

ANANTAM IAS · UPSC MAINS

Qualifying Paper

Practice Questions

Compulsory English

Exam-realistic questions with answer outlines, key points, examples, model answers and sources.

40

QUESTIONS · MODEL ANSWERS

ANANTAM IAS

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UPSC Mains Practice Questions — Compulsory English

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40 practice questions, each with an answer outline, key points, examples, a model answer and sources.

Organised into the following sections:

Section A — 12 questions

Section B — 8 questions

Section C — 8 questions

Section D — 12 questions

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How to use this book

Each question is exam-realistic and tagged with its marks, suggested word limit, and target writing time. Treat the page as a timed drill: read the question, give yourself the stated minutes, and write your own answer first.

Then check yourself against:

- **Answer Outline** — the intro–body–conclusion structure a high-scoring answer follows.
- **Key Points to Include** — the facts, committees, data and articles examiners reward.
- **Examples & Case Studies** — specific instances to make the answer concrete.
- **Model Answer** — one complete, well-within-limit attempt to learn the register from.
- **Sources** — where to read more and verify.

Difficulty (Easy / Medium / Hard) signals how much synthesis the question demands, not how important it is. Work across all sections for full syllabus coverage.

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COMPULSORY ENGLISH

Section A

12 practice questions

Q1

Comprehension passage: India's federal architecture and cooperative federalism

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

MEDIUM

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (synthesise ~700 words on this theme): India's Constitution describes the country as a Union of States, not a federation of states, signalling a federal frame with a strong unitary tilt. The Seventh Schedule divides legislative competence into the Union, State and Concurrent Lists, while Articles 245-263 govern inter-governmental relations. Over seven decades, finance commissions, the GST Council and bodies like NITI Aayog have shifted the balance from competitive grant-giving to negotiated cooperation. Yet friction persists — appointment of governors, deployment of central agencies, sharing of cesses outside the divisible pool, and post-2014 disputes over the role of the chancellor in state universities have all tested cooperative federalism. The passage should argue that federalism in India is a process, not a static structure, and that institutional dialogue — not litigation — is the healthiest form of conflict resolution.

Approach: read the passage twice; first quickly for the central argument, then slowly with a pencil to underline topic sentences and connectives like 'however', 'in contrast', 'consequently'. Answer in complete sentences, in your own words wherever possible; do not lift more than 4 consecutive words from the passage. For the vocabulary question, give the contextual meaning, not the dictionary meaning.

What an examiner expects: answers in serial order, numbered, each kept within the indicated word limit; one-mark factual questions answered in a single sentence; five-mark interpretive questions answered in 60-80 words with one example from the passage; the vocabulary question answered with a synonym + a brief sentence using the word in the same sense.

Common pitfalls: (1) copying long sentences verbatim — examiners deduct for paraphrase failure; (2) adding outside knowledge that the passage does not support; (3) ignoring word-limits and writing essay-length answers to comprehension prompts.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five comprehension questions to be set on the passage: (a) State the central argument of the passage in two sentences. (b) According to the author, why is institutional dialogue preferable to litigation? (c) Identify two bodies that exemplify cooperative federalism and explain their role as mentioned in the passage. (d) The author calls federalism 'a process, not a structure' — explain in your own words. (e) Give the meaning of the words 'divisible pool', 'tilt', 'frame' and 'litigation' as used in the passage.
- Para 1 topic sentence: India's federal frame has a strong unitary tilt.
- Para 2 topic sentence: The Seventh Schedule allocates legislative competence across three lists.
- Para 3 topic sentence: Cooperative federalism has been institutionalised through finance commissions, the GST Council and NITI Aayog.
- Para 4 topic sentence: Friction continues over governors, agencies, cesses and university chancellors.
- Para 5 topic sentence: Federalism is a continuing negotiation, healthier when resolved through dialogue.
- Answer length budgeting: 60 + 70 + 80 + 80 + 60 + 50 words = 400 words.
- Use connectives like 'According to the passage', 'the author argues', 'the text suggests' to flag paraphrase.
- For the vocabulary question, supply one synonym AND a short sentence demonstrating the same shade of meaning.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model opener: 'The passage argues that Indian federalism is best understood as a continuing negotiation rather than a fixed constitutional design, with a deliberate Union tilt.'
- Q (b) model opener: 'The author prefers dialogue because litigation freezes a single moment of disagreement into law, whereas negotiation allows both tiers of government to adjust as conditions change.'
- Q (c) model opener: 'The GST Council and NITI Aayog illustrate cooperation: the first pools tax sovereignty for a single national market, the second replaces unilateral plan grants with negotiated state-specific outcomes.'
- Q (e) sample: 'divisible pool — the share of central taxes constitutionally available to the states; here it signals that cesses are kept outside this share, narrowing the states' fiscal room.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: India's Constitution opens with a deliberate phrase: the country is a Union of States, not a federation. The drafting committee chose those words to signal that while powers would be shared between the Centre and the states, the Union itself was indissoluble. The Seventh Schedule divides legislative competence into three lists, and Articles 245 to 263 supply the machinery for inter-governmental contact. For most of the first three decades, that machinery was tilted heavily towards New Delhi. Article 356 was invoked more than ninety times, governors acted as agents of the ruling party, and the divisible pool of taxes was treated as a gift from the Centre rather than a constitutional entitlement. The 1973 Kesavananda judgment, the Sarkaria Commission of 1988, and the slow rise of coalition governments after 1989 began to rebalance the relationship. Today the architecture looks formally cooperative: finance commissions transfer over forty per cent of central taxes to the states, the GST Council takes most indirect-tax decisions by consensus, and NITI Aayog has replaced the directive Planning Commission. Yet friction persists. Cesses and surcharges, which sit outside the divisible pool, have grown faster than shareable taxes. Governors continue to delay assent to state bills. Central agencies are deployed selectively, and disputes over the chancellor's role in state universities have reached the Supreme Court. The deeper point is that federalism in India is a process, not a static structure. It must be re-negotiated every time the economy, the technology of governance, or the social compact changes. The healthiest form of conflict resolution is institutional dialogue, not litigation, which freezes positions and leaves the losing side aggrieved.

Model comprehension answers:

1. The Constitution describes India as a Union of States, rather than a federation, to convey that the constituent units cannot legally secede from the whole. The drafters wished to retain the federal sharing of powers between the Centre and the states while denying any state a right of withdrawal. The phrasing therefore signals indissolubility and a deliberate tilt towards a strong centre in matters of national integrity, even as ordinary legislative competence is divided across three lists.
2. The Centre-state balance has shifted through three forces: the rise of coalition governments after 1989, which forced negotiation across ideological lines; the institutional reform recommended by the Sarkaria Commission and reinforced by the Punchhi Commission; and the constitutional embedding of fiscal devolution through successive finance commissions. The GST Council and NITI Aayog have added consultative venues. Together these have moved practice from directive central

planning towards negotiated cooperation, even where asymmetries of power remain visible.

3. The persistent sources of friction are four. First, the growing share of cesses and surcharges, which lie outside the divisible pool and shrink states' tax share. Second, the selective use of central investigative agencies in opposition-ruled states, which corrodes trust. Third, gubernatorial delay or refusal of assent to state legislation, which transfers political contests into constitutional offices. Fourth, post-2014 disputes over the chancellor's role in state universities, which have reached the courts and remained politically inflamed.

4. The author treats Indian federalism as a process rather than a static structure because the constitutional text alone cannot anticipate every technological, economic and social change. Each generation must re-negotiate the boundary between Union and state competence — through finance commissions, the GST Council and judicial review. Federalism is therefore a continuous practice of accommodation; its health is measured not by an absence of disagreement but by the quality of the conversation between governments that produces resolution.

5. The phrase 'institutional dialogue' refers to structured, deliberative venues — the Inter-State Council, the GST Council, parliamentary committees — where Union and state representatives debate and compromise on shared problems. The author prefers dialogue to litigation because court rulings produce binary outcomes that freeze a question without settling the political grievance behind it, while institutional negotiation distributes the cost of compromise and leaves the working relationship intact for later cooperation.

topic sentence

paraphrase

contextual meaning

main idea

supporting detail

connectives

inference

word limit

Q2

Comprehension passage: Artificial intelligence, work and the social contract

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

MEDIUM

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~700 words): Generative AI now performs tasks once thought safe from automation — drafting legal briefs, summarising medical notes, writing first-pass code. Earlier waves of automation displaced routine manual work; this wave displaces routine

cognitive work, which is where most middle-class livelihoods sit. The passage should weigh two opposing readings: an optimistic view in which AI augments workers and lifts productivity, and a pessimistic view in which gains accrue to capital, the middle skill-tier hollows out, and labour's bargaining position weakens. It should conclude that the outcome is not technologically determined — it depends on three policy choices: how training data is sourced, whether productivity gains are shared, and whether displaced workers receive portable benefits and re-skilling. The author argues that India, with its young workforce and large IT services sector, has more agency than most countries to shape this transition.

Approach: first sweep — locate the thesis (last sentence of para 1 or first of para 2). Second sweep — bracket the 'two readings'. Then answer in the order asked, restating the question stem in your opening clause so the examiner can follow without re-reading the passage.

What an examiner expects: the comparison question answered with a two-column mental table rendered in prose; the inference question answered with 'the author suggests' or 'the passage implies' to mark interpretation; vocabulary answered with a synonym AND a short sentence demonstrating the same shade.

Common pitfalls: (1) introducing personal opinions about AI; (2) confusing 'augmentation' with 'replacement'; (3) overshooting word limits because the topic is familiar.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five comprehension questions: (a) What distinguishes the current wave of automation from earlier waves? (b) Summarise the optimistic and pessimistic readings in one sentence each. (c) Why does the author believe the outcome is a policy choice, not a technological inevitability? (d) Why might India be better placed than most countries? (e) Meaning of 'hollows out', 'portable benefits', 'augment', and 'agency'.
- Para 1: GenAI now performs cognitive tasks, not just manual ones.
- Para 2: Two readings — optimistic (augmentation) versus pessimistic (displacement and capital capture).
- Para 3: Three policy levers — training data sourcing, productivity-gain sharing, portable benefits.
- Para 4: India's relative position — young workforce, IT services base, larger room to shape rules.
- Para 5: Conclusion — outcome is not destiny; institutions decide.
- Word-budget: 50 + 80 + 90 + 80 + 100 = 400 words.

- Use 'augmentation' as a quoted technical term once, then in your own words; avoid jargon clusters.
- Inference question: phrase as 'the passage implies that...' rather than 'I think...'.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (b) model: 'Optimistic reading — AI takes over routine cognitive tasks and frees workers for higher-value judgement, lifting productivity. Pessimistic reading — gains flow to capital owners while middle-skill cognitive jobs are hollowed out, weakening labour's bargaining power.'
- Q (c) model opener: 'The author argues that technology only sets the boundary of the possible; whether augmentation or displacement prevails depends on three policy choices — how training data is sourced, whether productivity gains are shared, and whether benefits travel with the worker.'
- Q (e) sample: 'hollows out — to remove the middle layer while leaving the top and bottom intact; in the passage, mid-skill cognitive jobs disappear while high-skill judgement work and low-paid in-person work remain.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: Every previous wave of automation eventually created more jobs than it destroyed, but the comfort drawn from that record may be misleading when applied to artificial intelligence. Earlier machines amplified human muscle and freed workers to use their minds; the present generation of large models displaces cognitive tasks that were the bedrock of middle-class employment — drafting, translating, summarising, coding, advising. The transition is also unusually fast. Within four years of release, generative systems have moved from curiosity to daily tool in law firms, newsrooms, schools and clinics. Labour economists estimate that between a fifth and a quarter of measurable office tasks in advanced economies can already be automated; the share in routine clerical, paralegal and customer-service work is higher still. The Indian context is different but not insulated. The country's services boom rested on the export of cognitive labour at competitive prices, and any global compression of that demand will reach Indian cities first. At the same time, generative tools can lower the cost of producing tutors, paralegal aides, agronomic advice and primary-care triage, extending services to populations that the market has never reached. The social contract that emerged from the industrial age — schooling for the young, wages for adults, pensions for the old — was built on a predictable working life of roughly forty years. That contract is now under strain on three fronts: the half-life of vocational skills is collapsing, the boundary between employment and self-employment is

dissolving, and the tax base that funds social protection is shifting from labour to capital. Adjustment will require a renewed compact: continuous learning entitlements, portable benefits, public investment in adoption support, and a fiscal architecture that taxes returns to data and algorithms. The question is no longer whether the machines will displace work, but whether democratic politics can update its instruments fast enough to keep the gains widely shared.

Model comprehension answers:

1. The optimism drawn from past technological transitions is misleading because earlier machines replaced muscle and freed workers for cognitive tasks, whereas generative artificial intelligence displaces precisely those cognitive tasks — drafting, summarising, coding, advising — that constituted middle-class employment. The pace of diffusion is also unusual: in four years the tools have moved from novelty to daily use in offices, schools and clinics, leaving little time for the gradual re-skilling that previous waves of automation historically allowed.

2. India is unusually exposed because its services-led growth has rested on exporting cognitive labour — back-office work, software development, business-process outsourcing — at competitive prices. Any global compression of demand for such labour will reach Indian cities first. At the same time, generative tools can extend tutoring, paralegal aid, agronomic advice and primary-care triage to populations the market has never reached, so the impact will be mixed and uneven rather than uniformly negative across the country.

3. The traditional social contract assumed schooling for the young, wages for adults and pensions for the old, calibrated to a working life of about forty years. Three pressures now weaken that compact: the half-life of vocational skills is shortening so rapidly that one period of schooling no longer suffices; the boundary between employment and self-employment is dissolving as gig work spreads; and the tax base is shifting from labour to capital, undermining the revenue that funds welfare. Each pressure compounds the others.

4. The author proposes a renewed compact with four elements. Continuous-learning entitlements would give every adult a publicly funded right to retrain across a long working life. Portable benefits, decoupled from a single employer, would protect workers whose careers cross many jobs and sectors. Public investment in adoption support would help small firms absorb the new tools without falling behind. A fiscal architecture taxing returns to data and algorithms would refill the revenue base that labour taxes alone can no longer sustain.

5. By ‘whether democratic politics can update its instruments fast enough’, the author asks whether the slow legislative and administrative cycles of democracies can match the speed at which artificial intelligence is reshaping work. Markets adjust quickly; political institutions, by design, do not. The sentence reframes the central question as one of governance velocity rather than of technological inevitability — the displacement is happening regardless, but the distribution of its costs depends on how rapidly policy can be revised to keep gains widely shared.

thesis statement

paraphrase

contrast

inference

qualification

register

tone

argument structure

Q3

Comprehension passage: Climate adaptation in Indian cities

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

HARD

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~750 words): Indian cities are warming faster than the surrounding countryside because of the urban heat-island effect — dark roofs and roads absorb radiation, concrete releases stored heat slowly, and tree cover has shrunk as ground-floor parking and apartment blocks have replaced courtyards and verandas. Heatwaves that once killed agricultural workers now kill construction labour, gig riders and the elderly poor in poorly ventilated tenements. Adaptation, the passage argues, requires three layered responses: a forecast-and-warn layer (early warning, cool shelters), a structural layer (cool roofs, shaded transit stops, tree canopies, water bodies), and a rights-and-rules layer (a heat code in building bye-laws, paid heat-rest breaks for outdoor workers, insurance for income lost on red-alert days). It ends with the warning that adaptation cannot substitute for mitigation: every tonne of carbon avoided narrows the adaptation gap a decade later.

Approach: identify the three-layer schema in para 3 — examiners often ask candidates to reproduce it. For ‘in your own words’ questions, replace nouns first, then verbs; the structure may remain.

What an examiner expects: answers that mirror the passage’s three-layer architecture when discussing solutions; precise figures or examples where the passage gave them; tight one-sentence answers to factual questions.

Common pitfalls: (1) confusing adaptation with mitigation — they are not interchangeable; (2) over-quoting the passage; (3) using climate jargon (‘anthropogenic radiative forcing’) in a comprehension answer.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five questions: (a) Why are cities warming faster than the surrounding countryside? (b) Identify three groups whom heatwaves now affect most. (c) Explain the three layers of adaptation in your own words. (d) What is the author's warning at the end? (e) Meaning of 'heat-island', 'tenement', 'mitigation', 'canopy'.
- Para 1: urban heat-island mechanism — absorption + slow release + shrinking tree cover.
- Para 2: who pays — outdoor workers, gig riders, elderly poor.
- Para 3: three-layer adaptation — forecast-and-warn, structural, rights-and-rules.
- Para 4: examples — cool roofs, shaded transit stops, paid heat-rest breaks.
- Para 5: adaptation cannot substitute for mitigation.
- Word-budget: $70 + 50 + 120 + 60 + 100 = 400$ words.
- Avoid jargon — 'cooling potential' beats 'thermo-regulatory capacity' in a comprehension answer.
- Vocabulary answers should be one synonym + one short demonstrating sentence.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model: 'According to the passage, cities warm faster because dark surfaces absorb solar radiation, concrete releases stored heat slowly at night, and the older shaded courtyards have been built over.'
- Q (c) model: 'The first layer warns — early-warning bulletins and cool shelters reduce immediate deaths. The second layer rebuilds — cool roofs, tree canopies, shaded transit stops and reopened water bodies lower the ambient temperature. The third layer regulates — a heat code in building bye-laws, paid heat-rest breaks for outdoor workers and income insurance on red-alert days share the cost fairly.'
- Q (d) model: 'The author warns that adaptation is necessary but not sufficient — every tonne of carbon avoided today narrows the adaptation gap a decade later, so mitigation cannot be deferred.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: Indian cities sit at the sharp edge of climate change. Roughly one in three urban residents lives in informal settlements that lack drainage, shade or piped cooling. Average summer temperatures have risen by more than one degree Celsius since the 1980s, monsoons have grown shorter but more intense, and coastal storm surges now reach further inland than the existing setback lines anticipate. The economic cost is no longer hypothetical: a single flood in a tier-one city can erase the productivity gains of a fiscal year. Yet the dominant response, until very recently, has

remained mitigation-led — solar capacity, electric buses, building codes that target future emissions. Adaptation, the work of fitting cities to the climate they already have, has lagged. Three structural reasons explain the gap. First, adaptation rarely produces a photogenic outcome: shaded pavements, restored wetlands, permeable surfaces, working drains. None lend themselves to ribbon-cutting. Second, the costs are local but the benefits are diffuse — a wetland restored in one ward serves the catchment of three, complicating who pays. Third, municipal capacity is thin. Most Indian cities have fewer planners per resident than peer cities in Southeast Asia, and the National Disaster Management Authority's heat-action plans, while genuinely useful, depend on a layer of municipal staff that does not always exist. The recent generation of city climate plans — in Ahmedabad, Surat, Bhubaneswar, Mumbai — points to a more workable model: combine a heat-action plan, a flood-action plan and a green-cover restoration plan into one document, fund it through a dedicated municipal climate envelope, and tie disbursement to measurable indicators such as canopy cover, drainage coverage and heat-related hospital admissions. Adaptation cannot eliminate climate risk; it can only buy time for the slower work of decarbonisation. But for the resident of an informal settlement in May, time is precisely what is in shortest supply.

Model comprehension answers:

- 1.** Indian cities face three concurrent climate stresses. Summer temperatures have risen by more than a degree Celsius since the 1980s, putting outdoor workers and informal-settlement residents at sharp heat risk. The monsoon has compressed into shorter but more intense bursts, overwhelming drainage built for an older rainfall pattern. Coastal storm surges now penetrate beyond historical setback lines, eroding the assumption on which urban land-use rules were drawn. The economic cost of a single flood can erase a year of productivity gains.
- 2.** Adaptation has lagged mitigation because adaptation rarely produces a photogenic, ribbon-cutting outcome — shaded pavements, restored wetlands and working drains attract little political reward. Its costs are also local while its benefits are diffuse, complicating the allocation of payment among wards or cities. Finally, municipal capacity is thin: most Indian cities have fewer professional planners per resident than peer cities in Southeast Asia, and even well-designed national plans depend on staff that often does not exist on the ground.
- 3.** The 'photogenic outcome' problem refers to the political invisibility of adaptation. Solar panels, electric buses and new metros lend themselves to inauguration

ceremonies and clear photographs; restored wetlands, permeable pavements and functioning storm drains do not. Because political incentives reward visible projects, capital tends to flow towards mitigation rather than to the unglamorous infrastructure that actually saves lives during a heatwave or a cloudburst. The author identifies this asymmetry as a structural barrier rather than a personal failing of decision-makers.

4. Cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat, Bhubaneswar and Mumbai are pointing to a more workable model with three elements. First, integrate heat-action, flood-action and green-cover plans into a single climate strategy rather than scattering them across departments. Second, fund the strategy through a dedicated municipal climate envelope rather than dozens of unrelated heads. Third, tie disbursement to measurable indicators — canopy cover, drainage coverage, heat-related hospital admissions — so that money follows results rather than intentions, and learning accumulates across cycles.

