specified subject** that gives the reader its essential meaning, relevant particulars and significance.
Introduce	3	To introduce is to **establish the essential identity, purpose and basic elements of a subject** so that the reader knows what is being discussed.
Give an account	2	To give an account is to **present a connected factual explanation of what happened, what exists or what was undertaken** in relation to a subject.
Throw light	3	To throw light on a subject is to **make its important meaning, relevance or implications clearer** by focusing on the aspects that best illuminate it.
Bring out	15	To bring out is to **make important features, effects or relationships clearly visible**, especially where their significance is not immediately apparent from a simple description.
Highlight	11	To highlight is to **direct attention to the most significant features, distinctions or contributions** of a subject.
Weigh and judge		
Examine	73	To examine is to put a specific claim, issue or process under **close scrutiny**, asking what the evidence reveals about how it works, why it matters and whether its stated implications hold.
Critically examine	31	To critically examine is to investigate a proposition while **actively testing its foundations**: the evidence supporting it, the assumptions it depends on, the objections it faces and the conditions under which it may not hold.

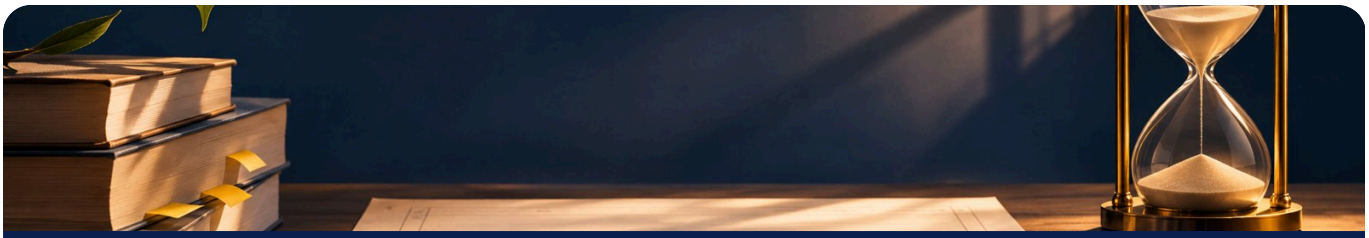
Analyse	45	To analyse is to **break a complex subject into its important parts** and explain how those parts interact, influence one another or combine to produce a particular outcome.
Critically analyse	8	To critically analyse is to **unpack a proposition into its component claims and relationships**, explain the mechanisms connecting them, and then investigate whether those connections are convincing.
Evaluate	24	To evaluate is to **judge the value, effectiveness, success or impact** of something by asking what it was meant to achieve, what results it produced and how those results compare with relevant standards.
Critically evaluate	19	To critically evaluate is to reach a **reasoned judgement of value, performance or desirability** while subjecting the available arguments and evidence to particularly demanding scrutiny.
Assess	12	To assess is to **determine the extent, significance or effectiveness** of a role, condition, problem or intervention by weighing the evidence that shows how much it matters.
Critically assess	1	To critically assess is to **determine how far a proposition or contribution is valid, significant or effective**, while rigorously testing the assumptions and evidence on which that judgement depends.
Appraise	1	To appraise is to make a **considered judgement of the value or importance of a contribution**, examining what it has added and why that contribution matters in its particular setting.
Review	1	To review is to **take stock of a subject's actual working, development and present position**, examining what has happened, what has been achieved and what remains unsatisfactory.
Estimate	1	To estimate is to make a **reasoned approximation of the magnitude or significance** of something when its full value may not be directly measurable.
Comment	45	To comment is to offer an **informed and reasoned position** on a specific statement, development or issue, making clear what you think the evidence allows you to conclude.
Critically comment	1	To critically comment is to **take a reasoned position on a proposition after testing whether its claims deserve acceptance**, including the factual assumptions and causal explanations on which it rests.
Reason, defend and reflect		
How far	19	Determine **how much of a claim actually holds** when tested against evidence, rather than treating it as wholly true or false.
To what extent	12	Establish **the degree and scope of a contribution, relationship, achievement or claim** by examining how strongly the available evidence supports it.
Do you agree	27	You are given an identifiable proposition and must **take a defensible position** on whether it is correct.
Do you think	22	Form an **independent, reasoned judgment** about a possibility, proposition, comparison, prediction or preferred course of action.
Justify	29	Establish **why a particular claim, decision, principle or course of action deserves acceptance** by building a defensible case for it.