5. The phrase ‘adaptation can only buy time’ acknowledges that no amount of local adjustment can reverse the global accumulation of greenhouse gases driving climate change. The deeper solution is decarbonisation, which is necessarily slow and international. Adaptation, by contrast, can be local and quick: it reduces the human cost of the warming that is already in the pipeline. For the resident of an informal settlement during May, that time-buying — a shaded route home, a working drain, an early-warning text — can be the difference between illness and survival.

main idea

supporting detail

paraphrase

synonym

inference

schema

register

summary

Q4

Comprehension passage: Public health after the pandemic — the unfinished primary care agenda

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

MEDIUM

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~700 words): The pandemic temporarily made hospitals the face of Indian health policy. Yet the durable lesson is the opposite — countries with strong primary care, not those with the most ICU beds, fared best in life-years saved per rupee. India’s primary care promise rests on Health and Wellness Centres at the subcentre level, with a community health officer (typically a B.Sc. nurse with a six-month bridge in public health) supported by ASHAs and ANMs. The passage should argue that the architecture is sound but three gaps remain: continuity of medicine supply, a working two-way referral chain to

district hospitals, and the digital backbone that allows a citizen's record to follow her. It should close with a redefinition — primary care is not a cheap version of hospital care; it is a different discipline whose job is to prevent referrals.

Approach: identify the central re-framing — primary care prevents referrals, it is not low-cost curative care. The five questions usually test (1) factual recall, (2) author's main argument, (3) comparison, (4) inference, (5) vocabulary.

What an examiner expects: a clear restatement of the three gaps in question 3, with one concrete consequence per gap; answers in the third person ('the author claims', 'the passage notes') rather than first person.

Common pitfalls: (1) treating primary care as a budget line rather than a system; (2) forgetting to name the cadres correctly (CHO, ASHA, ANM); (3) ignoring the closing redefinition while answering the main-idea question.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five questions: (a) What was the durable, not the temporary, lesson of the pandemic? (b) Who staffs a Health and Wellness Centre? (c) Identify and explain the three gaps the author flags. (d) How does the author redefine primary care at the end of the passage? (e) Meaning of 'continuity of supply', 'two-way referral chain', 'subcentre', 'digital backbone'.
- Para 1: pandemic put hospitals at the centre, but that was the wrong lesson.
- Para 2: countries with strong primary care saved more life-years per rupee.
- Para 3: India's architecture — HWCs at subcentre level; cadres: CHO + ASHA + ANM.
- Para 4: three gaps — drug supply, referral chain, digital record.
- Para 5: redefinition — primary care prevents referrals; it is not a cheap version of hospital care.
- Word-budget: $50 + 50 + 130 + 80 + 90 = 400$ words.
- Name cadres correctly — full forms once, abbreviations after.
- Use the author's metaphor 'a different discipline' verbatim in answer (d) — it is a deliberate distinction.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model: 'The author argues that the durable lesson was not the visibility of hospitals but the value of strong primary care, which delivered more life-years per rupee than ICU expansion.'

- Q (c) model: 'First, continuity of medicine supply — patients abandon treatment when essential drugs run out. Second, a working two-way referral chain — without it primary care cannot escalate or receive back from district hospitals. Third, the digital backbone — without a portable record, every fresh contact starts from zero.'
- Q (d) model: 'The author redefines primary care as a different discipline whose job is to prevent referrals, not as a cheaper substitute for hospital care.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: A pandemic is supposed to reset priorities. India's experience of Covid-19 promised to do for primary health what the 1991 crisis did for trade policy: produce, under pressure, a reform consensus that years of placid debate could not. Five years on, that promise has been only half kept. The visible parts of the health system have improved. Oxygen generation, intensive-care beds, diagnostic laboratories and vaccine production have been expanded at a pace no peer economy matched. The country also built, in less than three years, the most ambitious health-identity infrastructure in the world: Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, the unified health interface, telemedicine through eSanjeevani. Yet the foundational layer — primary care close to where people live — remains thin. Sub-centres are short of nurses; rural hospitals depend on contract physicians; non-communicable disease screening is patchy; and the share of out-of-pocket expenditure in total health spending, while falling, is still above forty per cent. The economic logic for fixing this layer is overwhelming. Every rupee invested in well-functioning primary care saves between three and five rupees of avoidable hospitalisation. The epidemiological logic is starker still: India's disease burden has shifted from infections to non-communicable conditions, which require continuous management rather than episodic admission. Yet primary care attracts neither the political attention of tertiary hospitals nor the headline-grabbing potential of new technology. The policy answer is not novel — it is the gradual operationalisation of the Health and Wellness Centres announced in 2018, with full staffing, an essential drugs list, point-of-care diagnostics and a referral chain that the patient can actually navigate. The pandemic showed that, when political will is present, the Indian state can move quickly and at scale. The question now is whether that will can be sustained for problems that do not lend themselves to a single dramatic year of effort.

Model comprehension answers:

1. The pandemic produced two distinct kinds of gains. The first was tangible infrastructure: oxygen generation plants, intensive-care beds, diagnostic laboratories

and a vaccine-production base that no peer economy matched in pace or scale. The second was digital architecture — the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, the unified health interface and the eSanjeevani teleconsultation platform — collectively the most ambitious health-identity layer in the world. Both improvements are real, but they sit above the foundational primary-care layer that remains thin.

2. Primary care has lagged for three connected reasons. Sub-centres are short of trained nurses, leaving routine antenatal and immunisation services dependent on overworked auxiliaries. Rural hospitals continue to lean on short-term contract physicians, eroding continuity of care. Screening for non-communicable diseases — hypertension, diabetes, cancers — is patchy and episodic rather than systematic. The result is that out-of-pocket expenditure, although declining, remains above forty per cent of total health spending, indicating that the protective layer closest to households is incomplete.

3. The economic case for primary-care investment rests on documented savings: every rupee spent on well-functioning primary care averts three to five rupees of avoidable hospitalisation later in the disease pathway. Treatment near home, by trained nurses with point-of-care diagnostics, replaces costly tertiary admissions for conditions that should never have been allowed to escalate. The case is therefore not philanthropic but fiscal — primary care is the most cost-effective tier of any health system, and its under-investment is paid for many times over in emergency wards.

4. The epidemiological case is even more pressing. India's disease burden has shifted from communicable to non-communicable conditions — hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers — which behave fundamentally differently. They cannot be cured by a single dramatic admission; they require continuous, low-intensity management over decades. A tertiary-heavy system, designed for episodic acute care, is the wrong architecture for chronic disease. Primary care, with regular follow-up, screening and adherence support, is the only tier that matches the disease profile.

5. The phrase 'problems that do not lend themselves to a single dramatic year of effort' refers to slow, distributed reforms — staffing every sub-centre, maintaining an essential drugs list, building a working referral chain — that produce no inauguration moment. The pandemic showed the Indian state can mobilise rapidly when the problem is acute, visible and politically salient. The harder test, the author argues, is whether the same will can be sustained for primary-care reform, which yields its dividends gradually and without headline-friendly milestones.

main idea

comparison

inference

redefinition

vocabulary

summary

tone

argument

Q5

Comprehension passage: The digital divide and India's young learners

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

MEDIUM

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~700 words): India's digital divide is no longer mainly a divide of access — smartphone penetration has crossed three-quarters of households. The divide that matters now is one of meaningful use. A child who shares a single phone with three siblings, on a 2 GB daily pack throttled after 90 minutes of video, does not have the same internet as a child with her own device, fibre at home and a parent who can troubleshoot. The passage should distinguish four layers — devices, data, skills and supervision — and argue that policy still over-invests in the first two and under-invests in the last two. It should close with the claim that the National Education Policy's vision of multilingual digital content is necessary but not sufficient: without skills and adult supervision, content alone widens, rather than narrows, the gap.

Approach: the central move is from 'access' to 'meaningful use' — answer (b) hinges on this distinction. The four-layer schema in para 3 is the structuring device.

What an examiner expects: a clean distinction between access and meaningful use; the four layers named in order; the conclusion about content alone being insufficient stated explicitly.

Common pitfalls: (1) conflating access with use; (2) treating digital literacy as a child-only skill — the passage stresses parental supervision; (3) writing in slogan form ('Digital India for all') rather than analytical prose.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five questions: (a) How has the nature of India's digital divide changed? (b) Distinguish 'access' from 'meaningful use'. (c) List and briefly explain the four layers. (d) Why does the author say content alone can widen the gap? (e) Meaning of 'throttled', 'troubleshoot', 'penetration', 'over-invest'.
- Para 1: access has improved — three-quarters of households have a smartphone.
- Para 2: but a shared device on a throttled pack is not the same internet as a personal device on fibre.
- Para 3: four-layer schema — devices, data, skills, supervision.

- Para 4: policy over-invests in 1 and 2, under-invests in 3 and 4.
- Para 5: NEP content vision is necessary but insufficient without skills and supervision.
- Word-budget: $60 + 80 + 100 + 80 + 80 = 400$ words.
- Quote 'meaningful use' as a defined term once, then in plain English.
- Avoid policy slogans — analytical register, not advocacy.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model: 'The author argues that the divide has shifted from a divide of access — who owns a device — to a divide of meaningful use: who can use the device long enough, with enough skill and adult support, to learn from it.'
- Q (c) model: 'The four layers are: (1) devices — who has a personal phone, who shares; (2) data — who has unthrottled fibre, who runs out after 90 minutes; (3) skills — who can search, evaluate and create, not only watch; (4) supervision — who has an adult to scaffold the work and protect from harm.'
- Q (d) model: 'The author argues that more content delivered to a household with no skills and no adult supervision deepens the gap, because the child with skills and supervision benefits more from each new piece of content than the child without.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: The school closures of 2020 and 2021 were the longest in the developed and the developing world, and they laid bare an inequality that had been hiding in plain sight. India's young learners, who were almost evenly distributed across rural and urban schools before the pandemic, were suddenly separated by a wall built of bandwidth, devices and quiet rooms. Surveys conducted by ASER, by the Azim Premji Foundation and by independent researchers found that only a quarter of rural children had reliable access to a smartphone during school hours; that even where a device was present, it was usually shared with two or three siblings and an employed parent; and that the time spent on learning during closure was, for poorer households, less than an hour a day. The cost is now showing up in measurable ways. Foundational reading and arithmetic scores for the cohort that entered Class III in 2022 are below the cohort that entered in 2019. Dropouts among girls in older classes, especially in Bihar, Jharkhand and parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh, have risen. The Right to Education Act guarantees access to a school, but the pandemic made plain that access to a building is not the same as access to learning. Closing the gap will need three parallel efforts. First, a sustained programme of remedial teaching in early grades, modelled on Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level, taken from pilots to

system-scale. Second, public investment in school broadband and shared device pools, so that future shocks do not reproduce the same divide. Third, a rethink of teacher training: a generation of teachers now needs the skills to assess where each child is, not where the textbook says she should be. The digital divide is not, in the end, only about wires and screens. It is about whether a child born into the bottom income quintile is given the same chance to develop her mind as a child born into the top.

Model comprehension answers:

- 1.** The school closures revealed an inequality that had been hidden because pre-pandemic schools, however unequal in quality, were at least similar in attendance: rural and urban children attended for roughly the same hours. Closure converted physical attendance into screen attendance, and the disparities in bandwidth, devices and quiet study space — previously irrelevant — became the entire delivery channel of education. The pandemic did not create the divide; it made visible a structural inequality that the school day had been quietly equalising for decades.
- 2.** The surveys cited by the author — by ASER, the Azim Premji Foundation and independent researchers — established three findings. Only about a quarter of rural children had reliable access to a smartphone during school hours. Where a device existed, it was usually shared with two or three siblings and an employed parent, so any individual child's screen time was fragmentary. The total time spent on learning during closures was, for poorer households, less than one hour a day — far below what any sustained education requires.
- 3.** The cost of the closures is now measurable in three ways. Foundational reading and arithmetic scores for the cohort that entered Class III in 2022 are below those for the cohort that entered in 2019, indicating a real and not merely transient learning loss. Dropout rates among girls in older classes have risen, particularly in Bihar, Jharkhand and eastern Uttar Pradesh, where domestic responsibilities and early marriage compete with continued schooling. Together these signals point to a cohort entering adolescence with weakened academic foundations.
- 4.** The author proposes three parallel efforts. First, a sustained system-wide programme of remedial teaching in early grades, modelled on Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level approach, which groups children by current ability rather than enrolled class. Second, public investment in school broadband and shared device pools so that any future shock does not reproduce the same divide. Third, a fundamental shift in teacher training, equipping the present generation of teachers to

assess each child's actual learning level rather than to deliver the syllabus the textbook prescribes.

5. The sentence 'access to a building is not the same as access to learning' draws a sharp line between presence and outcome. The Right to Education Act guaranteed every child a place in a neighbourhood school, and that statutory promise was largely met. But a school is a means, not an end, and during the closures the means existed while the end — actual learning — collapsed for the poorest. The author argues that future policy must measure access at the level of learning gained, not merely enrolment recorded.

definition

distinction

schema

inference

main idea

paraphrase

vocabulary

summary

Q6

Comprehension passage: India's economic transformation and the missing middle

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

HARD

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~750 words): India's growth story has, for three decades, been told as a story of services — IT, banking, telecom and consumer brands. The passage should argue that this story has reached its limit because services of this kind employ a small, English-speaking, urban slice. The country's demographic dividend, in contrast, sits in towns and small cities, with twelfth-class education and trade skills. They need a missing middle of firms — between household enterprises and listed corporations — that can absorb them at decent wages. China filled this middle with township and village enterprises in the 1980s; India's path will look different but must do the same work. The passage should identify four enabling reforms: bankruptcy that actually closes failing firms, single-window land use change at the district level, a power tariff that does not punish manufacturing, and skills assessed by industry, not by examination boards. It should close by noting that none of this is glamorous and none of it will go viral; it is the slow institutional work that decides whether the demographic dividend becomes a dividend or a drag.

Approach: identify the central diagnosis — the missing middle of firms — and the four enabling reforms. The vocabulary question typically tests metaphorical usage ('dividend', 'drag', 'slice').

What an examiner expects: a precise paraphrase of the missing-middle thesis; the four reforms named with one sentence each; a calm, analytical close that echoes the author's tone.

Common pitfalls: (1) describing services growth as a failure — the passage says it has limits, not that it failed; (2) confusing 'missing middle' with 'middle class'; (3) leaving out one of the four reforms.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five questions: (a) Why has the services-led growth model reached its limit? (b) What does the author mean by 'the missing middle of firms'? (c) Identify and briefly explain the four enabling reforms. (d) Why does the author say the reforms 'will not go viral'? (e) Meaning of 'dividend', 'drag', 'slice', 'single-window'.
- Para 1: thirty years of services-led growth — IT, banking, telecom, consumer brands.
- Para 2: that growth employs a small, English-speaking, urban slice.
- Para 3: demographic dividend sits in towns, twelfth class plus trade skills.
- Para 4: missing middle — firms between household enterprises and listed corporates.
- Para 5: four reforms — bankruptcy, land use, power tariff, industry-assessed skills.
- Para 6: slow institutional work decides dividend vs drag.
- Word-budget: $70 + 70 + 120 + 60 + 80 = 400$ words.
- Use 'missing middle' as a quoted term once, then in your own words.
- Avoid editorialising — the question asks what the author says, not what you believe.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (b) model: 'The author refers to the absent layer of firms between household enterprises and listed corporations — mid-sized employers who could absorb workers with secondary education at decent wages but who do not yet exist at scale in India.'
- Q (c) model: 'The four reforms are: a bankruptcy regime that closes failing firms quickly; a district-level single-window for land-use change; an industrial power tariff that does not subsidise other users at manufacturing's expense; and a skills system whose certificates are assessed by industry, not by examination boards.'
- Q (d) model: 'The author calls the reforms unglamorous because they reward patient institutional work — they do not lend themselves to slogans or short news cycles, yet they are what converts the demographic dividend into a real dividend.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: India is approaching the third decade of post-liberalisation growth with the same anomaly that troubled its second: the country produces world-class firms at the top of the size distribution and a vast informal sector at the bottom, but very little in between. Roughly ninety per cent of Indian enterprises employ fewer than ten workers, and well under one per cent employ more than two hundred and fifty. This ‘missing middle’ matters because middling firms — the German Mittelstand, the Korean small-and-medium exporters, the Vietnamese contract manufacturers — are the engines of sustained productive employment. They pay higher wages than micro-units, train workers more systematically, and accumulate the managerial capacity that allows them eventually to scale. India’s distribution, by contrast, leaves most workers stranded in low-productivity micro-units while the formal sector cannot absorb the labour force fast enough to lift average wages. The standard explanations point to three sets of constraints. Compliance costs are highly non-linear: a firm crossing certain employment, turnover or premises thresholds inherits a stack of regulatory obligations that discourages growth at that very margin. Access to formal credit remains skewed towards the largest borrowers, while the smallest firms work through informal lenders at punitive rates. And the skilling system, despite the National Skill Development Mission, still under-produces the technicians and supervisors that middle-sized factories need. Recent policy has begun to address these — production-linked incentives for selected sectors, gradual GST simplification, the codification of four labour codes — but the structural answer requires patient work on each of the three constraints simultaneously rather than periodic bursts of attention to one. The deeper point is that economic transformation cannot rest on champions alone. A country with a billion citizens needs a layer of firms thick enough to put them to productive work.

Model comprehension answers:

1. The ‘missing middle’ refers to the absence of medium-sized firms in India’s enterprise distribution. Roughly ninety per cent of Indian enterprises employ fewer than ten workers and under one per cent employ more than two hundred and fifty, leaving very little between micro-units and large firms. The label is important because middling firms — exemplified by the German Mittelstand, Korean SME exporters and Vietnamese contract manufacturers — are the engines of sustained, productive, well-paid employment in successful industrialising economies.

2. Middling firms matter for three reasons. They pay materially higher wages than micro-units, so their growth lifts the average earnings of the workforce. They train workers more systematically, building general human capital rather than firm-specific shortcuts. And they accumulate the managerial capacity that allows them eventually to scale into large firms, sustaining a pipeline of expansion. A country that lacks this tier cannot translate aggregate growth into broadly shared improvements in living standards.

3. The author identifies three structural constraints. First, compliance costs jump sharply when a firm crosses certain employment, turnover or premises thresholds, creating an incentive to remain small or to split formally into smaller units. Second, formal credit is skewed towards the largest borrowers, leaving small firms dependent on informal lenders at punitive rates. Third, the skilling system under-produces the technicians and supervisors that middle-sized factories require, so growth-ready firms cannot find the workforce they need to expand operations.

4. Recent policy responses are partial but real. Production-linked incentives have targeted specific sectors such as electronics, pharmaceuticals and components, attempting to seed scale where it was missing. The Goods and Services Tax regime has been gradually simplified, particularly for small taxpayers. The four labour codes consolidate twenty-nine earlier laws into a more navigable framework. These steps address individual constraints, but the author argues they will only matter if they advance simultaneously, rather than in periodic bursts of attention to a single instrument.

5. The sentence ‘economic transformation cannot rest on champions alone’ rejects a strategy that concentrates support on a few large national firms. A handful of globally visible companies, however successful, cannot put a billion citizens to productive work. The economy needs a layer of firms thick enough to absorb labour at every skill level. Until that layer is built, growth will continue to flow disproportionately to the top of the size distribution, widening rather than narrowing the gap between the formal and informal halves of the workforce.

thesis

diagnosis

schema

metaphor

paraphrase

inference

register

argument

Q7

Comprehension passage: Indian democracy and the place of dissent

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

MEDIUM

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~720 words): India was conceived as a constitutional democracy, not merely a majoritarian one. The Preamble's promise of liberty of thought, expression and belief is given operational shape by Articles 19 and 21, and tested in every generation by how the state treats its dissenters — students on campuses, farmers at the border, journalists writing uncomfortable copy, and citizens marching with placards. The passage should distinguish three distinct claims that are often confused: a right to disagree, a right to assemble peacefully, and a right to be heard by the state. It should argue that the health of a democracy is measured not by the loudness of its loyal majority but by the safety of its least popular dissenter, and that procedural safeguards — speedy trial, anticipatory bail, narrow construction of sedition-type laws — are the everyday architecture of liberty. It should close with the observation that disagreement, well-conducted, is not a threat to the republic but the proof of its vitality.

Approach: read for the three-claim distinction in paragraph 2 — that is the structuring move. The closing aphorism (loudness of the majority vs safety of the dissenter) is the thesis and should be paraphrased, never copied.

What an examiner expects: answers in serial order; the three claims separated rather than merged; one example from the passage per interpretive answer; vocabulary answered with a synonym AND a short sentence demonstrating the same shade of meaning.

Common pitfalls: (1) reducing 'dissent' to street protest only; (2) bringing in current controversies that the passage does not mention; (3) writing slogans ('democracy is in danger') instead of restating the author's argument.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five comprehension questions: (a) State the central argument in two sentences. (b) Distinguish the three claims about dissent identified by the author. (c) Why does the author treat procedural safeguards as 'the everyday architecture of liberty'? (d) What does the author mean by 'the safety of the least popular dissenter'? (e) Meaning of 'majoritarian', 'anticipatory bail', 'narrow construction', 'aphorism'.
- Para 1 topic sentence: India was conceived as a constitutional, not merely majoritarian, democracy.
- Para 2 topic sentence: Three distinct claims — to disagree, to assemble, to be heard.
- Para 3 topic sentence: Procedural safeguards are the everyday architecture of liberty.

- Para 4 topic sentence: A democracy is measured by how it treats its least popular dissenter.
- Para 5 topic sentence: Disagreement, well conducted, is proof of vitality, not weakness.
- Answer length budgeting: 60 + 90 + 80 + 70 + 100 = 400 words.
- Use 'the author argues', 'the passage suggests' to signal paraphrase.
- For vocabulary, give one synonym plus one short demonstrating sentence.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model opener: 'The passage argues that constitutional democracy is distinguished from majoritarian rule by its protection of dissent, and that the everyday strength of Indian democracy lies in its procedural safeguards more than in its periodic elections.'
- Q (b) model: 'The author separates a right to disagree (a matter of expression), a right to assemble peacefully (a matter of association) and a right to be heard by the state (a matter of access) — each protected by a different combination of constitutional provisions and procedural law.'
- Q (c) model opener: 'The author calls them everyday architecture because they decide whether the right to dissent is lived daily or merely written down — speedy trial, anticipatory bail and narrow construction together prevent the process itself from becoming the punishment.'
- Q (e) sample: 'narrow construction — interpreting a statute strictly so it covers only the conduct it expressly forbids; in the passage, applied to sedition-type laws so that mere criticism of government is not criminalised.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: Democracy is often described as the rule of the majority, but the description is incomplete and, in the Indian context, potentially misleading. The constitutional design adopted in 1950 went considerably beyond majority rule. It guaranteed an opposition the right to organise, the press the right to report, the citizen the right to assemble and petition, and the courts the duty to protect rights even when they were inconvenient to the elected government of the day. The drafters were not romanticising disagreement; they had seen, in the partition of the subcontinent, what happens when the demands of a numerical majority go unmoderated by institutional checks. Dissent, in this design, is not a regrettable side-effect of free speech; it is an instrument of governance. It enables the public to detect errors before they become catastrophes, allows minorities to be heard before they are radicalised, and obliges the executive to defend its choices in argument rather than in silence. Seven decades on,

the instruments of dissent remain formally intact but operate under unfamiliar pressure. The sheer speed of digital communication has compressed the cycle between speech, response and counter-response; legal categories of speech-related offences have expanded; and the line between criticism and what is classified as incitement has grown harder to draw. Universities, traditionally the laboratories of unfinished argument, are themselves under strain — funding, faculty autonomy and student speech are now subjects of routine political contest. The constitutional answer, if there is one, is to remember that dissent is judged not by its tone but by its function. The shrillest critic and the gentlest pamphleteer perform the same democratic role: they tell the state something it would prefer not to hear.

Model comprehension answers:

1. The author argues that ‘rule of the majority’ is incomplete because Indian constitutional design protected far more than the right of a majority to govern. It guaranteed the opposition’s right to organise, the press’s right to report, the citizen’s right to assemble and petition, and the courts’ duty to protect rights even when inconvenient to elected governments. The drafters had witnessed partition’s costs and therefore tempered majoritarian power with rights and institutions designed to constrain it.
2. The drafters refused to romanticise disagreement because they had observed, in the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, what happens when the unmoderated demands of a numerical majority overwhelm institutional checks. The trauma of communal partition convinced them that a democracy without protected minority and dissent rights could degenerate into violence between communities. Dissent, in their design, was therefore an instrument of governance rather than a private indulgence, intended to prevent catastrophe rather than merely permit complaint.
3. Dissent serves three governance functions in the author’s reading. It enables the public to detect errors of policy or judgment before they harden into catastrophes that no later correction can repair. It allows minorities to be heard through legitimate channels before grievance becomes radicalisation. And it obliges the executive to defend its choices in public argument rather than retreating into administrative silence, raising the quality of decision-making by exposing it to challenge. These functions make dissent a feature, not a bug, of the constitutional design.
4. Three contemporary pressures threaten the instruments of dissent. Digital communication has compressed the cycle between speech, response and counter-response, so that public debate now happens at a pace older institutions were not built

to handle. Legal categories of speech-related offences have expanded, blurring the line between criticism and incitement and producing self-censorship. Universities, traditionally laboratories of argument, are under contest over funding, faculty autonomy and student speech, narrowing the space where disagreement could once mature into reasoned conclusion.

5. The sentence ‘dissent is judged not by its tone but by its function’ insists that the democratic worth of speech depends on what it does, not on how it sounds. The shrillest critic and the gentlest pamphleteer perform the same role: they tell the state something it would prefer not to hear. A regime that filters speech by tone — tolerating polite criticism but punishing sharp criticism — is filtering by what is comfortable, not by what is dangerous. Tone is a matter of style; function is a matter of constitutional purpose.

topic sentence

paraphrase

contextual meaning

main idea

supporting detail

connectives

inference

word limit

Q8

Comprehension passage: Climate change and the limits of growth-first thinking

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

HARD

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~750 words): For three decades, the dominant claim in development economics has been that growth eventually delivers the resources to clean up its own mess — the so-called environmental Kuznets curve. The passage should explain that the climate crisis breaks this assumption in two ways. First, the atmosphere is a single, shared stock: emissions today cannot be cleaned up tomorrow because warming is largely irreversible on human timescales. Second, the impacts fall first on those who emitted least, breaking the implicit social bargain that growth-now-clean-later relied on. The passage should weigh the orthodox response (decoupling — growing GDP while shrinking emissions) against the heterodox response (sufficiency — accepting lower throughput in high-income economies) and argue that India’s question is different from either: how to grow at the speed its young population requires while bending the emissions curve through technology, public infrastructure and energy transitions, without surrendering the development agenda to a borrowed northern debate. It should close with the warning that growth-first thinking is not refuted by the climate crisis — it is qualified by it.

Approach: identify the two breaks in the Kuznets logic in paragraph 2 — that is the structuring move. The three-way framing (decoupling, sufficiency, India's distinct path) sits in paragraphs 3 and 4.

What an examiner expects: the two breaks named precisely; the three positions distinguished without conflation; India's path described as distinct rather than as a copy of either pole; the closing 'qualified, not refuted' captured exactly.

Common pitfalls: (1) treating decoupling and sufficiency as the only two options; (2) writing an opinion essay on climate change; (3) ignoring the distinction between 'refuted' and 'qualified' in the closing sentence.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five comprehension questions: (a) What is the environmental Kuznets curve, as described in the passage? (b) State the two ways in which the climate crisis breaks the curve's logic. (c) Distinguish 'decoupling' from 'sufficiency' in one sentence each. (d) Why is India's question described as 'different from either'? (e) Meaning of 'irreversible', 'throughput', 'borrowed debate', 'qualified'.
- Para 1: growth-first orthodoxy — clean up later.
- Para 2: two breaks — irreversibility of atmospheric stock; impacts fall on least-emitter populations.
- Para 3: decoupling — GDP up, emissions down, through technology and rules.
- Para 4: sufficiency — high-income economies accept lower throughput.
- Para 5: India's distinct path — fast growth + bent curve + sovereign agenda.
- Para 6: closing — growth-first is qualified, not refuted.
- Word-budget: 60 + 90 + 60 + 100 + 90 = 400 words.
- Define one term once, then use ordinary English.
- Closing answer must use the verb 'qualified', not 'refuted' or 'rejected'.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model: 'The author describes the environmental Kuznets curve as the claim that pollution rises in early development and falls once a society is rich enough to afford cleanup, allowing growth to eventually deliver the resources to fix its own damage.'
- Q (b) model: 'First, atmospheric carbon is a stock, not a flow — emissions today cannot be undone tomorrow. Second, climate damage falls first on those who emitted least, breaking the implicit bargain that growth-now-clean-later relied on.'
- Q (d) model: 'India is described as a fast-growing, low-per-capita-emissions economy with a young workforce — its question is neither of choosing between decoupling and

sufficiency, but of growing fast while bending the emissions curve through technology, public infrastructure and energy transitions on its own terms.'

- Q (e) sample: 'qualified — modified by adding a condition; in the passage, growth-first thinking is not abandoned but limited by the constraint that the atmosphere is finite.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: For most of the twentieth century, growth and progress were assumed to be synonyms. A larger economy was thought to produce, almost mechanically, larger opportunities, larger budgets for the social good, and a larger capacity to repair whatever damage growth itself created. The assumption rested on an unspoken belief that the natural world was an unlimited backdrop to economic activity rather than a finite participant in it. The intellectual revolution of the last three decades, gathered loosely under the heading of climate science, has refuted that belief. The earth's atmosphere can absorb only a finite stock of carbon before warming becomes irreversible; the oceans can buffer only a limited acidification before fisheries collapse; the planet's soils, forests and freshwater systems are interdependent rather than infinitely substitutable. Growth-first thinking did not anticipate any of these constraints because, in the framework that produced it, they did not exist. The Indian context complicates the conversation. The country must continue to grow if it is to lift the third of its population still living on incomes that any rich country would call destitution. It cannot, in the name of planetary stewardship, freeze itself at a level of development that other societies have already exceeded. The question, then, is not whether to grow but how to choose between forms of growth — between expansion that decouples from emissions and expansion that does not, between investment in clean infrastructure and investment in stranded fossil assets, between agriculture that restores soils and agriculture that mines them. The policy frontier is to make the cleaner option the cheaper option through targeted public investment, intelligent regulation, and prices that reflect the true cost of carbon. Growth, on this revised understanding, is not the enemy of the environment; growth of the wrong kind is.

Model comprehension answers:

1. The author argues that the twentieth-century equation of growth with progress assumed nature was an unlimited backdrop to economic activity rather than a finite participant in it. Climate science has now refuted that assumption: the atmosphere can absorb only a finite stock of carbon before warming becomes irreversible; oceans can buffer only a limited acidification; soils, forests and freshwater systems are interdependent and not infinitely substitutable. Growth-first thinking failed because,

in the framework that produced it, these constraints did not exist as inputs to decision-making.

2. The Indian context complicates simple anti-growth prescriptions because the country must continue to expand its economy if it is to lift the roughly one-third of its population still living on incomes any rich society would call destitution. India cannot, in the name of planetary stewardship, freeze itself at a level of development that wealthier societies have already exceeded. The moral burden of historical emissions lies elsewhere; the moral claim to continued growth, for a population still poor, is therefore strong and difficult to dismiss outright.

3. The author reframes the question from ‘whether to grow’ to ‘how to choose between forms of growth’. The relevant choices are three. Between expansion that decouples from emissions through clean energy, efficiency and electrification, and expansion that does not. Between investment in clean infrastructure that will earn returns for decades, and investment in fossil-asset infrastructure that risks becoming stranded. Between agricultural systems that restore soils through rotation and cover-cropping, and systems that mine soils through intensive monoculture for short-term yield.

4. The policy frontier, in the author’s reading, is to make the cleaner option the cheaper option. Three instruments are central. Targeted public investment must lower the unit cost of clean energy, transport and buildings through scale economies. Intelligent regulation must remove the obstacles — grid access, land use, permitting — that artificially raise the cost of clean alternatives. And carbon pricing must internalise the true cost of fossil emissions, ending the implicit subsidy that has long made dirty options appear deceptively affordable to investors.

5. The phrase ‘growth of the wrong kind’ refers to economic expansion that ignores planetary constraints — additions to coal capacity that lock in emissions for forty years, mining of soils that erodes the next generation’s food production, urban sprawl that mandates car dependence. Such growth raises measured output but borrows against the future. ‘Growth of the right kind’ uses each rupee of investment to reduce, rather than to increase, the planetary debt the next generation will inherit. The discipline is to learn to tell the two apart.

thesis

paraphrase

contrast

schema

inference

register

definition

summary

Q9

Comprehension passage: Education in the age of artificial intelligence

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

MEDIUM

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~720 words): Education systems were designed for a world in which knowing things was scarce and valuable; the school's first job was to fill the empty head. Search engines complicated that assumption. Large language models have now overturned it: a tool that can summarise, draft, explain and translate on demand changes what a curriculum should privilege. The passage should argue that the new scarce capacities are three — the discipline of unmediated reading, the habit of original observation, and the moral judgement to decide when not to use a tool. It should warn that AI in the classroom risks producing a generation that is fluent without being literate, articulate without being accurate, and confident without being curious. The recommended response is not a ban on tools but a deliberate sequencing — children should first build the underlying skill, then meet the tool that automates it, and only then be allowed to use the tool routinely. The closing claim is that the purpose of school is unchanged — to produce thinking citizens — but its method must change.

Approach: identify the three new scarce capacities in paragraph 3 — that is the structuring move. The 'deliberate sequencing' policy in paragraph 5 is the prescription and must be paraphrased intact.

What an examiner expects: the three capacities named precisely; the warning about fluent-without-literate captured in the candidate's own words; the sequencing principle stated explicitly; vocabulary answered with synonym plus short sentence.

Common pitfalls: (1) interpreting the passage as anti-technology — it is not; (2) confusing fluency with literacy in the answers; (3) ignoring the moral dimension of the third capacity.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five comprehension questions: (a) Why have large language models 'overturned' the older curriculum logic? (b) Identify the three scarce capacities the author names. (c) Explain the warning about 'fluent without being literate'. (d) What does the author mean by 'deliberate sequencing' of tool use? (e) Meaning of 'unmediated reading', 'original observation', 'articulate', 'curiosity'.
- Para 1: schools were built when knowing things was scarce.
- Para 2: search engines complicated the assumption; LLMs overturn it.
- Para 3: three scarce capacities — unmediated reading, original observation, moral judgement on when not to use a tool.

- Para 4: the warning — fluent without literate, articulate without accurate, confident without curious.
- Para 5: deliberate sequencing — build skill, then meet tool, then use routinely.
- Para 6: purpose of school unchanged; method must change.
- Word-budget: $70 + 90 + 80 + 80 + 80 = 400$ words.
- Name the three capacities with the author's words, then expand briefly.
- Vocabulary requires one synonym + one sentence in the same sense.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model: 'According to the passage, LLMs change what is scarce — when a tool can summarise, draft, explain and translate on demand, knowing things matters less than knowing what to do with them, and the curriculum that prizes recall is overturned.'
- Q (b) model: 'The author names three capacities — the discipline of unmediated reading, the habit of original observation and the moral judgement to decide when not to use a tool. The first builds attention, the second builds evidence, the third builds character.'
- Q (d) model: 'Deliberate sequencing means a child should first build the underlying skill (writing a paragraph, solving an equation), then meet the tool that automates it, and only then be allowed to use the tool routinely — so the tool augments competence rather than replacing it.'
- Q (e) sample: 'unmediated reading — reading without a tool's summary or paraphrase between the reader and the text; in the passage, treated as a scarce capacity the school must cultivate.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: When the first widely available large language models reached classrooms in 2023, most education systems responded as if a new form of cheating had been invented. Within two years, that framing had collapsed under the weight of evidence and necessity. The same tools that a student can use to draft an essay are now used by teachers to design lesson plans, by parents to support homework, and by the most ambitious students to receive a tutor of effectively unlimited patience. The question is no longer whether artificial intelligence will be part of education, but what education should look like when it is. The honest answer requires distinguishing between two kinds of learning that earlier debate often conflated. The first is the acquisition of foundational skills — reading fluency, arithmetic fluency, the ability to construct an argument and to identify a flawed one. These foundations cannot be

outsourced. A child whose first drafts are always written by a machine will not learn to write, just as a child whose first sums are always done by a calculator will not learn to count. The second kind of learning is everything that builds on those foundations — research, synthesis, the work of joining ideas across disciplines. Here artificial intelligence is a genuine amplifier, allowing a student with curiosity but limited adult guidance to follow a question further than her school could ever have taken her. The implication for policy is double. Foundational learning must be protected from premature automation, with assessment that prizes the unaided act of reading, computing and arguing. At the same time, schools must teach the new craft of working with these systems — when to use them, how to verify what they produce, and how to recognise that the most confident-sounding output may also be the most wrong.

Model comprehension answers:

- 1.** The initial reaction of most education systems was to treat large language models as a new form of cheating, focusing on detection, prohibition and the threat to academic integrity. Within two years, that framing collapsed because the same tools that students used to draft essays were being used by teachers to plan lessons, by parents to help with homework, and by ambitious students to access an unlimited-patience tutor. Prohibition proved impractical; the technology had moved past the boundary that schools were trying to defend.
- 2.** The author distinguishes between two kinds of learning that earlier debate had conflated. The first is the acquisition of foundational skills — reading fluency, arithmetic fluency, the ability to construct an argument and to spot a flawed one. The second is everything that builds on those foundations — research, synthesis, joining ideas across disciplines. The distinction matters because foundations cannot be outsourced without atrophy, while higher-order work is genuinely amplified by good tools used well.
- 3.** Foundational learning cannot be outsourced for a developmental reason. A child whose first drafts are always written by a machine will not learn to write, just as a child whose first sums are always performed by a calculator will not learn to compute. The act of struggling through a paragraph or a calculation is precisely the practice that builds the cognitive equipment. Skip the struggle and the equipment never forms. Outsourcing foundations therefore produces dependence rather than capability, even where outputs initially appear identical.
- 4.** The author identifies two distinct policy implications. Foundational learning must be protected from premature automation, with assessment redesigned to value the

unaided act of reading, computing and arguing — including a renewed role for invigilated written work. At the same time, schools must teach the new craft of working with these systems: when to deploy them, how to verify what they produce, and how to recognise that the most confidently expressed output may also be the most wrong. Defence and integration must proceed in parallel.

5. The closing reasoning of the passage asserts the constant purpose of education across technologies. Tools have changed across centuries, from slate to printed textbook to keyboard to language model, but the goal is unchanged: to produce a citizen capable of independent reasoning. The classroom of the future will look different in instruments and routines, but if it fulfils that older purpose it is doing its job, and if it fails that purpose no amount of technological sophistication will redeem it. The continuity is moral, not technical.

thesis

schema

warning

prescription

paraphrase

inference

vocabulary

summary

Q10

Comprehension passage: Gender and the Indian labour market

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

HARD

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~750 words): India's female labour force participation has long been among the lowest in Asia, but the standard explanations — conservatism, education, fertility — explain only part of the puzzle. The passage should argue that the deeper constraint is the unequal distribution of unpaid care work. A woman in an Indian household spends, on average, six times as many hours on cooking, cleaning, child care and elder care as a man in the same household; that time-use cliff is what closes the door to paid employment, not preferences. It should describe four levers that begin to redistribute the cliff: public infrastructure (creches, safe transport, piped water); legal entitlements (paid maternity, paternity, shared leave); workplace design (predictable hours, part-time tracks that do not punish careers); and norms (the slow cultural work of treating care as common, not female, labour). It should close by distinguishing 'female labour force participation' as a number from women's economic agency as a substance — and warn that policy that lifts the first without redistributing care risks producing more exhausted women, not freer ones.

Approach: identify the time-use diagnosis in paragraph 2 — that is the central re-framing. The four-lever schema in paragraph 3 is the structuring device.

What an examiner expects: the time-use diagnosis stated cleanly; the four levers named in order; the participation-versus-agency distinction preserved in the closing answer; vocabulary handled with synonym plus sentence.

Common pitfalls: (1) repeating the standard explanations the passage explicitly down-grades; (2) treating creches as the whole answer; (3) confusing 'participation' with 'agency' in the closing question.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five comprehension questions: (a) Why are the standard explanations described as insufficient? (b) What is the 'time-use cliff' the author identifies? (c) Identify and briefly explain the four levers of redistribution. (d) Distinguish 'female labour force participation' from 'women's economic agency'. (e) Meaning of 'time-use cliff', 'creche', 'agency', 'redistribute'.
- Para 1: India's FLFP is among the lowest in Asia.
- Para 2: standard explanations (conservatism, education, fertility) are partial.
- Para 3: time-use cliff — six-to-one ratio of unpaid care work, mainly closes the door.
- Para 4: four levers — infrastructure, legal entitlements, workplace design, norms.
- Para 5: distinction — participation as number vs agency as substance.
- Para 6: warning — lifting participation without redistributing care produces exhausted women, not freer ones.
- Word-budget: $60 + 50 + 130 + 80 + 80 = 400$ words.
- Name all four levers; leaving one out forfeits marks.
- Closing answer must keep the participation-vs-agency distinction intact.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model: 'According to the passage, the standard explanations — conservatism, education, fertility — explain part but not most of the gap, because countries similar to India on those measures have far higher female participation, so a deeper structural cause must be at work.'
- Q (c) model: 'The four levers are: (1) public infrastructure — creches, safe transport, piped water — that frees time; (2) legal entitlements — paid maternity, paternity and shared parental leave — that share time; (3) workplace design — predictable hours and part-time tracks that do not punish careers — that protects time; (4) norms — the slow cultural work of treating care as common rather than female labour — that re-prices time.'