Substantiate	6	Demonstrate that a claim or interpretation has a **solid evidential foundation** by presenting facts, examples and reasoning that directly support it.
Argue	3	Construct and defend **a coherent line of reasoning** on a proposition, contested explanation or institutional choice.
Debate	1	Bring **competing interpretations or positions into direct examination** rather than discussing an issue from only one angle.
Give reasons	30	Provide the **specific grounds that explain an outcome or support a conclusion**, making the logical connection between each reason and what the question asks.
Account for	7	Explain **why an observed outcome, pattern, change or discrepancy has occurred**, identifying the forces that produced it.
Reflect	1	Think beyond the surface meaning of an idea or role and offer **a considered interpretation of its deeper significance, responsibilities and implications**.

Pinpoint, compare and propose

Suggest	57	To suggest is to move from understanding a situation to **designing a useful response** to it.
Identify	15	To identify is to **recognise and isolate the specific elements** that satisfy the question's description or arise from its facts.
Distinguish	11	To distinguish is to establish **where and how related things differ** by examining them against meaningful common criteria.
Differentiate	4	To differentiate is to **make the meaningful differences visible** between related concepts, situations, processes or causes.
Compare	6	To compare is to examine two or more subjects through **the same relevant lenses** so that their relationship becomes clear.
Enumerate	7	To enumerate is to **set out the relevant points systematically**, covering the categories, reasons, provisions or developments that answer the question.
List	4	To list is to **provide the requested items directly**, using clear, concise and individually identifiable entries.
Mention	12	To mention is to **bring the specifically requested information into the answer briefly and clearly**.
State	5	To state is to **express the requested information explicitly and without ambiguity**.
Indicate	6	To indicate is to **direct attention to the particular provisions, issues, circumstances or options** that matter in the stated situation.
Point out	3	To point out is to **bring particular facts, consequences, measures or roles into clear focus** because they answer the specific issue raised.
Define	3	To define is to establish **what a term or concept precisely means** by stating its essential characteristics.
Outline	1	To outline is to present **the main contours of a subject in an organised overview**.
Trace	2	To trace is to **reconstruct how a development unfolded over time**, from its origins through significant stages to the period specified in the question.

Underline	**1**	To underline is to **bring the most significant features or changes into sharp focus** so that the central point of the question stands out.
Show	**1**	To show is to **demonstrate that a particular relationship, difference or proposition is valid**, rather than merely asserting it.
When the question is the directive		
What	**331**	A 'What' question asks you to **identify the precise thing being sought**, whether it is the meaning of a concept, the principal causes of a problem, the provisions of a law or the ethical challenges in a situation.
How	**162**	'How' asks you to reveal **the working connection between a cause, action or condition and its result**.
Why	**40**	'Why' asks you to uncover **the reasons that explain a situation or support a judgement**, rather than merely describe what is happening.
Which, Who	**17**	'Which/Who' asks you to move from a general subject to **a specific identification or selection**: who qualifies, which requirements apply or which available option is most appropriate.
Is, Are, Can, Does	**66**	A yes/no question asks you to **test a particular proposition and reach a reasoned position** on whether it is true, possible, justified or advisable.
Quotations (GS IV)	**29**	A quotation question asks you to **interpret the ethical idea conveyed by a statement**, including the deeper distinction, tension or insight expressed through its language.



YOUR NEXT STEP

Now read a whole paper word by word.

A directive becomes a habit only when you read real papers with it. Take one GS paper, mark the task word in every question, decide what each one asks you to do, and then write the paper in three hours.

1. **Mark every task word in one paper**
2. **Check them against this handout**
3. **Write the paper in three hours**
4. **Have it evaluated**

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