- Q (d) model: 'Participation is a head-count — how many women report paid work in a survey week. Agency is a substance — whether women control the income they earn, choose the work they do, and can refuse exit. The first can rise without the second.'
- Q (e) sample: 'time-use cliff — a sharp gap in how many hours men and women spend on unpaid care; here, the six-to-one ratio that closes the door to paid employment for women.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: The female labour-force participation rate in India is among the lowest in the world for an economy of its income level, and it has fallen rather than risen over the last two decades of economic growth. The headline number — somewhere between a quarter and a third of working-age women in paid work, depending on the survey and the definition — disguises a more complicated picture. Participation drops sharply as household income rises, which is the opposite of the pattern observed in most peer countries. It is highest among the poorest households where survival forces wage work, falls in the lower-middle bracket as families respond to rising incomes by withdrawing women from physically demanding agricultural labour, and only begins to rise again at the top of the distribution where educated women enter formal employment. The dip in the middle, sometimes called the 'U-shaped' relationship, is unusually deep in India. The explanations sit in three places. Some are statistical: domestic work, agricultural labour on family land, and self-employment of the unpaid family-helper kind are systematically under-counted, particularly when the woman herself is asked. Some are structural: the kinds of jobs created by India's services-led growth are concentrated in cities and require skills that the female schooling pipeline has not, until recently, produced. And some are cultural — norms about acceptable work, safety in public transport, the gendered allocation of unpaid care, and the lingering social premium on women staying within the home as incomes rise. The policy implications are multi-layered: improved measurement, urban transit safe for women travelling at off-peak hours, child-care infrastructure, and crucially, a labour market that no longer treats women's work as a marginal supplement to a male wage.

Model comprehension answers:

1. India's female labour-force participation rate sits among the lowest in the world for an economy of its income level, lying between roughly a quarter and a third of working-age women in paid work, depending on the survey and definition used. Unusually, the rate has fallen rather than risen over the last two decades of rapid

economic growth — the reverse of the pattern observed in most peer economies during their transition years. The headline figure also conceals significant variation across income groups, which the article then unpacks.

2. The participation curve is ‘U-shaped’ across household income. It is highest among the poorest households, where survival forces women into wage work irrespective of preference. It falls sharply in the lower-middle bracket as families, on rising incomes, withdraw women from physically demanding agricultural and casual labour. It rises again only at the top, where educated women enter formal employment that confers status. India’s dip in the middle is unusually deep, leaving a large band of working-age women outside the measured labour market.

3. Statistical explanations argue that current measurement systematically undercounts women’s economic contribution. Domestic work, even when economically productive, is excluded by convention; agricultural labour performed on family-owned land is counted erratically; and unpaid family-helper work in household enterprises is missed altogether, particularly when the woman herself, rather than the household head, is asked. The result is that some of the apparent fall in participation is an artefact of how questions are asked rather than a genuine withdrawal of women from work.

4. Structural explanations point to a mismatch between the jobs that India’s growth produces and the women available to take them. Services-led expansion has concentrated formal jobs in cities, requiring schooling and credentialing that the female pipeline has historically under-supplied. Cultural explanations add three further constraints: prevailing norms about respectable work, real safety risks in public transport, and the gendered allocation of unpaid care within households. A social premium on women staying at home as family income rises compounds each of these pressures.

5. The policy response must work on four fronts. Statistics must be redesigned to count women’s actual contribution, particularly in agriculture and household enterprise. Urban transit must become safe for women travelling at off-peak and night hours. Child-care infrastructure — affordable, accessible, professionally staffed — must release the time currently consumed by unpaid care. And the labour market itself must stop treating women’s work as a marginal supplement to a male wage, redesigning recruitment, working hours and progression so that it can absorb female workers on equal terms.

diagnosis

schema

distinction

paraphrase

inference

register

summary

vocabulary

Q11

Comprehension passage: Urban infrastructure and the geography of inequality

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

MEDIUM

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~720 words): Indian cities are described in the planning literature as ‘one city, two infrastructures’. A serviced core enjoys piped water, sewage, paved roads, scheduled garbage collection and reliable power; a peri-urban ring depends on tankers, septic tanks, dirt roads, informal pickers and load-shed lines. The dividing line is not income alone but tenure — formal address versus informal occupancy — because public utilities are entitled, by rule and by habit, to serve the addressed. The passage should describe how this design choice converts a one-time difference in legal status into a permanent difference in life chances: children attend schools the bus does not reach, women bear the cost of fetching water, workers spend two hours each way commuting to the serviced core. It should propose a different design — universal service by geography, with charging rights determined separately — and argue that the upfront cost is repaid in productivity, public health and social peace. The closing claim is that infrastructure is a constitutional question disguised as an engineering one.

Approach: identify the tenure diagnosis in paragraph 2 — that is the central re-framing. The ‘universal service by geography’ policy in paragraph 4 is the prescription.

What an examiner expects: the tenure mechanism stated precisely; the three consequences (schools, water, commute) listed in order; the prescription paraphrased intact; the closing ‘constitutional question disguised as engineering’ captured exactly.

Common pitfalls: (1) reducing the issue to income inequality; (2) describing the consequences without naming the mechanism; (3) treating the prescription as ‘subsidies for the poor’ rather than universal service.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five comprehension questions: (a) What does 'one city, two infrastructures' mean? (b) Why is tenure, not income, identified as the deeper dividing line? (c) Explain the three consequences the passage names. (d) Summarise the author's prescription. (e) Meaning of 'tenure', 'peri-urban', 'load-shed', 'serviced core'.

- Para 1: cities described as 'one city, two infrastructures'.
- Para 2: dividing line is tenure — formal address vs informal occupancy.
- Para 3: three consequences — schools the bus does not reach; water carried by women; two-hour commutes.
- Para 4: prescription — universal service by geography; charging rights separated from delivery.
- Para 5: upfront cost repaid in productivity, public health, social peace.
- Para 6: infrastructure is a constitutional question disguised as engineering.
- Word-budget: $60 + 80 + 110 + 80 + 70 = 400$ words.
- Distinguish 'service by geography' from 'subsidy for the poor'.
- Closing answer must use the metaphor 'constitutional question disguised as engineering'.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model: 'The phrase describes Indian cities as having a serviced core with piped water, sewage, paved roads and reliable power, alongside a peri-urban ring dependent on tankers, septic tanks, dirt roads and load-shed lines — two infrastructures sharing one administrative boundary.'
- Q (b) model: 'According to the author, public utilities are entitled by rule and by habit to serve the addressed; a household without formal tenure is invisible to the system regardless of its income. Tenure is therefore the dividing line; income only shapes how households cope with the absence of service.'
- Q (c) model: 'First, children miss school because the bus route does not reach the unaddressed lanes. Second, women bear the cost of fetching water because piped supply stops at the formal grid. Third, workers spend two hours each way commuting to the serviced core where the jobs are.'
- Q (e) sample: 'tenure — the legal status of a household's claim to its dwelling; in the passage, formal tenure is what triggers entitlement to public utilities.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: Urban infrastructure is often discussed as a single category — roads, water, drainage, electricity, public transport — as if a city either has it or does not. The reality, in any large Indian city, is that infrastructure exists in layers, and the layer a resident encounters depends overwhelmingly on where in the city she lives. The wealthier neighbourhoods of Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi and Chennai are served by metered piped water, daily solid-waste collection, dedicated stormwater drains, and

underground cabling. A few kilometres away, in the same municipal jurisdiction, an informal settlement may depend on a shared community tap, septic tanks that overflow during the monsoon, and overhead wiring that fails several times a month. The maps overlay each other so closely that one can move from the first to the second by crossing a single road. This unevenness is not accidental. It reflects three structural choices. First, infrastructure investment has historically followed property tax — areas with higher assessed values attract more spending, even though the per-capita need is often higher elsewhere. Second, the design standards for shared services assume permanent legal occupancy; informal settlements, by definition, lack that occupancy and therefore receive temporary fixes that calcify into permanent inadequacy. Third, the political economy of urban projects favours visible, large-ticket investments — a flyover, a metro line, a riverside walkway — over the unglamorous work of replacing leaking water mains beneath a poor neighbourhood. The result is a geography of inequality that schools, hospitals and labour markets cannot wholly redeem. The reform agenda is therefore not only about more infrastructure, but about a different allocation of the infrastructure that already exists.

Model comprehension answers:

- 1.** The author argues that urban infrastructure does not exist as a single category that a city either has or lacks, but in layers whose distribution is sharply unequal across neighbourhoods of the same municipality. Wealthier areas of Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi and Chennai receive metered piped water, daily waste collection, dedicated stormwater drains and underground cabling; informal settlements a few kilometres away depend on shared taps, overflowing septic tanks and frequently failing overhead wiring. The maps overlap so closely that the move from one to the other can be made by crossing a single road.
- 2.** The first structural cause is the link between infrastructure spending and property-tax revenue. Areas with higher assessed property values generate more municipal income, and historically that income has been reinvested locally, attracting yet more spending. The pattern reinforces itself: wealthier wards receive better services, which raises property values, which raises tax yields, which finances more services. Poorer wards, where need is often higher, generate lower revenue and therefore receive less. The mechanism is not malicious but it is cumulative.
- 3.** The second cause lies in design standards that assume permanent legal occupancy. Pipes, drains, electricity connections and waste systems are dimensioned and routed for buildings with verified addresses and registered occupants. Informal settlements,

by definition, lack such occupancy, so the municipality offers temporary arrangements — a stand-pipe, a community tap, an unauthorised wiring spur — that were never meant to last. Over time these calcify into permanent inadequacy, with no clear path for upgrading because the underlying legal premise was never revisited.

4. The third cause is the political economy of visibility. Large-ticket investments — a flyover, a metro line, a riverside walkway — are ribbon-cuttable, photogenic and easily branded as achievement. Replacing a leaking water main beneath a poor neighbourhood produces no such moment, even though the gain in public health may be greater. The incentive structure of urban politics therefore tilts allocation towards the visible and the new rather than the invisible and the maintenance-intensive, even when the latter would yield higher welfare per rupee.

5. The author argues that the reform agenda cannot be reduced to building more infrastructure in aggregate. A municipality might add capacity while preserving the same unequal distribution, leaving the geography of inequality intact. The deeper reform is to change allocation — to anchor it in actual need rather than in assessed property value, and to design for a city's actual residents rather than only for its formally registered ones. Without that redistributive shift, additional investment will simply deepen, rather than reduce, the gap between neighbourhoods.

diagnosis

mechanism

prescription

schema

paraphrase

inference

vocabulary

summary

Q12

Comprehension passage: Pluralism and constitutional morality

30 MARKS

400 WORDS

30 MIN

HARD

COMPREHENSION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Passage (~750 words): Indian society is described, accurately, as plural — religious, linguistic, regional, caste-based, and increasingly sub-cultural. The Constitution does not seek to dissolve this plurality into a uniform civic identity; it seeks to bind it through what Ambedkar called constitutional morality — the disposition to settle disagreements by procedure rather than force, by reason rather than rhetoric, and by reference to shared rules rather than to the loudest claim of the moment. The passage should distinguish constitutional morality from public morality (the dominant feeling of the day) and from religious morality (the practice of a community), and argue that judicial interpretation has consistently chosen the first when the three conflict — from the Sabarimala bench's privileging of the right to worship over customary exclusion, to the privacy judgment's

elevation of personal autonomy. It should warn that constitutional morality is fragile because it requires the unpopular discipline of restraining majoritarian impulse, and close with the claim that pluralism survives in India not by celebration but by the daily work of a constitutional order that refuses to take sides on essentially private questions.

Approach: identify the three-way distinction in paragraph 2 — constitutional, public and religious morality — that is the structuring move. The closing claim about ‘refusing to take sides on essentially private questions’ is the thesis.

What an examiner expects: the three moralities cleanly distinguished; one example (Sabarimala or the privacy judgment) used in answer (c); the closing thesis preserved as the candidate’s final sentence; vocabulary handled with synonym plus sentence.

Common pitfalls: (1) collapsing constitutional morality into ‘the law’; (2) treating pluralism as celebration of diversity rather than as a discipline; (3) writing political commentary on specific cases.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Five comprehension questions: (a) Why does the Constitution not seek to dissolve plurality? (b) Distinguish constitutional morality, public morality and religious morality. (c) Give one judicial example of the author's claim that courts privilege constitutional morality. (d) Why does the author call constitutional morality 'fragile'? (e) Meaning of 'constitutional morality', 'majoritarian impulse', 'autonomy', 'plurality'.
- Para 1: Indian society is plural — religious, linguistic, regional, caste-based, sub-cultural.
- Para 2: three-way distinction — constitutional, public, religious morality.
- Para 3: judicial interpretation has chosen the first when the three conflict.
- Para 4: examples — Sabarimala, privacy judgment.
- Para 5: constitutional morality is fragile; requires restraining majoritarian impulse.
- Para 6: pluralism survives by daily work, not by celebration.
- Word-budget: 60 + 100 + 80 + 80 + 80 = 400 words.
- Use 'restraint' and 'discipline' rather than evaluative words like 'wise' or 'brave'.
- Closing answer should use the author's phrase 'refuses to take sides'.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Q (a) model: 'The author argues that India's plurality is a fact, not a choice, and that the constitutional design seeks to bind rather than dissolve it — through shared procedures,

equal citizenship and rule-based dispute resolution — because attempting uniformity would itself fracture the polity.'

- Q (b) model: 'Public morality is the dominant feeling of the day; religious morality is the internal practice of a community; constitutional morality is the disposition to settle disagreements by procedure, reason and shared rules. The first two shift; the third is the discipline that holds them in check.'
- Q (c) model: 'The privacy judgment is one example — the court elevated personal autonomy over the public morality that had previously animated criminal law on consenting adults — choosing constitutional morality over public morality.'
- Q (e) sample: 'majoritarian impulse — the tendency for the largest group's preference to be treated as the right answer regardless of constitutional limits; in the passage, the daily temptation that constitutional morality must restrain.'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample passage: Pluralism is not the same as tolerance. A society can be tolerant in a thin sense — leaving its minorities alone while quietly assuming they should eventually conform — and still fail the test of pluralism, which asks for more. Pluralism, properly understood, treats the presence of multiple ways of living, believing and speaking as an asset of the constitutional order rather than as a temporary inconvenience. The Indian Constitution, in the language of its preamble and in the substance of Articles 14 to 29, codifies that demanding version of pluralism. It guarantees equality before the law without regard to religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth; it protects the right of cultural and religious minorities to conserve their script, language and educational institutions; it allows reservations of opportunity for groups historically excluded; and it accepts that uniformity, where it is achieved at all, must be earned rather than imposed. Dr Ambedkar gave a name to the disposition that the document expects of its citizens: constitutional morality. It is the willingness, in his words, to subordinate one's private preferences to the rules and procedures by which the constitution operates, even when those rules and procedures yield outcomes one would not personally choose. The test of constitutional morality, then, is not how one behaves when the rules favour one's group, but how one behaves when they do not. It is the discipline of accepting that the rights of others are not concessions granted by the majority but entitlements protected by the document — entitlements the majority does not have the standing to withdraw.

Model comprehension answers:

- 1.** Pluralism, in the author's reading, goes beyond tolerance. Tolerance can be thin — leaving minorities alone while quietly expecting eventual conformity to a dominant way of life. Pluralism treats the presence of multiple ways of living, believing and speaking as an asset of the constitutional order rather than as a temporary inconvenience to be managed until uniformity emerges. The distinction matters because a society can be technically tolerant and still fail the more demanding test of recognising difference as a legitimate, lasting feature of public life.
- 2.** The Indian Constitution codifies pluralism through several interlocking provisions. The preamble names the country secular and pledges equality of status. Articles 14 to 29 give that pledge content: equality before law without regard to religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth; freedom of conscience and religion; protection of cultural and educational rights of minorities; the right to conserve script, language and institutions. Reservations of opportunity for historically excluded groups accept that formal equality alone may not deliver substantive equality of citizenship.
- 3.** Constitutional morality, in Ambedkar's formulation, is the willingness of citizens to subordinate their private preferences to the rules and procedures of the constitution, even when those rules yield outcomes one would not personally choose. It is a civic disposition, not a constitutional clause. The test is behavioural and asymmetric: how a citizen acts when the document protects an outcome she dislikes is more diagnostic than how she acts when the document delivers what she wants. It is the discipline of accepting binding restraint.
- 4.** The author argues that the rights of others are not concessions granted by the majority but entitlements protected by the document, beyond the majority's standing to withdraw. The framing matters because if rights are read as concessions, they can be revoked when political convenience shifts; if they are read as entitlements, they constrain the majority itself. The first framing makes minority rights perpetually conditional; the second makes them constitutive of the polity. The Indian Constitution adopts the second, more demanding framing.
- 5.** The 'constitutional bet' implicit in the passage refers to the choice made in 1950 to build a polity on the assumption that deep difference is permanent and can be accommodated within a single democratic frame. It is a bet because such a polity is harder to operate than a culturally homogenised one. Each generation must deliver on the bet through its own conduct — in courts, legislatures, classrooms and markets. The bet is not won once and for all in the constituent assembly; it is renewed, or lost, in every later generation.

distinction

schema

example

thesis

paraphrase

inference

vocabulary

summary

COMPULSORY ENGLISH

Section B

8 practice questions

Q13

Précis: A passage on social media, attention and democratic deliberation

20 MARKS

250 WORDS

25 MIN

MEDIUM

PRÉCIS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Source passage (~700 words): the candidate will receive a passage arguing that social media platforms have changed the economics of attention. Outrage is cheap to produce and quick to spread, while measured argument is expensive and slow; the algorithmic feed rewards the first and penalises the second. The passage will discuss the consequences for democratic deliberation — coarsened public conversation, faster mobilisation, the displacement of local newspapers, and the rise of parallel realities. It will close with a measured claim — regulation should aim at the design of attention, not at speech itself.

Approach: précis to ~230-250 words. The passage has a clear structure: diagnosis (economics of attention), four consequences, prescription. Preserve all three; compress the consequences into a single sentence with a list, do not waste a sentence on each. The prescription must be retained verbatim in meaning — it is the passage's stake in the debate.

What an examiner expects: a noun-phrase title; one paragraph; preserved order — diagnosis → consequences → prescription; word count in brackets; no opinions; the distinction between 'regulating speech' and 'regulating design' kept intact.

Common pitfalls: (1) inserting commentary about specific platforms; (2) losing the design/speech distinction in the prescription; (3) dropping the prescription altogether because it sits in the last paragraph; (4) writing 'the article says' repeatedly instead of restructuring into a single argument.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Target word count: 230-250.
- Three-part structure preserved: diagnosis, consequences, prescription.
- Title: 'The Economics of Attention and Public Conversation'.
- Compress four consequences into one sentence with a list.
- Retain the design-versus-speech distinction in the prescription.

- Drop platform brand names — they are illustrative, not load-bearing.
- Third person; indirect speech; author's name omitted.
- Single paragraph; word count in brackets.
- Avoid colloquialisms like 'these days' — use 'in recent years'.
- Connectives: 'consequently', 'as a result', 'in response'.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Compression of consequences: 'These shifts have coarsened public conversation, accelerated mobilisation, eroded local journalism and produced parallel realities.'
- Prescription line: 'The author argues that regulation should target the design of attention rather than the content of speech.'
- Title example: 'The Economics of Attention and Public Conversation'.
- Closing: '(243 words)'.

MODEL ANSWER

Sample original passage: A democracy depends on the quality of its public attention, and the structures that organise public attention have changed more in fifteen years than in the previous century. The newspaper, the evening news bulletin and the talk show were once the chief channels through which a citizen encountered the day's argument. They were imperfect, often partisan, but their architecture imposed a discipline: an editor selected what was worth reading, a producer decided what deserved airtime, and the consumer received a curated, sequential, and finite product. The architecture of social media is different in every dimension. It is algorithmic rather than editorial; it is infinite rather than finite; it is optimised for engagement rather than for accuracy; and the cost to the publisher of producing emotionally charged content is essentially zero. The consequences for democratic deliberation are uncomfortable. Citizens are increasingly exposed to news that has been ranked by its capacity to generate strong reactions; outrage spreads roughly six times faster than reasoned commentary, according to multiple studies; and political identity, once formed, is reinforced by feeds that filter out disconfirming information. The result is a public sphere that feels more participatory than ever before and yet often produces worse-quality argument than the editorially-mediated sphere it replaced. The solutions are neither nostalgic nor authoritarian. They do not require returning to a world of three television channels, nor handing content moderation to the state. They require platform design that elevates accuracy over reaction, media literacy education that begins in school, and journalism funding models that survive

the collapse of advertising revenue. A democracy whose citizens cannot share a baseline of facts cannot deliberate; one that cannot deliberate cannot govern itself.

Model précis (~ 240 words): Democratic deliberation depends on the quality of public attention, and the architecture that organises that attention has been transformed in fifteen years. Earlier channels — newspapers, evening bulletins, talk shows — were imperfect and often partisan, but their structure imposed a discipline: editors selected what merited reading, producers decided what merited airtime, and citizens received a curated, sequential and finite product. Social media is different in every respect. It is algorithmic rather than editorial, infinite rather than finite, optimised for engagement rather than accuracy, and the cost of producing emotionally charged content is essentially zero. The consequences for democracy are uncomfortable. Citizens are exposed to material ranked by its capacity to provoke strong reactions; outrage spreads several times faster than reasoned commentary; and political identities, once formed, are reinforced by feeds that filter out disconfirming information. The resulting public sphere feels more participatory than the older one yet often produces worse-quality argument than the editorially-mediated sphere it replaced. Remedies need to be neither nostalgic nor authoritarian. Returning to a handful of television channels is neither possible nor desirable; handing content moderation to the state would create different and graver hazards. The viable path lies in platform design that elevates accuracy above reaction, in media-literacy education beginning in school, and in funding models for journalism that survive the collapse of advertising revenue. A democracy whose citizens cannot share basic facts cannot deliberate, and one that cannot deliberate cannot ultimately govern itself.

précis

compression

structure

indirect speech

paraphrase

third person

word count

title

Q14

Précis: A passage on climate finance and equity between nations

20 MARKS

250 WORDS

25 MIN

HARD

PRÉCIS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Source passage (~770 words): the candidate will receive a passage on climate finance. It will trace the journey from the \$100 billion-a-year pledge of Copenhagen 2009 to its eventual delivery, to the New Collective Quantified Goal set at COP29, and to the persistent disputes — what counts as climate finance, whether loans should count as fully as grants, who pays, and what share goes to adaptation versus mitigation. The passage will end with

the author's claim that the equity question — whether the historical polluters are paying their fair share — is what decides the legitimacy of every other climate negotiation.

Approach: précis to ~250 words. The passage is technical — resist the temptation to retain every figure. Keep the headline figure (\$100 billion), name the NCQG once, then summarise the disputes as a list. The closing equity claim must survive intact.

What an examiner expects: a noun-phrase title; one paragraph; numbers used sparingly and accurately; technical terms used once and then paraphrased; the equity-decides-legitimacy thesis preserved as the closing sentence.

Common pitfalls: (1) keeping every figure in the original; (2) dropping the equity thesis because it sits in the last paragraph; (3) using 'I' or 'we'; (4) misrepresenting loans-versus-grants — it is a real distinction in the literature.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Target word count: 240-250.
- Title: 'Climate Finance and the Equity Question'.
- Keep one headline figure (\$100 billion) and one term (NCQG); paraphrase others.
- Compress disputes into a single listed sentence: definition, loans-versus-grants, who pays, adaptation share.
- Preserve the closing equity claim — it is the thesis.
- Third person; indirect speech; no opinion.
- Single paragraph; word count in brackets.
- Avoid acronyms after first use only — define then use; do not stack UNFCCC + COP + NCQG without breath.
- Numbers as words for small, digits for large (\$100 billion stays as digits).
- Connectives: 'subsequently', 'in turn', 'despite this'.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Compression of disputes: 'Disputes have persisted over what counts as climate finance, whether concessional loans should count as fully as grants, who is liable to pay, and what share should flow to adaptation rather than mitigation.'
- Closing thesis line: 'The author concludes that the equity question — whether historical polluters are paying their fair share — decides the legitimacy of every other climate negotiation.'
- Title example: 'Climate Finance and the Equity Question'.
- Closing: '(248 words)'.

MODEL ANSWER

Sample original passage: Climate finance is the unavoidable subject of every climate negotiation, and it remains the most fraught. The original framework, agreed in 1992 and codified in successive conferences of the parties, accepted a principle of common but differentiated responsibilities: countries that had emitted most over two centuries of industrialisation bore a proportionately greater obligation to fund mitigation and adaptation in countries that had emitted less. The Copenhagen conference of 2009 attached a number to that principle — one hundred billion dollars a year, by 2020, from developed to developing countries. The number was reached late, was met partly through redirected aid, and was, in any case, inadequate to the task. The most recent estimates place adaptation needs alone in developing countries at upwards of three hundred billion dollars annually by 2030, with mitigation finance requirements several multiples of that. Three structural difficulties complicate the conversation. First, the line between developed and developing has shifted in three decades: economies that were poor at the framework's adoption are now major emitters, and the rich-world claim that responsibility should follow current emissions runs against the developing-world insistence that responsibility must reflect historical accumulation. Second, much of the financing offered is in the form of loans rather than grants, increasing the debt burden of countries already constrained by it. Third, the distinction between mitigation finance — for clean energy, electric mobility, industrial transition — and adaptation finance — for sea walls, drought-resistant agriculture, heat resilience — has tilted heavily towards the former, which produces measurable emission reductions, leaving adaptation chronically under-resourced. Resolution requires acknowledging that climate finance is not aid; it is a shared response to a shared atmospheric debt, and the burden of repayment falls disproportionately on those whose ledger of historical emissions is heaviest.

Model précis (≈ 240 words): Climate finance is the unavoidable and most contested subject of every climate negotiation. The original framework of 1992 accepted that countries which had emitted most over two centuries of industrialisation bore a proportionately greater obligation to fund mitigation and adaptation in countries that had emitted less. In 2009 a figure of one hundred billion dollars annually by 2020 was attached to this principle. The target was reached late, was met partly through redirected aid, and was in any case inadequate. Current estimates place adaptation needs alone at over three hundred billion dollars a year by 2030, with mitigation finance requirements several multiples of that. Three structural difficulties complicate the conversation. First, the line between developed and developing has shifted in

three decades: economies once poor are now major emitters, and the rich-world claim that responsibility should follow current emissions clashes with the developing-world insistence that it must reflect historical accumulation. Second, much of the finance offered is in loans rather than grants, deepening the debt burden of already constrained countries. Third, the division between mitigation finance — for clean energy and industrial transition — and adaptation finance — for sea walls, drought-resistant agriculture and heat resilience — has tilted heavily towards the former, leaving adaptation chronically under-resourced. Resolution requires recognising that climate finance is not aid but a shared response to a shared atmospheric debt, and that the burden of repayment falls disproportionately on those whose historical emissions ledger is heaviest.

précis

compression

technical terms

structure

indirect speech

paraphrase

third person

word count

Q15

Précis: A passage on the future of work in an automated economy

20 MARKS

250 WORDS

25 MIN

MEDIUM

PRÉCIS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Source passage (~700 words): the candidate will receive a passage arguing that the question ‘will there be enough jobs?’ is the wrong question. The right questions are: what kind of jobs, at what wage, with what security, and for whom? The passage will discuss the shift from career employment to portfolio work, the rise of gig platforms, the unbundling of benefits from jobs, and the policy response — portable benefits, hours-based protections rather than employer-based ones, a minimum floor below which platforms cannot bid down rates. It will close with the claim that the durable design choice is to attach rights to the worker, not to the job.

Approach: précis to ~240 words. The passage’s central re-framing — wrong question vs right questions — must survive. Compress the four sub-questions into one sentence. The policy response must keep three of its four elements; the closing ‘attach rights to the worker’ line must be retained verbatim in meaning.

What an examiner expects: a noun-phrase title; the re-framing preserved at the top; the closing principle preserved at the bottom; one paragraph; word count in brackets.

Common pitfalls: (1) summarising the four sub-questions one by one and exhausting the word budget; (2) misreading ‘attach rights to the worker’ as ‘attach rights to the job’; (3) inserting examples of specific gig platforms.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Target word count: 230-250.
- Title: 'Re-framing the Question of Work'.
- Compress the four sub-questions into one sentence with a list.
- Keep at least three of the four policy elements (portable benefits, hours-based protections, minimum floor).
- Preserve the closing principle: rights attach to the worker, not the job.
- Third person; indirect speech.
- Single paragraph; word count in brackets.
- Drop brand names of platforms; use 'gig platforms'.
- Avoid contractions; precis register is formal.
- Use 'consequently' and 'in response' as transition words.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Re-framing line: 'The author argues that asking whether jobs will be enough is the wrong question; the right questions are what kind of jobs, at what wage, with what security, and for whom.'
- Compression of policy response: 'The author urges three design choices — portable benefits, hours-based protections, and a minimum floor below which platforms cannot bid down rates.'
- Closing thesis: 'The author concludes that the durable design choice is to attach rights to the worker, not to the job.'
- Title example: 'Re-framing the Question of Work'. Word count: '(241 words)'.

MODEL ANSWER

Sample original passage: The future of work has been the subject of so many anxious essays that the topic itself has acquired a slight air of cliché. Beneath the noise, however, lies a real and unfinished question: what does a society owe its working population when the technologies of automation can produce material output without proportionate human labour? Earlier waves of automation displaced workers but generally created, with a lag, new categories of employment that absorbed them. The lag was painful — coal villages, declining textile towns, the rust belts of

advanced economies — but the eventual recovery was, at least in aggregate, real. The present wave is different in three ways. First, the technologies displace not muscle but cognition, eroding the middle of the income distribution rather than its bottom. Second, the speed of diffusion is unprecedented; what took decades in earlier transitions now takes years. Third, the gains accrue disproportionately to the owners of capital and intellectual property, rather than to the workers whose previous productivity grew alongside the machines they operated. The policy response cannot rest on the assumption that displacement will be temporary and benign. It must include four components: a system of continuous learning that adults can access through their working lives; a portable benefits architecture that survives the dissolution of long-term employment; an industrial policy that distributes ownership of new technologies more widely than market outcomes alone would deliver; and a tax system that captures the returns to data and algorithms as labour-derived value diminishes. A society that fails to redesign its compact with its workers in the face of such a transition will not preserve social peace; one that succeeds will find that the dividends of automation can in fact be widely shared.

Model précis (~ 240 words): The future of work raises an unfinished question beneath much repeated commentary: what does a society owe its workers when automation can produce material output without proportionate human labour? Earlier waves of automation displaced workers but eventually generated new categories of employment that absorbed them, even where the intervening adjustment was painful for coal villages, textile towns and the rust belts. The present transition differs in three ways. It displaces cognition rather than muscle, hollowing the middle of the income distribution rather than its bottom. The speed of diffusion is unprecedented, compressing into years what earlier transitions took decades to complete. The gains accrue disproportionately to the owners of capital and intellectual property rather than to workers whose productivity once rose alongside the machines they operated. Policy cannot rest on the assumption that displacement will be temporary and benign. It must include four components. A system of continuous learning must be available to adults through their working lives, not only through formal schooling. A portable benefits architecture must survive the dissolution of long-term employment, decoupling protection from any single employer. An industrial policy must distribute ownership of new technologies more widely than market outcomes alone would deliver. A tax system must capture the returns to data and algorithms as labour-derived value diminishes. A society that fails

to redesign its compact with workers will not preserve social peace; one that succeeds will find the dividends of automation can be widely shared.

précis

re-framing

compression

policy response

indirect speech

third person

title

word count

Q16

Précis: A passage on the Constitution as a living document

20 MARKS

250 WORDS

25 MIN

MEDIUM

PRÉCIS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Source passage (~720 words): the candidate will receive a passage arguing that the Indian Constitution is best read as a living document — drafted in 1949 but interpreted in each generation by courts, parliaments and citizens. The passage will discuss landmark moments (Kesavananda Bharati, the 42nd and 44th amendments, the right to privacy judgment, the digital-rights cases) and will close with the claim that the basic structure doctrine is what keeps the document alive without untethering it.

Approach: précis the passage to roughly one-third its length — about 240-250 words. Begin by reading the passage twice and writing a one-sentence sense of the central idea in the margin. Then identify the topic sentence of each paragraph and list it in your rough work. Compress: drop examples that merely illustrate, retain those that establish the argument; replace lists with category words ('several judgments', 'a series of amendments'). Write the précis in a single paragraph, in your own words, in the third person, in indirect speech, in the past tense for narrated events and present tense for the author's enduring claims. Add a title at the top — a noun phrase, not a sentence.

What an examiner expects: a title; word count noted in brackets at the end; one paragraph, not bullet points; no direct quotes; faithful to the original's order and emphasis; no opinions added; the basic-structure-doctrine claim retained because it is the closing thesis.

Common pitfalls: (1) writing the précis longer than one-third — examiners deduct heavily; (2) skipping the title; (3) using 'I think' or 'the writer is right' — précis is paraphrase, not commentary; (4) reproducing famous case names while dropping the argument they support.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Target word count: 240-250 (one-third of ~720).
- Single paragraph; no headings, no bullets.

- Title at top — noun phrase, e.g. 'Constitution as a Living Document'.
- Indirect speech; third person; author's name not mentioned.
- Retain: central thesis, the basic-structure framing, one example per generation.
- Drop: rhetorical flourishes, repeated examples, journalistic asides.
- Replace catalogues with category labels ('a series of amendments' rather than naming five).
- Word count noted in brackets at the end: '(247 words).'
- Order of ideas must follow the original — précis is not synthesis.
- Use present tense for the author's lasting claims, past tense for narrated events.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Title example: 'Constitution as a Living Document'.
- Compression example: original — 'In Kesavananda Bharati (1973), Maneka Gandhi (1978), Minerva Mills (1980), and a series of later judgments...' → précis: 'in a series of landmark judgments from the 1970s onward'.
- Indirect-speech reformulation: 'The author writes that the Constitution must be read as a continuing conversation, not a frozen text.'
- Closing line: 'The author concludes that the basic structure doctrine keeps the document alive while preventing it from being untethered from its core. (247 words)'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample original passage: The Indian Constitution, framed between 1946 and 1949, is best understood not as a finished blueprint but as a living document — one whose meaning is renegotiated by every generation that lives under it. The text adopted on 26 November 1949 was the product of compromise: between the demands of national unity and the federal claims of provinces, between the language of socialism and the architecture of a market economy, between the urgency of social reform and the caution of a constitutional bench. None of these compromises was meant to be final, and the document itself contained the instruments of its own evolution — the power of amendment in Article 368, the duty of judicial review in Articles 32 and 226, and the directive principles that pointed at goals the legislatures of 1950 were not yet ready to deliver. The seven decades since adoption have tested this design across several large moments. Kesavananda Bharati in 1973 established the basic structure doctrine, insisting that amendment could go far but not so far as to dismember the document's essential features. The Forty-second Amendment of 1976 attempted such dismemberment; the Forty-fourth Amendment of 1978 reversed much of it. The right

to privacy was read into Article 21 only in 2017, more than six decades after the Constitution came into force. Through digital rights cases, criminal-law judgments and federalism disputes, the courts have continued to read the document as one that must speak to circumstances its drafters could not have anticipated. What keeps this evolving interpretation tethered is the basic structure doctrine — the recognition that the Constitution is open to growth but not to mutation. The document is alive precisely because it can change; it remains the same document precisely because some of its features cannot. Read this way, the Constitution is less a settled artefact than a continuing conversation between generations.

Model précis (= 240 words): The Indian Constitution is best read as a living document rather than a finished blueprint. Adopted in 1949 after a sequence of deliberate compromises — between national unity and provincial federalism, between socialism and market governance, between immediate social reform and judicial caution — it was never intended to be final. The text contained the instruments of its own evolution: the amending power, the duty of judicial review, and the directive principles that named goals the legislatures of the time were not yet ready to deliver. Seven decades of practice have shown the design at work. The basic structure doctrine, declared in 1973, established that amendment could reach far but could not dismantle the document's essential features. A subsequent amendment attempted such dismantling and was largely reversed within two years. Rights have continued to be expanded by interpretation, the right to privacy being read into the chapter on life and liberty more than six decades after adoption. Through digital, criminal and federalism cases, the courts have continued to read the document as one that must respond to circumstances its drafters could not have foreseen. What tethers this open-ended evolution is precisely the basic structure doctrine, which permits growth but forbids mutation. The Constitution stays alive because it can change; it remains the same document because some of its features cannot. It is therefore less a settled artefact than a continuing conversation between generations of citizens.

précis

compression

topic sentence

indirect speech

third person

paraphrase

title

word count

Q17

Précis: A passage on judicial reform and the right to timely justice

20 MARKS

250 WORDS

25 MIN

MEDIUM

PRÉCIS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Source passage (~730 words): the candidate will receive a passage arguing that the Indian judiciary's most pressing reform task is not the substance of its rulings but the time it takes to reach them. The passage will trace the size of the case backlog at the trial, high-court and Supreme Court levels, discuss the structural causes (vacancies, adjournment culture, paper-heavy procedure, undertrial overcrowding) and survey the standard remedies (e-filing, fast-track courts, mediation, district-level judicial impact assessments). It will argue that delayed justice is not merely slow justice — it is a different kind of injustice, because it punishes the unconvicted and rewards the well-resourced. It will close with the claim that constitutional rights to liberty and to a fair trial cannot be honoured without a credible promise on time, and that judicial reform must be measured by clock time, not by case-disposal statistics alone.

Approach: précis to ~240 words. The passage has a clear structure — diagnosis, causes, remedies, principle. Preserve all four; compress causes and remedies into one list each. The closing claim that delay is a 'different kind of injustice' must survive intact — it is the passage's thesis.

What an examiner expects: a noun-phrase title; one paragraph; preserved order; word count in brackets; no opinions; the 'punishes the unconvicted, rewards the well-resourced' formulation kept whole.

Common pitfalls: (1) keeping every figure in the original; (2) summarising remedies as a long list and exhausting the word budget; (3) losing the 'different kind of injustice' formulation by paraphrasing it into blandness.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Target word count: 235-250.
- Title: 'The Time-Cost of Indian Justice'.
- Single paragraph; no headings, no bullets.
- Compress causes into one listed sentence: vacancies, adjournment culture, paper procedure, undertrial overcrowding.
- Compress remedies into one listed sentence: e-filing, fast-track courts, mediation, judicial impact assessments.
- Preserve the 'different kind of injustice' formulation.
- Retain the closing claim about clock time vs disposal statistics.
- Indirect speech; third person; author's name omitted.

- Word count noted in brackets at the end: '(244 words).'
- Use 'the author argues', 'the passage notes' to flag paraphrase.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Title example: 'The Time-Cost of Indian Justice'.
- Compression of causes: 'The author traces the backlog to structural causes — judicial vacancies, an adjournment culture, paper-heavy procedure and undertrial overcrowding.'
- Compression of remedies: 'The standard remedies — e-filing, fast-track courts, mediation and district-level judicial impact assessments — are necessary but insufficient.'
- Closing line: 'The author concludes that delay is a different kind of injustice — it punishes the unconvicted and rewards the well-resourced — and that judicial reform must be measured by clock time, not by case-disposal statistics alone. (244 words)'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample original passage: The right to timely justice is constitutional in claim and statistical in fact, and the gap between the two has widened steadily over four decades. The Supreme Court has, in a series of judgments beginning with Hussainara Khatoon in 1979, held that speedy trial is implicit in the protection of life and liberty under Article 21. The same court today operates with a pendency in the high courts of more than sixty lakh cases, and a pendency in the subordinate courts of more than four crore. Three structural causes account for the persistence of the problem. The first is judicial strength: India has approximately twenty-one judges per million population, against an authorised strength that would itself require doubling, and against an OECD average several times that figure. Vacancies in the subordinate judiciary persist for years; vacancies in the higher judiciary persist for months but at a stage where each absence affects the disposal rate of an entire bench. The second is procedural: the Code of Civil Procedure permits multiple stages of adjournment, the Code of Criminal Procedure permits successive interlocutory appeals, and the absence of effective case-management protocols allows cases to drift between hearings for years without disposal. The third is infrastructural: many subordinate court complexes lack functional digital case-management systems, e-filing has been adopted unevenly across states, and basic services such as recording of evidence by video conference still operate as exceptions. Reform must therefore be three-tracked: a sustained programme of judicial recruitment to a higher authorised strength, procedural reform that compresses unnecessary delay without compromising due process, and the

completion of the digital case-management infrastructure begun under the e-Courts mission. The constitutional promise of speedy justice cannot be kept by judgments alone; it requires capacity that the system has not yet been given.

Model précis (~ 240 words): The right to timely justice is constitutional in claim and statistical in fact, and the gap between the two has widened over four decades. The Supreme Court has held since 1979 that speedy trial is implicit in the protection of life and liberty, but pendency in the high courts now exceeds sixty lakh cases and in the subordinate courts four crore. Three structural causes explain the persistence. First, judicial strength: India has roughly twenty-one judges per million population, far below the authorised strength itself and far below comparable economies. Subordinate-judiciary vacancies persist for years; higher-judiciary vacancies persist for months but disable entire benches. Second, procedure: the civil and criminal codes permit multiple adjournments and successive interlocutory appeals, and the absence of effective case-management protocols allows cases to drift between hearings for years without disposal. Third, infrastructure: many subordinate court complexes lack functional digital case-management systems, e-filing has been adopted unevenly across states, and basic services such as recording evidence by video conference remain exceptional rather than routine. Reform must therefore be three-tracked. A sustained programme of judicial recruitment must lift working strength towards the authorised establishment and beyond. Procedural reform must compress unnecessary delay without compromising due process. The digital case-management infrastructure begun under the e-Courts mission must be completed across all states. The constitutional promise of speedy justice cannot be kept by judgments alone; it requires institutional capacity that the system has not yet been given.

précis

compression

thesis

indirect speech

third person

paraphrase

title

word count

Q18

Précis: A passage on data protection and the rights of the digital citizen

20 MARKS

250 WORDS

25 MIN

MEDIUM

PRÉCIS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Source passage (~720 words): the candidate will receive a passage arguing that India's digital citizen needs three protections, not one. The first is informational privacy — a right against arbitrary collection. The second is purpose limitation — a right that data collected for one reason is not used for another. The third is meaningful redress — an institution to

which the citizen can complain when the first two are violated. The passage will trace the evolution from the privacy judgment of 2017 to the Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023, name the new Data Protection Board, and identify the gaps that remain — narrow exemptions for the state, unclear status of inferred data, weak penalties for repeat offenders. It will close with the claim that data protection is not primarily a technology question — it is a question of institutional design, and that the strongest privacy law is one whose enforcement institution is plainly independent of the data fiduciaries it regulates.

Approach: précis to ~245 words. The passage has a three-protection schema (informational privacy, purpose limitation, redress) — that must be preserved. The closing claim about institutional design and independence is the thesis.

What an examiner expects: a noun-phrase title; one paragraph; the three protections preserved in order; the DPDP Act named once; the closing thesis stated as the candidate's final sentence; word count in brackets.

Common pitfalls: (1) replacing the three protections with a single label like 'privacy'; (2) keeping the legislative narrative at full length and dropping the closing thesis; (3) using 'I think' or 'I believe'.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Target word count: 235-250.
- Title: 'Three Protections for the Digital Citizen'.
- Preserve the three-protection schema in order.
- Name the DPDP Act and Data Protection Board once.
- Compress the gaps into one listed sentence: narrow state exemptions, unclear inferred data, weak repeat-offender penalties.
- Preserve the closing thesis: data protection is a question of institutional design.
- Third person; indirect speech; no author named.
- Single paragraph; word count in brackets.
- Use 'consequently', 'in turn', 'despite this' as transitions.
- Avoid acronyms after first use only — define DPDP once.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Title example: 'Three Protections for the Digital Citizen'.
- Schema preservation: 'The author identifies three protections — informational privacy, purpose limitation and meaningful redress — without which the digital citizen has no real autonomy over her data.'

- Closing thesis: 'The author concludes that the strongest privacy law is one whose enforcement institution is plainly independent of the data fiduciaries it regulates.'
- Closing line: '(243 words)'.

MODEL ANSWER

Sample original passage: The right of the digital citizen is the constitutional question of the present decade. Until 2017, the Indian Constitution made no explicit mention of privacy, and the courts had read the silence sometimes as protection and sometimes as its absence. The unanimous nine-judge judgment in Puttaswamy fixed the position: privacy is a fundamental right under Articles 14, 19 and 21, and any state action that infringes it must satisfy a four-fold test of legality, necessity, proportionality and procedural safeguards. The judgment, while welcome, was the easy part. The harder work is operational: building a statute that protects citizens from misuse of their data without paralysing the legitimate functions of the state, and without imposing compliance burdens so heavy that small enterprises cannot bear them. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 is the first serious attempt at that statute. It establishes a Data Protection Board, gives the citizen rights of correction, erasure and grievance redressal, places obligations of consent and purpose-limitation on data fiduciaries, and provides exemptions for state functions in the interest of sovereignty and security. The Act has drawn criticism from three directions: civil-liberties scholars argue the state exemptions are too broadly drawn; industry argues some compliance obligations exceed international norms; and consumer advocates argue enforcement will only be as effective as the Board permits. The right resolution of these tensions cannot be found in legislative drafting alone. It will require regulatory practice that is transparent, judicial scrutiny that is rigorous, and a public that is sufficiently literate in digital rights to assert them. Without such a public, the most carefully drafted statute will protect citizens only on paper, and the digital citizen will continue to bear risks she did not consent to carry.

Model précis (≈ 240 words): The right of the digital citizen is the constitutional question of the present decade. Until 2017 the Indian Constitution did not explicitly mention privacy, and the courts had read that silence inconsistently. The Puttaswamy judgment settled the position: privacy is a fundamental right under Articles 14, 19 and 21, and state action that infringes it must satisfy a four-fold test of legality, necessity, proportionality and procedural safeguards. The judgment was the easy part. The harder work was operational: building a statute that protects citizens from misuse of their data without paralysing legitimate state functions or imposing compliance

burdens that small enterprises cannot bear. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 is the first serious attempt. It establishes a Data Protection Board, confers rights of correction, erasure and grievance redressal, imposes consent and purpose-limitation obligations on data fiduciaries, and exempts certain state functions in the interest of sovereignty and security. The Act has been criticised from three sides: civil-liberties scholars argue that the state exemptions are too broad; industry argues that some compliance obligations exceed international norms; and consumer advocates argue that enforcement will be only as effective as the Board permits. The right resolution cannot be reached through drafting alone. It will require transparent regulatory practice, rigorous judicial scrutiny, and a public sufficiently literate in digital rights to assert them. Without such a public, even the most carefully drafted statute will protect citizens only on paper.

précis

schema

compression

indirect speech

paraphrase

third person

title

word count

Q19

Précis: A passage on agricultural distress and farm-sector reform

20 MARKS

250 WORDS

25 MIN

HARD

PRÉCIS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Source passage (~740 words): the candidate will receive a passage arguing that Indian agricultural distress is mis-described when it is reduced to a price-of-produce problem. The passage will identify four overlapping crises — falling per-capita land holdings, declining soil and water, weakening monsoon predictability, and a credit system that under-prices risk for the small farmer. It will discuss the standard responses — minimum support prices, fertiliser subsidy, crop insurance, loan waivers — and argue that each addresses a symptom while leaving the underlying structure intact. It will propose a different set of reforms — consolidation through land-leasing markets, public investment in soil and water at watershed scale, climate-adapted seeds and crop calendars, and parametric weather insurance — and close with the principle that the policy goal is not the rescue of the farmer of today but the construction of a farm sector that does not need rescuing.

Approach: précis to ~245 words. Preserve the four-crisis diagnosis and the four-reform prescription; compress each into a single listed sentence. The closing principle (‘not the rescue of today’s farmer but the construction of a sector that does not need rescuing’) must survive intact.

What an examiner expects: a noun-phrase title; one paragraph; the four-and-four schema preserved; the closing principle stated as the candidate's final sentence; word count in brackets.

Common pitfalls: (1) reducing the passage to a story about MSP; (2) dropping one of the four crises or four reforms; (3) softening the closing principle into a generic call for reform.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Target word count: 240-250.
- Title: 'Beyond the Price-of-Produce Diagnosis'.
- Preserve the four-crisis diagnosis: land, soil, weather, credit.
- Preserve the four-reform prescription: leasing markets, watershed investment, climate-adapted seeds, parametric insurance.
- Compress each into a single listed sentence.
- Retain the closing principle about constructing a sector that does not need rescuing.
- Third person; indirect speech; no author named.
- Single paragraph; word count in brackets.
- Avoid technical jargon beyond what the passage uses.
- Numbers as words for small, digits for large.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Title example: 'Beyond the Price-of-Produce Diagnosis'.
- Compression of crises: 'The author identifies four overlapping crises — shrinking per-capita land, declining soil and water, weakening monsoon predictability, and a credit system that under-prices risk for the small farmer.'
- Compression of reforms: 'The author proposes a different set of reforms — consolidation through land-leasing markets, public investment in soil and water at watershed scale, climate-adapted seeds and crop calendars, and parametric weather insurance.'
- Closing line: 'The author concludes that the policy goal is not the rescue of the farmer of today but the construction of a farm sector that does not need rescuing. (246 words)'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample original passage: Indian agriculture occupies a paradoxical place in the country's political economy. It accounts for less than a fifth of national output but provides primary livelihood to more than two-fifths of the workforce, and that asymmetry — declining share of output, persistent share of labour — is the structural

source of farm-sector distress. The decades of Green Revolution productivity gains have flattened. Real returns to cultivation have stagnated in most regions, and the gap between input costs and output prices has narrowed in step. Minimum support prices, designed to protect farmers from price collapses, have come to function as a ceiling rather than a floor for the limited set of crops they cover, and procurement is geographically uneven, favouring a handful of states that grew politically powerful around the wheat-rice axis of the 1970s. Land holdings have continued to fragment with each generation: the average holding is now about one hectare, which makes mechanisation, professional management and the use of formal credit increasingly difficult. Three reform directions are pursued in the policy literature. The first is market reform — expanding the network of regulated wholesale markets, allowing private procurement under enforceable contracts, and lifting some of the prohibitions on inter-state trade. The second is income support, exemplified by direct cash transfers under PM-KISAN that bypass the price-based machinery entirely. The third is structural diversification — extending crop insurance, raising horticulture and dairy production, improving cold-chain infrastructure, and encouraging farmer-producer organisations to give small holders some of the bargaining power they lack as individuals. The political difficulty of agricultural reform comes from the unusual width of its losers and beneficiaries: any reform that helps small farmers in the long run risks unsettling the political bloc that gained from the system as it stood. The puzzle of farm-sector reform is therefore as much political as technical.

Model précis (= 240 words): Indian agriculture occupies a paradoxical place: it accounts for under a fifth of national output yet provides primary livelihood to more than two-fifths of the workforce, and that asymmetry is the structural source of farm-sector distress. Green Revolution productivity gains have flattened. Real returns to cultivation have stagnated in most regions, and the gap between input costs and output prices has narrowed. Minimum support prices, designed to protect farmers from price collapses, function as a ceiling rather than a floor for the limited set of crops they cover, and procurement is geographically uneven, favouring states that grew politically powerful around the wheat-rice axis of the 1970s. Holdings continue to fragment with each generation; the average is now about one hectare, making mechanisation, professional management and formal credit progressively difficult. Three reform directions are pursued in the literature. The first is market reform — expanding regulated wholesale markets, enabling enforceable private contracts and lifting prohibitions on inter-state trade. The second is income support, exemplified by direct cash transfers that bypass the price machinery. The third is structural

diversification — extending crop insurance, raising horticulture and dairy output, improving cold-chain infrastructure and encouraging farmer-producer organisations to give small holders bargaining power they lack individually. The political difficulty of reform lies in the unusual breadth of its losers and beneficiaries: any reform that helps small farmers in the long run risks unsettling the bloc that benefited from the existing system. The puzzle is therefore as much political as technical.

précis

diagnosis

prescription

schema

compression

indirect speech

third person

word count

Q20

Précis: A passage on the international order in flux

20 MARKS

250 WORDS

25 MIN

HARD

PRÉCIS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Source passage (~750 words): the candidate will receive a passage arguing that the post-1945 international order — built on UN-centred multilateralism, open trade, Bretton Woods finance and a thin but real common law of war — is being remade rather than abandoned. The passage will describe four pressures: the rise of plural centres of power, the weaponisation of economic interdependence (sanctions, export controls, chip restrictions), the climate emergency demanding global coordination, and the technology race that no single country can win or regulate alone. It will argue that India's position is distinctive — not aligned with any one bloc, large enough to matter, young enough to grow — and that its preferred outcome is a reformed multilateralism in which the rule-makers reflect today's distribution of weight. It will close with the claim that the question is not whether the old order endures but whether what replaces it carries forward the universalist commitments — peace, development, human dignity — that justified it.

Approach: précis to ~245 words. Preserve the four pressures and India's distinctive position. The closing claim about universalist commitments is the thesis.

What an examiner expects: a noun-phrase title; one paragraph; the four pressures listed in one sentence; India's position described in one sentence; the closing thesis preserved; word count in brackets.

Common pitfalls: (1) describing each of the four pressures in a separate sentence and exhausting the word budget; (2) treating India's non-alignment as the thesis; (3) replacing 'remade, not abandoned' with 'collapsing'.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Target word count: 240-250.
- Title: 'A Multilateral Order Being Remade'.
- Preserve the 'remade, not abandoned' formulation.
- Compress the four pressures into a single listed sentence.
- Describe India's position in one sentence — non-aligned, large, young.
- Retain the closing claim about universalist commitments.
- Third person; indirect speech; no author named.
- Single paragraph; word count in brackets.
- Use 'subsequently', 'in turn', 'despite this' as transitions.
- Avoid acronym overload — define UN, Bretton Woods once.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Title example: 'A Multilateral Order Being Remade'.
- Compression of pressures: 'The author identifies four pressures — the rise of plural centres of power, the weaponisation of economic interdependence, the climate emergency demanding coordination, and a technology race no single country can win or regulate alone.'
- India's position: 'India is described as distinctive — not aligned with any one bloc, large enough to matter, young enough to grow — and as preferring a reformed multilateralism whose rule-makers reflect today's distribution of weight.'
- Closing line: 'The author concludes that the real question is whether what replaces the post-1945 order carries forward the universalist commitments — peace, development, human dignity — that justified it. (247 words)'

MODEL ANSWER

Sample original passage: The international order built after 1945 was a deliberate experiment in cooperative restraint. Its architects, drawn largely from the victors of the Second World War, designed the United Nations system, the Bretton Woods institutions and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade to prevent the kind of unilateral conduct that had produced two catastrophic wars. The arrangement was always imperfect — the Cold War froze parts of it for four decades, decolonisation revealed its initial parochialism, and the structural privileges of the permanent five at the Security Council embedded an inequality that the Charter itself never acknowledged. But for most of the period since 1945, the framework provided a working set of rules under which the global economy expanded, the worst forms of

inter-state conflict were avoided, and the basic norms of sovereign equality were nominally observed. That framework is now under unprecedented strain. The dominant economic power and the rising one are decoupling their technology stacks. The World Trade Organization's dispute-settlement mechanism has been disabled by sustained obstruction. The Security Council has been paralysed on the largest conflicts of the present decade. Multilateral climate finance has fallen short of the figures promised, and the rules-based aspects of cyberspace, outer space and artificial intelligence have not been credibly written into treaty form. Three responses are emerging. The first is regional: blocs such as the European Union, ASEAN and African Union are building their own dense rule-systems where global ones have weakened. The second is minilateral: groupings such as the Quad, the I2U2 and the BRICS are pursuing limited cooperation among willing partners. The third is structural reform: the long-overdue expansion of the Security Council, the recapitalisation of the multilateral development banks, and the negotiation of new instruments for technologies that did not exist when the original framework was written. Whether the order survives or fractures will depend on whether these responses cohere or compete.

Model précis (~ 240 words): The international order built after 1945 was a deliberate experiment in cooperative restraint, designed by the war's victors through the United Nations, the Bretton Woods institutions and the GATT to prevent the unilateral conduct that had produced two catastrophic wars. The framework was always imperfect — frozen by the Cold War, parochial at its inception, and structured around the permanent privileges of five powers. But for most of the period since 1945 it provided a working set of rules under which the global economy expanded, the worst inter-state conflicts were avoided, and norms of sovereign equality were nominally observed. The framework is now under unprecedented strain. The dominant and the rising economic powers are decoupling their technology stacks. The World Trade Organization's dispute-settlement mechanism has been disabled by sustained obstruction. The Security Council has been paralysed on the largest conflicts of the present decade. Multilateral climate finance has fallen short of pledges, and the rules of cyberspace, outer space and artificial intelligence have not been credibly written into treaty form. Three responses are emerging. The first is regional: blocs such as the European Union, ASEAN and African Union are building denser rule-systems where global ones have weakened. The second is minilateral: groupings such as the Quad, I2U2 and BRICS pursue limited cooperation among willing partners. The third is structural reform of the original institutions. Whether the order survives or fractures depends on whether these responses cohere.

précis

compression

structure

indirect speech

third person

paraphrase

title

word count

COMPULSORY ENGLISH

Section C

8 practice questions

Q21

Short essay: Is technology widening or narrowing inequality in India?

60 MARKS

650 WORDS

45 MIN

MEDIUM

SHORT ESSAY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Approach: a short essay rewards structure, not length. Plan six paragraphs of roughly 100-110 words each, with a one-line thesis stated at the end of paragraph 1 and reasserted in paragraph 6. Avoid the trap of arguing only one side — examiners reward candidates who take a position only after weighing the opposite.

What an examiner expects: a one-line thesis you can underline; one example per paragraph; transitions between paragraphs ('however', 'on the other hand', 'taken together'); a closing that goes beyond the essay's own argument to a wider implication.

Common pitfalls: (1) opening with a definition of 'technology' from a dictionary; (2) listing technologies without analysing them; (3) ending with a slogan ('only time will tell'); (4) ignoring counter-evidence.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Paragraph 1 (introduction, ~100 words): scene-set with the JAM trinity and UPI as a real story; thesis — technology has narrowed access inequality but is widening capability inequality.
- Paragraph 2 (~110 words): the case for narrowing — DBT removed leakages, UPI gave the kirana store the same payment rails as a mall, telemedicine reached remote PHCs.
- Paragraph 3 (~110 words): the case for widening — the algorithmic feed, the data economy, AI tools that compound the head start of the already-skilled; one concrete example.
- Paragraph 4 (~100 words): the missing layer — meaningful use depends on devices, data, skills and supervision; the last two are unevenly distributed.
- Paragraph 5 (~110 words): a policy response — public digital infrastructure plus public digital skills; treat AI as infrastructure to be regulated, not as a product to be celebrated.
- Paragraph 6 (~110 words): conclusion — restate thesis; widen to the principle that any general-purpose technology amplifies existing inequalities unless deliberately steered;

close with one image.

- Total target: 640 words; cap at 660.
- One example per paragraph; do not stack three examples in one paragraph.
- Transitions between paragraphs are explicit, not implicit.
- Avoid jargon clusters — 'algorithmic amplification' once is enough.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Thesis sentence: 'Technology has narrowed inequality of access while widening inequality of capability — a paradox that defines India's digital decade.'
- Counter-balance transition: 'These gains are real, yet they coexist with a less visible widening of the gap.'
- Closing image: 'The same fibre cable that carries a child's NCERT video to one village also carries a deep-fake clip that confuses her neighbour — the infrastructure is neutral; the social design around it is not.'
- Concrete example for para 2: 'A subsistence vegetable seller in Madurai now accepts payment by QR code; the price of being included in the economy has dropped to zero.'
- Concrete example for para 3: 'A graduate who can prompt a large language model writes a brief in an hour that takes her junior a day — the productivity gap inside the same office has widened.'

MODEL ANSWER

The story of technology in India has been told twice over: as the great equaliser that put a banking app and a doctor's consultation in the same villager's palm, and as the great divider that separated those with bandwidth from those without. Both versions are partly correct, which is why the simple question — is technology widening or narrowing inequality? — does not yield a clean answer. The honest reply is that technology has done both at once, and that the balance now tilts towards narrowing only when the state actively designs it that way. Left to markets alone, technology amplifies whatever inequalities the country already has. Made into a public infrastructure, it can become the single most powerful instrument of equalisation in a generation.

The narrowing has been most visible in finance. Before the Unified Payments Interface, less than a third of Indian adults made a digital transaction in a typical month. By 2024 the figure had crossed three-quarters, with the steepest gains coming from rural households and women, who had been most excluded by branch banking. Aadhaar-linked direct benefit transfers have moved over thirty lakh crore rupees to

citizens since 2014, much of it to households that had never seen a formal financial account before. CoWIN, the vaccination platform, delivered over two billion doses through a system that was the same in Mumbai as in Mizoram. In each case, a digital public good built once at national scale erased a layer of intermediation that had historically taxed the poor most heavily.

The narrowing has been visible in services beyond finance too. The eSanjeevani teleconsultation platform has carried more than thirty crore consultations, the majority from sub-district health facilities where a specialist had never been available. ONDC has begun to make the discovery of small sellers possible without the marketing budgets that large incumbents alone could afford. DIKSHA has pushed teacher-training and student content into low-bandwidth Android phones in every district. None of these is a complete answer, but each represents a structural narrowing — a poor citizen, for the first time, gaining access to a service that her income would not have bought her in the private market.

And yet the widening is just as real, and it has been most acute in education and work. The school closures of 2020 and 2021 exposed an inequality that the school day had been quietly equalising: poorer children studied for less than an hour a day while richer ones continued nearly uninterrupted on private platforms. Generative AI is now beginning to amplify a similar gap in higher education and white-collar work. A student with a paid subscription, a quiet room and a parent who can guide the prompt receives a tutor of effectively unlimited capacity; a student without those advantages does not. The same divergence is appearing in the labour market, where the workers most exposed to automation are precisely those without the resources to retrain.

The defenders of unfettered markets will argue that technology eventually trickles down — and the history of the mobile phone, which became universal in two decades, gives that argument some force. But trickle-down took two decades for the mobile phone, and the question is whether a country with India's social fault-lines can afford that pace for the next wave. The risk of waiting is that technology will compound existing inequalities — of caste, of gender, of geography — into a digital inheritance that the next generation cannot escape on its own merit. The risk of acting is far smaller: India already knows how to build digital public goods at scale.

The conclusion, then, is conditional rather than absolute. Technology is narrowing inequality wherever the state has deliberately designed it as public infrastructure, and widening inequality wherever the state has left it to private channels. The lesson of UPI, Aadhaar and CoWIN is the lesson of the next decade: the same architecture,

extended into education, skilling and care, can keep the gains of the digital revolution widely shared. The reverse — passivity in the face of the next wave — is the surest way to convert a tool of equalisation into one more instrument of advantage.

thesis

topic sentence

transition

evidence

counter-argument

concluding image

register

balance

Q22

Short essay: Federalism is best preserved by trust, not by litigation

60 MARKS

650 WORDS

45 MIN

HARD

SHORT ESSAY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Approach: the prompt is a proposition — agree, qualify or reject, then defend. The safest stance is qualified agreement: trust is the first-best, litigation is the necessary backstop. Plan six paragraphs; the second-to-last must concede the strongest counter-argument before the closing reasserts the thesis.

What an examiner expects: clear stance in paragraph 1; one institution per paragraph as evidence (Finance Commission, GST Council, Inter-State Council, NITI Aayog, the courts); a paragraph that concedes the limits of the thesis; a close that distinguishes ‘trust’ from ‘silence’.

Common pitfalls: (1) listing every centre-state dispute of the last decade without analysis; (2) treating the courts as the villain — they are part of the constitutional design; (3) ending with ‘we must all work together’ instead of a precise principle.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Paragraph 1 (~100 words): stance — trust is the first-best, litigation the backstop; thesis spelt out.
- Paragraph 2 (~110 words): the Finance Commission as institutionalised trust — predictable formulas, periodic renewal.
- Paragraph 3 (~110 words): the GST Council as pooled sovereignty — a body that has never voted because it has always negotiated.
- Paragraph 4 (~110 words): friction points — governor's office, central agencies, cesses outside the divisible pool; trust is fragile when one tier acts unilaterally.
- Paragraph 5 (~110 words): the concession — when trust fails, the courts step in; basic structure doctrine and Sarkaria Commission norms are the floor below which dialogue

cannot fall.

- Paragraph 6 (~110 words): close — trust is not silence; it is the habit of negotiation in good faith; institutions exist to keep the habit alive.
- Total target: 650 words; cap at 670.
- Name institutions correctly; do not generalise about 'the centre'.
- Transitions: 'consider, by contrast', 'this is not to deny', 'taken together'.
- Avoid party names — write at the level of institutions, not politics.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Thesis sentence: 'Trust is the first-best preserver of Indian federalism; litigation is its indispensable backstop, but the two are not interchangeable.'
- Concession line: 'This is not to deny the courts a role — when trust breaks down, the basic-structure doctrine and the Sarkaria norms are the floor below which dialogue cannot fall.'
- Closing principle: 'Trust is not silence; it is the disciplined habit of negotiating in good faith, and the institutions of federalism exist precisely to keep that habit alive.'
- Evidence for para 3: 'The GST Council has never voted because it has always negotiated — a fact that says more about Indian federalism than any judgment can.'

MODEL ANSWER

Federalism is a constitutional design, but its survival depends on a civic practice. The Indian Constitution distributes power across the Union and the states through three legislative lists, four sets of taxes, a council of governors and a chain of high courts, and any of those instruments can be invoked when relations break down. They are, however, instruments of last resort. The healthier life of a federal system lies in the daily, almost invisible work of negotiation between governments — and that work depends on trust, not on writs. India's federalism has always been strongest when its leaders chose conversation over litigation, and weakest in the periods when they chose the reverse.

Consider the most consequential federal reform of the last decade. The Goods and Services Tax demanded a constitutional amendment, a redistribution of taxing power, and the creation of a council with one vote per state and one for the Union. None of this could have been achieved by court order; it required protracted negotiation in which finance ministers from every party traded concerns, made concessions on rates and compensation, and built a consensus that has, despite occasional friction, held. The GST Council remains the best living example of what cooperative federalism looks

like when it works — a permanent venue where disagreement is processed by dialogue, not by judgment.

The Finance Commission offers a second example. Every five years it confronts the most explosive question in any federation — who gets how much money — and produces an answer that all states have accepted for seventy-five years. The Commission's authority does not come from coercion. It comes from a process that consults each state, applies transparent formulae, and produces recommendations that successive governments at the Centre have honoured even when they disliked the result. When that trust held, devolution rose. When it began to be eroded — through the growth of cesses and surcharges outside the divisible pool — the relationship has visibly suffered.

The contrast with litigation-driven federalism is instructive. The disputes over the role of the chancellor in state universities, over the discretionary powers of the governor, over the right of state legislatures to compel central assent, have produced a stream of high-court and Supreme Court judgments — but they have not produced political peace. Each ruling settles a procedural question while leaving the underlying political grievance untouched. Litigation, by its design, produces winners and losers; it cannot produce the patient, ongoing accommodation that a federal polity needs from one election to the next.

A reasonable counter-view is that trust, where it is broken, can only be restored through enforceable rulings. If the centre treats opposition-ruled states unequally, or if a governor refuses assent in bad faith, what remains except the courts? The objection has some force, and the Supreme Court has played a crucial role in restraining the worst abuses. But the moments when the court has had to intervene are precisely the moments when federalism's preventive infrastructure failed — when the Inter-State Council went silent, when the Niti Aayog's governing council was avoided, when the GST-style chamber for a particular dispute did not exist. The remedy for litigation is not less court, but more dialogue upstream.

The conclusion follows. India's constitutional design supplies both the dialogic and the adjudicative paths, and a healthy federation relies overwhelmingly on the first. The Inter-State Council should be convened on a calendar, not on demand. The Finance Commission's recommendations should be honoured in full, including a fiscal architecture in which cesses do not crowd out shareable taxes. The Niti Aayog's governing council should be the venue where the prime minister and the chief ministers meet at least twice a year, with substantive agendas. Federalism preserved

by trust is not weak federalism; it is the strongest version available, because it builds the habit of accommodation that a writ can never legislate. India's experience of seventy-five years suggests that this is, in the end, the only federalism that lasts.

stance

proposition

concession

institution-based evidence

transition

principle

register

closing

Q23

Short essay: The classroom of 2035 — what should it look like?

60 MARKS

650 WORDS

45 MIN

MEDIUM

SHORT ESSAY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Approach: a future-oriented prompt rewards specificity over speculation. Imagine a single classroom in a single place — a Class 8 in a small town in Odisha, say — and describe it in detail rather than philosophising about education. Plan six paragraphs.

What an examiner expects: a vivid opening picture; clear thesis on what the classroom should preserve from today and what it should change; concrete elements per paragraph (teacher's role, AI tools, assessment, mental health, community link); a closing that ties the description to a value, not a technology.

Common pitfalls: (1) describing only the technology — VR headsets, robots, holograms — and forgetting the human; (2) writing in the conditional throughout ('there could be', 'one might see'); (3) ending with 'the future is bright' instead of a precise commitment.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Paragraph 1 (~100 words): scene-setting — a Class 8 in 2035; thesis — the classroom should change its tools but defend its purpose: producing curious, kind, capable citizens.
- Paragraph 2 (~110 words): the teacher's role — moves from delivery to scaffolding; remains the most important adult in the child's day.
- Paragraph 3 (~110 words): AI tools — personalised practice, instant feedback, multilingual scaffolds; with hard limits to protect time for unmediated thought.
- Paragraph 4 (~100 words): assessment — competence portfolios, demonstrations, project archives; not just board examinations.
- Paragraph 5 (~110 words): well-being — explicit time for sleep, play, friendship; counsellor presence, screen-time discipline.
- Paragraph 6 (~110 words): community link — parents, grandparents, local artisans visit; the classroom is porous, not sealed; close with the principle that the classroom is a

place, not a platform.

- Total target: 640 words.
- Use present-tense narrative descriptions where useful — they pull the examiner into the picture.
- Avoid technology fetish — the human teacher is the central figure.
- Closing principle stated as a sentence, not a slogan.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Opening picture: 'It is half past nine on a Tuesday in Sambalpur in 2035. The first bell has rung; thirty-two eighth-graders are settling in.'
- Thesis: 'The classroom of 2035 must change almost everything about how it teaches and almost nothing about what it is for.'
- Closing principle: 'A classroom is a place, not a platform; the most important thing in it remains another human being who knows the child.'
- Para 3 concrete detail: 'An AI tutor offers each child the next practice problem at exactly the right difficulty; the teacher reads the dashboard at the start of class and decides whom to sit with for ten minutes that day.'

MODEL ANSWER

The classroom of 2035 is a forecast, not a prediction, and forecasts are useful precisely because they make assumptions visible. If the classroom of 2035 looks much like the classroom of 1995 — rows of desks, a teacher at the front, a printed textbook, a forty-minute period — that will not be because nothing has changed. It will be because schools chose not to absorb the changes around them. The more interesting question is what design would let the classroom take the best of the new while preserving the irreplaceable parts of the old. The honest answer combines four things: deeper foundations, a different teacher, smarter tools, and a wider notion of what counts as a school day.

Deeper foundations come first because the temptation in any technological transition is to assume that machines will compensate for weak basics. They will not. A child who cannot read fluently cannot interrogate a chatbot's answer; a child who cannot perform mental arithmetic cannot detect when an automated calculation has gone wrong; a child who has never written an unaided paragraph cannot evaluate the prose a machine produces for her. The classroom of 2035 must therefore protect the first eight or nine years of schooling for unaided practice in reading, writing, arithmetic and reasoning. Pratham's Teaching at the Right Level shows that ability-grouped

remedial instruction can lift foundational outcomes within months. That pedagogy should be system-wide by 2030.

The teacher in 2035 looks different from the teacher of 2025. Her job is no longer to deliver content — the content is freely available, in higher quality than any individual teacher can produce — but to diagnose, motivate and design. She uses adaptive software to know exactly where each child sits on a learning trajectory; she designs the project work that bonds that trajectory to questions worth asking; and she protects the unaided practice that the trajectory requires. Her training, accordingly, is also different. The B.Ed. and D.El.Ed. curricula of 2035 will, if reform succeeds, devote at least a third of their hours to assessment literacy, classroom management of mixed-ability groups, and supervised practice with AI-assisted instructional tools.

The tools matter, but only if they are public goods. A classroom that depends on private subscriptions to commercial platforms will reproduce, inside the school, the inequalities of the digital home. The viable model is the one India has already used for finance, payments and identity: a digital public good built once and made available at marginal cost to every school. DIKSHA is the seed of such a platform; by 2035 it should host adaptive content, AI tutors trained on Indian curricula, multilingual interfaces, and offline modes for low-bandwidth regions. The infrastructure that delivers it — broadband, devices, screens, electricity — must be funded as a constitutional minimum of education access, the way pencils once were.

The strongest counter-view is that this vision is over-engineered for a country whose first task is to fix half the schools that lack working toilets and trained teachers. The objection is serious. A glittering 2035 classroom in Mumbai while one in Kalahandi still lacks chalk is the worst of all possible outcomes — the digital divide as a public project. The answer is not to scale back the ambition but to sequence it correctly. Foundational fixes must come first, and the technological layer must be designed for the school that has the fewest resources, not the most. If the design works for a single-teacher rural school in Bihar, scaling it to a tier-one private school in Bengaluru is trivial; the reverse is impossible.

The classroom of 2035, in this design, is both more traditional and more advanced than the classroom of 2025. More traditional because it protects the unaided struggle that builds the mind — silent reading, mental arithmetic, longhand writing. More advanced because the teacher commands instruments her predecessor could not, and the school day extends into a continuum of curated content a child can return to at home. The purpose is unchanged from any century: to grow a citizen capable of

independent reasoning. The instruments have improved; the discipline of teaching has not.

scene-setting

thesis

concrete detail

narrative present

principle

transition

register

closing

Q24

Short essay: Adaptation to climate change cannot be left to the market alone

60 MARKS

650 WORDS

45 MIN

HARD

SHORT ESSAY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Approach: a proposition prompt — take a stance and defend it with examples. The strongest stance is agreement with a single concession — markets are necessary for capital allocation, but not sufficient for distributing adaptation. Plan six paragraphs.

What an examiner expects: a one-line thesis stated by the end of paragraph 1; one type of adaptation per body paragraph (cooling, water, insurance, migration); a paragraph acknowledging what markets do well; a closing that distinguishes public goods from private ones.

Common pitfalls: (1) treating ‘the market’ as a single villain; (2) ignoring genuine market contributions like crop insurance; (3) ending with ‘the government must act’ without saying how.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Paragraph 1 (~100 words): scene — heatwaves, water stress, sea-level rise; thesis — adaptation requires public infrastructure because its benefits are diffuse and the worst-affected can least pay.
- Paragraph 2 (~110 words): cooling — shaded transit stops, cool roofs, urban trees; benefits everyone, paid for by no one if left to the market.
- Paragraph 3 (~110 words): water — rainwater harvesting, lake restoration, groundwater regulation; tragedy of the commons unless rules and recharge are public.
- Paragraph 4 (~110 words): insurance — markets can price weather risk; but they will exclude the highest-risk populations, who need public reinsurance.
- Paragraph 5 (~100 words): migration — the most under-discussed adaptation; markets do not move people humanely; states must.
- Paragraph 6 (~110 words): close — markets allocate capital; states define the public goods that capital should serve; distinguish the two and design accordingly.

- Total target: 640 words.
- Name examples specifically — Ahmedabad heat action plan, Chennai water crisis, PMFBY weather insurance.
- Concede the market's strengths — capital allocation, price discovery — before reasserting the thesis.
- Closing distinguishes 'public goods' from 'private goods' — a precise principle, not a slogan.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Thesis: 'Adaptation must be financed by markets but defined and distributed by states, because its benefits are diffuse and its costs fall disproportionately on those least able to pay.'
- Concession: 'Markets do real work — they allocate capital, discover prices and weed out poorly designed projects.'
- Closing principle: 'Markets allocate capital well; states define the public goods that capital should serve. Confusing the two is what makes climate adaptation politically attractive and practically inadequate.'
- Concrete example: 'Ahmedabad's heat action plan was not built by a price signal; it was built by a city government acting on a public-health duty.'

MODEL ANSWER

Markets are excellent at allocating goods that have prices, and climate adaptation is mostly a service that does not. A working drain, a shaded street, a restored mangrove, an early-warning text message — these protect lives and assets but generate no revenue stream to pay for themselves. That single fact, more than any ideological position, is why adaptation cannot be left to markets alone. The proposition is not that markets have no role; it is that the public good they provide is too thin, too uneven, and too late for the climate already in the pipeline. Adaptation is, in the technical sense, a public-goods problem, and public-goods problems require public action.

Begin with the most visible asymmetry. Mitigation, the work of reducing emissions, has a price signal — every tonne of carbon abated has a measurable value in tradable markets, in renewable-energy auctions, in fuel-economy regulations. Adaptation has no such signal. The household that elevates its plinth above a flood line does not earn a return; the city that restores a wetland does not invoice the catchment it protects. Markets allocate effort towards what they can measure and price, and they will under-invest in adaptation by structural design rather than by accident. India's own

experience confirms the pattern: solar capacity has grown twenty-fold in a decade, while urban drainage networks have grown perhaps two-fold over the same period.

The second asymmetry is distributional. The households most exposed to climate harm — informal-settlement residents, smallholder farmers, coastal fishing communities — are also those least able to pay for private adaptation. A wealthy resident of Mumbai or Bengaluru can air-condition her home, raise her flood-line, switch to drought-resistant landscaping, and insure her property at premiums she can afford. A resident of Dharavi or a farmer in Vidarbha can do none of these. Market-led adaptation, by definition, serves those who can pay; the climate-vulnerable poor are systematically excluded from its protections. Public action is not a moral overlay on this asymmetry; it is the only mechanism capable of closing it.

The third reason markets are insufficient is temporal. Climate adaptation has a horizon of decades, while market discount rates compress that horizon into single-digit years. A mangrove planted in 2025 protects a coast in 2050; a private investor will not fund it because the payback period exceeds her required return. A storm-drain dimensioned for the rainfall of 2055 will be expensive in 2025 and indispensable in 2050; private demand for it does not exist today. Only a public balance sheet, with a longer horizon and a wider definition of return, can underwrite investments whose dividends fall outside any commercial frame.

The counter-view, fairly stated, is that public action is itself imperfect — slow, prone to political distortion, often captured by incumbent interests. The objection has weight. India's municipal climate plans, however well drafted, have struggled with thin staffing and political capture; central programmes have under-spent their adaptation lines for several consecutive years. But the right response to imperfect public action is not to defer to markets that cannot do the job at all; it is to design public action better. Dedicated municipal climate envelopes, results-linked disbursement tied to canopy cover and drainage coverage, independent climate auditors, and a constitutional treatment of adaptation as a tier-of-government responsibility — each addresses a specific failure mode of state action without surrendering the field to a price mechanism that does not see adaptation at all.

The conclusion follows from the question itself. Adaptation cannot be left to the market alone because the market does not see what adaptation does — a public good, distributed unequally to those who cannot pay, paying back over decades that no investor will wait. The lesson of the last decade is that India can build digital public infrastructure for the things it has chosen to treat as collective: identity, payments,

vaccinations, identity. It must now extend the same logic to the infrastructure that will determine whether the next generation inherits a habitable urban and rural landscape. Markets will follow. They will not lead.

thesis

stance

concession

public goods

principle

evidence

transition

closing

Q25

Short essay: Can technology serve human values, or must it shape them?

60 MARKS

650 WORDS

45 MIN

MEDIUM

SHORT ESSAY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Approach: a proposition prompt — argue that the dichotomy is false, then qualify.

Technology is shaped by the values of its designers, and in turn shapes the values of its users; the policy question is who steers the loop. Plan six paragraphs of roughly 100-110 words each, with a one-line thesis at the end of paragraph 1.

What an examiner expects: a thesis you can underline; one technology per body paragraph (the printing press, the algorithmic feed, machine translation, generative AI); a paragraph that concedes the strongest counter-argument; a close that converts the argument into a concrete principle for institutions.

Common pitfalls: (1) treating ‘technology’ as a single thing; (2) listing gadgets without analysing their effect on judgment, attention or relationships; (3) ending with ‘we must use technology wisely’ — a slogan, not a principle.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Paragraph 1 (~100 words): scene — a child with a phone, a doctor with a model, a citizen with a feed; thesis — technology is shaped by values and reshapes them; the policy question is who steers the loop.
- Paragraph 2 (~110 words): the printing press as historical precedent — democratised reading, displaced clergy, eventually built the nation-state.
- Paragraph 3 (~110 words): the algorithmic feed — designed for engagement, ends by training attention, displacing patience and rewarding outrage.
- Paragraph 4 (~110 words): machine translation and AI tutors — widen access while shrinking the discipline of unmediated reading.
- Paragraph 5 (~110 words): the concession — technology has also enabled banking the unbanked, screening for tuberculosis, translating the courtroom; refuse the romance of opposition.

- Paragraph 6 (~110 words): close — design choices made under public scrutiny, by institutions accountable to people, not by markets alone; the principle is governance, not the gadget.
- Total target: 650 words; cap at 670.
- One technology per paragraph; do not stack three examples in one paragraph.
- Transitions: 'consider, by contrast', 'and yet', 'taken together'.
- Avoid the word 'disruption' — the essay rewards precision over jargon.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Thesis sentence: 'Technology is neither a neutral tool nor an autonomous force — it is shaped by the values of its designers and in turn reshapes the values of its users; the question worth our attention is who steers the loop.'
- Concession line: 'This is not to deny technology's gifts — a daily-wage worker in a small town now banks on her phone, a tuberculosis screen in a primary health centre uses a model trained on millions of chests, a courtroom translates in real time for an Adivasi witness.'
- Closing principle: 'The choice is not between embracing or rejecting technology; it is between design under public scrutiny and design under no one's gaze, and only the first deserves the name of progress.'
- Concrete example for para 3: 'A feed designed to keep eyes on screens ends by training the muscle of impatience — and a generation that cannot sit with a paragraph cannot sit with a problem.'

MODEL ANSWER

The question of whether technology can serve human values or must shape them sounds like a binary, but the honest answer is that it does both, and that the balance is not fixed by the technology itself. Every powerful instrument arrives with a default — a way of being used that follows the path of least resistance — and that default tends to shape the user as much as the user shapes the tool. Whether a society receives the technology on its own terms, or is reorganised around the technology's defaults, depends on choices made in design, in regulation and in education. Technology in itself is neither neutral nor sovereign; it is a partner in a relationship whose terms are negotiated.

The case for human primacy starts with a simple observation. Every technology that mattered in the last century — print, electricity, the telephone, the internet — was domesticated, over time, into purposes its inventors did not foresee and its users did.

The printing press, designed for sacred texts, became the instrument of newspapers, novels and democratic deliberation. Electricity, designed for industrial production, became the substrate of domestic life. The internet, designed for academic file transfer, became a platform for commerce, friendship and protest. In each case, human purposes — pluralism, intimacy, expression — bent the technology to themselves over the course of a generation. There is no obvious reason to assume that artificial intelligence will be different in kind, even if it differs in speed.

The case for technological shaping is, however, also strong. The smartphone has reshaped the attention span of a generation of adolescents without any explicit decision to permit that reshaping. Social media has restructured political discourse around outrage and brevity, again without anyone choosing the trade-off.

Recommendation algorithms have reshaped what we read, watch and buy in ways that aggregate to a different culture of consumption. None of these effects was inevitable; each was the product of design choices that prioritised engagement over deliberation. The cumulative drift shows how a widespread tool can move the values it appears merely to serve.

The Indian context tilts the balance towards intentional design. The country is at the receiving end of technologies built primarily for other markets, with defaults calibrated for cultural and regulatory environments different from its own. UPI, Aadhaar and the India Stack demonstrated that a society can deliberately build digital infrastructure around its own values — universal access, low cost, public accountability — rather than accept the defaults of platforms that have no such obligation. The lesson is replicable: the next wave of technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, can be domesticated to Indian linguistic, social and constitutional priorities if the design is undertaken consciously rather than imported by default.

The strongest counter-view is that any attempt to bend technology to existing values is conservatism in another costume — a refusal to allow technology to expose values that may themselves be obsolete. Slavery, caste hierarchy and patriarchal practice were once defended as values too; the steam engine, the railway and the contraceptive pill all helped to dissolve them. Why should the new wave not similarly correct the present generation's blind spots? The objection has force, and any defence of human primacy must accept that values themselves evolve under technological influence. The question is whether the evolution proceeds through deliberate human reflection or through algorithmic drift. The first is democratic; the second is not.

The conclusion is therefore conditional. Technology can serve human values when its design, regulation and use are subjected to ongoing democratic deliberation. It will shape those values, unhelpfully, when it is deployed at scale with defaults that no one has examined. The classroom of 2035, the workplace of 2040 and the courtroom of 2045 will each be infused with artificial intelligence; whether each remains recognisably human in its purposes depends on choices made now. A society that abdicates those choices to the platforms will find that the platforms have made them, and a society that asserts them will discover that technology, properly directed, can serve the deepest of its values.

thesis

stance

concession

principle

evidence

transition

register

closing

Q26

Short essay: The case for rural revival in an urbanising India

60 MARKS

650 WORDS

45 MIN

MEDIUM

SHORT ESSAY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Approach: a development-policy prompt — distinguish two ways of reading rural revival. The first is sentimental — saving the village as cultural project. The second is structural — building rural livelihoods so that those who stay are not poorer for staying and those who move are not pushed by despair. Take the second stance. Plan six paragraphs.

What an examiner expects: a thesis stated by the end of paragraph 1; one rural domain per body paragraph (agriculture, non-farm employment, infrastructure, services, governance); a paragraph that handles the urbanisation counter-argument; a closing that distinguishes rural revival from rural nostalgia.

Common pitfalls: (1) sentimentalising the village; (2) treating rural revival as a sub-set of agriculture policy; (3) ignoring the role of small towns as the real bridge between village and city.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Paragraph 1 (~100 words): scene — a small town in eastern UP with a college, a market, a primary health centre and a daily bus to the village; thesis — rural revival is a structural project, not a sentimental one.
- Paragraph 2 (~110 words): agriculture — consolidation through leasing, watershed investment, climate-adapted seeds, parametric insurance; raise productivity per worker without raising distress per acre.

- Paragraph 3 (~110 words): non-farm employment — food processing, building materials, repair services, logistics; the missing middle of mid-sized rural firms.
- Paragraph 4 (~110 words): infrastructure — all-weather roads, three-phase power, broadband, cold chain; remove the friction that keeps rural enterprise unviable.
- Paragraph 5 (~100 words): services — schools, health centres, courts, banks; treat their quality, not their presence, as the metric.
- Paragraph 6 (~110 words): close — rural revival is not the opposite of urbanisation but its precondition; people should move when they choose, not when they must; the principle is dignity in place, not against place.
- Total target: 650 words; cap at 670.
- Name examples specifically — NABARD's watershed programmes, PMAY, e-NAM, PM-Gati Shakti.
- Concede urbanisation's force, then reframe rather than oppose it.
- Closing distinguishes rural revival from rural nostalgia in one sentence.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Thesis: 'Rural revival is not the protection of a romanticised past — it is the structural work of building livelihoods so that those who stay are not poorer for staying and those who move are not pushed by despair.'
- Concession: 'India will urbanise — that is not in doubt. The question is whether the move from village to city is a chosen widening of opportunity or a forced response to collapsed agriculture.'
- Closing principle: 'Rural revival and urbanisation are not opposites; they are two halves of the same demographic transition, and the test of both is whether they enlarge the choices of the people who live them.'
- Concrete example for para 3: 'A district town that hosts twenty mid-sized food-processing units absorbs more young workers than a metropolitan suburb that hosts one warehouse.'

MODEL ANSWER

India's urbanisation is often celebrated as a sign of economic transformation, but the celebration assumes that the rural side of the country can be left to manage its decline. The assumption is wrong twice over: rural India is not declining in the simple sense, and even if it were, an India that abandons its villages cannot deliver the urban transition it is reaching for. Rural revival is therefore not a sentimental project; it is a

precondition of sustainable urban growth. The country needs both halves to work, and the present neglect of one will eventually break the other.

The strongest case for revival is demographic. Roughly two-thirds of Indians still live in rural areas, and projections suggest that even by 2050 nearly half will. A development strategy that writes off this half — by treating rural life as a transit lounge between agriculture and the city — misallocates the resources of an entire generation. The young person who would have become a productive worker in a thriving rural economy instead arrives in a city ill-prepared, takes up informal employment at survival wages, and lives in conditions that prevent her family from accumulating capital across generations. Distress migration is not a sign of urban opportunity; it is a sign of rural failure that the city is then asked to absorb.

The economic case is equally strong. Indian agriculture, despite stagnant productivity at the all-India level, contains pockets of genuine dynamism that have been under-supported. Horticulture, dairy, fisheries and farm-forestry now contribute more to agricultural value than cereals do, and they generate two to three times the employment per hectare. A serious rural revival strategy would invest in cold chains, in market linkages, in farmer-producer organisations that aggregate small holdings into bargaining units, and in extension services that connect farmers to the latest knowledge. The returns to such investment are well-documented: the dairy cooperative movement of the 1970s and the horticulture push of the 2000s each demonstrated that targeted public investment in rural enterprise can shift the trajectory of an entire region.

The ecological case may be the most important of all. Climate change is reshaping rural India faster than urban India because rural livelihoods depend more directly on natural systems — soil, water, forest cover, monsoon timing. A rural revival that ignores ecology will collapse within a generation; one that restores natural capital — through watershed development, regenerative agriculture, common-property forestry — will compound returns for decades. Programmes such as MGNREGA, when used for permanent natural-asset creation rather than ad-hoc earthworks, have produced documented gains in groundwater, soil moisture and forest cover. The next decade should expand that model rather than retreat from it.

The counter-view is that rural revival fights against history. Every successful industrialisation in the modern era — Britain, Korea, China, parts of Southeast Asia — has moved a large share of the population from countryside to city, and the policy lesson is to ease that transition rather than to resist it. The objection is real, but it

confuses the destination with the journey. India's urbanisation must continue; the question is whether it is forced by rural collapse or pulled by rural prosperity. The first produces slums, distress wages and political resentment; the second produces a workforce that arrives in cities prepared, capitalised and confident. The historical examples actually support this reading — Korea invested heavily in rural infrastructure even as it industrialised, and China's most successful decades combined urban expansion with deliberate rural-area development.

The conclusion is straightforward. A rural revival is not a romantic alternative to urbanisation; it is the foundation that makes urbanisation work. The investments are not exotic: irrigation, roads, electricity, broadband, schools, primary health, post-harvest infrastructure, farmer organisations. The fiscal commitment is significant but well within the country's means if the political will is present. The reward, beyond the welfare of half a country, is an urban India that is not perpetually trying to absorb the failure of the other half. A balanced country is, in the end, a more competitive one — and a more decent one too.

thesis

stance

structural

concession

principle

evidence

transition

closing

Q27

Short essay: Secularism in practice — protection, not preference

60 MARKS

650 WORDS

45 MIN

HARD

SHORT ESSAY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Approach: a constitutional concept prompt — argue that Indian secularism is best understood as the equal protection of religious life, not as the strict separation of religion from public life, and that the everyday work of secularism happens in administration, not in headlines. Plan six paragraphs.

What an examiner expects: a precise statement of what Indian secularism is (and is not) by the end of paragraph 1; concrete administrative examples — religious endowments, personal law, education aid, places of worship; a paragraph that handles the strict-separation counter-argument; a closing that distinguishes protection from preference.

Common pitfalls: (1) reducing the essay to a comparison with France or the United States; (2) treating secularism as anti-religion; (3) ending with 'unity in diversity' as a slogan rather than a principle.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Paragraph 1 (~100 words): scene — a district magistrate authorising a temple festival, a school receiving aid for its minority section, a court adjudicating a personal-law dispute; thesis — Indian secularism is equal protection, not separation.
- Paragraph 2 (~110 words): the constitutional design — Articles 25-30, the basic-structure invocation of secularism, the Places of Worship Act of 1991; protection through equal treatment of unequals.
- Paragraph 3 (~110 words): personal law — equal protection does not mean uniformity; reform must come from within communities, accompanied by a state that secures equal rights to women across all communities.
- Paragraph 4 (~110 words): education and welfare — minority institutions, aided schools, scholarship schemes; the state may engage religion to deliver equal opportunity.
- Paragraph 5 (~110 words): the concession — strict separation has a discipline of its own and protects against state capture by majority religion; the trade-off is that it can flatten religious life into private sentiment.
- Paragraph 6 (~110 words): close — secularism in India is the daily administrative habit of protection without preference; the principle is the safety of the smallest community, not the celebration of the largest.
- Total target: 650 words; cap at 670.
- Cite the Places of Worship Act and Articles 25-30 by name.
- Avoid the political vocabulary of 'appeasement' on either side.
- Closing principle stated as a sentence, not a slogan.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Thesis: 'Indian secularism is not the wall between church and state familiar from the United States; it is the equal protection of religious life by a state that engages, regulates and supports all faiths impartially.'
- Concession: 'Strict separation has its own discipline — it prevents the state from being captured by the majority religion — but its price is the flattening of religious life into private sentiment, which an Indian republic of believers could never have accepted.'
- Closing principle: 'Secularism in India is the daily administrative habit of protection without preference, and its truest measure is the safety of the smallest community, not the celebration of the largest.'
- Concrete example for para 4: 'A government-aided madrasa or convent school is not a violation of secularism; it is its expression — the state ensuring that religious

communities can educate their children without surrendering the right to teach what they believe.'

MODEL ANSWER

Secularism is the most contested word in the Indian constitutional vocabulary, and much of the contest comes from confusion about what the word is supposed to do. The Indian Constitution does not declare a wall between religion and state; it does not require the state to be blind to faith; and it does not prohibit religious life from spilling into public space. What it does require is something more precise and more demanding: the state must protect every faith equally, and it must prefer none. Secularism in the Indian sense is therefore not a doctrine of absence but a discipline of practice — the practice of even-handed protection rather than selective favour.

The constitutional architecture makes this disposition concrete. Articles 25 to 28 protect the freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate religion. Articles 29 and 30 protect the cultural and educational rights of minorities. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law without regard to religion. Article 15 prohibits discrimination by the state on religious grounds. None of these provisions exclude religion from the public sphere; what they exclude is the state's preference for one faith over another. The architecture, in other words, is plural rather than secular in the European sense, and the better description of the Indian disposition is 'protection without preference'.

This framing matters for current debates. When the state funds the maintenance of religious sites of multiple traditions, it is acting consistently with the Constitution if the funding is even-handed; it is acting unconstitutionally if the funding favours one tradition over others. When the state regulates personal law, it must do so in a way that respects the distinctness of each community while extending the same protections to women, minors and weaker members across all of them. The Sabarimala judgment, the Triple Talaq judgment, the Sec. 377 judgment — each in different ways applied the same constitutional principle: protect the individual within every community, and prefer none over the others.

The strongest counter-view is that protection without preference is impossible in practice. A state that funds Haj subsidies but not pilgrimages of other faiths exhibits preference; a state that recognises personal law for some communities but enforces a uniform code on others exhibits preference; a state that publicly observes one set of festivals while privatising others exhibits preference. The objection has force, but it also identifies the test rather than refuting it. The constitutional question is whether

the inevitable rough edges of state practice are being smoothed towards even-handedness over time, or whether they are being hardened into structural favour. The first is reform within the framework; the second is the abandonment of it.

India's practical secularism has, on the whole, leaned towards reform — slowly, incompletely, and with frequent regressions, but in a recognisable direction. The Haj subsidy was ended in 2018, and equivalent subsidies for other pilgrimages have been reduced or rationalised. Personal-law reform has proceeded by community-specific judicial intervention rather than by a single uniform code that no community would have accepted. Anti-conversion laws, where they exist, have been tested against the constitutional guarantee of freedom of conscience, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. None of these moves is final, but each illustrates the discipline that the Constitution requires: protection extended to each, preference shown to none.

The conclusion follows. Secularism in India is not a wall but a balance — actively maintained, periodically tested, and never finished. The country's diversity will keep generating cases that test the principle, and the answer to each case must be the same: even-handed protection. The risk is twofold. The first risk is that protection itself becomes patchy, with some communities receiving less than others. The second is that preference creeps back under the language of cultural restoration. Both risks are real, but both are also recognisable, and a Constitution that has lasted seventy-five years has shown that it can correct them. Indian secularism is, in this reading, practical and provisional. It is also, on present evidence, durable.

thesis

stance

concession

principle

evidence

transition

register

closing

Q28

Short essay: India's demographic dividend and the workforce of 2040

60 MARKS

650 WORDS

45 MIN

MEDIUM

SHORT ESSAY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Approach: a future-oriented prompt — argue that India's demographic dividend is neither automatic nor permanent, and that converting it into a workforce by 2040 is the central economic question of the next fifteen years. Plan six paragraphs.

What an examiner expects: a one-line thesis stated by the end of paragraph 1; concrete numbers used sparingly (median age, working-age share, female participation); one

workforce dimension per paragraph (skills, health, mobility, gender, social protection); a closing that distinguishes 'demographic dividend' from 'demographic drag'.

Common pitfalls: (1) reciting demographic statistics without policy analysis; (2) treating the dividend as automatic; (3) ignoring the gendered nature of the workforce question.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Paragraph 1 (~100 words): scene — India's median age in 2025 is about 28; by 2040 it will be 35; the working-age share peaks in this window; thesis — the dividend is conditional, not automatic.
- Paragraph 2 (~110 words): skills — secondary completion, vocational training certified by industry, apprenticeship at scale; not just degrees but assessed competences.
- Paragraph 3 (~110 words): health — anaemia, stunting, mental health; a workforce that is sick is not a workforce; primary care prevents what hospital care cannot afford.
- Paragraph 4 (~110 words): mobility — language, hostels, portable benefits, recognition of qualifications across states; let the worker follow the job without losing entitlements.
- Paragraph 5 (~110 words): gender — half the demographic dividend is female; without redistributing unpaid care and ensuring safety, half the workforce stays at home.
- Paragraph 6 (~110 words): close — social protection through portable benefits; the dividend becomes a drag when growth slows before workers are ready; the principle is to make the worker, not just to count her.
- Total target: 650 words; cap at 670.
- Cite the PLFS framework once for participation data.
- Concede demographic complications — variation across states, regional ageing of southern India.
- Closing principle stated as a sentence: dividend or drag is a choice, not a destiny.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Thesis: 'India's demographic dividend is a window, not a guarantee — it becomes a dividend only if the working-age population finds work it is skilled, healthy and free enough to do.'
- Concession: 'The dividend is also uneven — Kerala and Tamil Nadu are ageing while Bihar and UP are youthful; a single national policy will mis-serve both, and the federal compact must absorb that variation.'
- Closing principle: 'Dividend or drag is a choice, not a destiny — and the test of policy is not how many young Indians turn eighteen each year but how many turn eighteen ready to work.'

- Concrete example for para 5: 'A young woman who finishes school but cannot reach a workplace because the bus stops at the highway, or whose mother-in-law cannot release her from cooking by seven in the morning, is not part of the workforce no matter what the statistics record.'

MODEL ANSWER

India has been described as having a demographic dividend for so long that the phrase risks becoming a slogan. A dividend, however, is not a guarantee; it is an opportunity that pays out only if it is invested. The country's median age will rise from twenty-eight today to roughly thirty-five by 2040, and the working-age population will peak before 2045 and then begin to decline. The next two decades therefore represent the only window in which India can convert favourable demography into sustained income growth. After that window closes, the country will be older without yet being rich, and the policy choices that produced that outcome will be irreversible.

The dividend's potential is genuine. India will add more workers to the global labour force in the next two decades than any other country, while ageing economies in Europe and East Asia will be losing workers. If a meaningful share of those Indian workers are employed in productive sectors at decent wages, the country could lift average household incomes from the lower-middle-income range into the upper-middle-income range within a generation. The Korean and Chinese examples show that such a transition is possible; the Brazilian and South African examples show that it is not automatic. The variable that distinguishes the two paths is the quality of investment in human capital and in the firms that can absorb that capital.

Human capital is the first priority and the area where India is most exposed. Foundational learning outcomes, as measured by ASER and PISA-aligned studies, remain weak: a substantial share of Class V children cannot read a Class II text fluently. Vocational training reaches a small fraction of the eligible cohort, and certificates often lack labour-market value. Tertiary enrolment has expanded rapidly but quality has lagged. A serious dividend strategy therefore begins in primary classrooms — with Teaching at the Right Level pedagogy, with redesigned teacher training, and with an assessment regime that measures learning rather than enrolment. None of this is glamorous; all of it is foundational.

The second priority is the firms in which the workforce will work. India's enterprise distribution remains heavily skewed, with too few medium-sized firms able to absorb labour at productive wages. Production-linked incentives, GST simplification and the four labour codes have begun to address the constraints, but the work is far from done.

A dividend without a corresponding expansion of mid-sized employers will produce a workforce that is educated but informally employed — credentials without productivity, certificates without wages. The policy frontier is therefore not in education alone but in the industrial and services sectors that will determine whether the educated workforce finds work worth doing.

The counter-view is that India's services-led growth has already shown a path to absorbing workers without the industrial transformation that earlier dividend stories required. Information technology services, business-process outsourcing, financial services and the gig economy have together produced more jobs over two decades than manufacturing did. The objection is partly correct but cannot be the whole strategy. Services absorb only a fraction of the cohort that needs employment, and the most automatable services are precisely those most exposed to artificial intelligence in the next decade. A dividend strategy that rests only on services is a strategy that bets against the very technology now reshaping those services.

The conclusion is that India's workforce of 2040 will be shaped by decisions taken between 2026 and 2032 — the years in which the children entering Class I today will pass through the most formative stretch of their schooling, and the years in which the firms that will employ them will set their hiring patterns. The dividend is large enough to lift a country and small enough to be wasted. Investment in foundational learning, in skilling that matches actual demand, in mid-sized firms that can absorb the workforce at decent wages, and in the social infrastructure that allows women to participate equally — each of these will determine whether India of 2040 is the country its demography promises or the country that arrives at the end of an unused opportunity.

thesis

stance

concession

principle

evidence

transition

register

closing

COMPULSORY ENGLISH

Section D

12 practice questions

Q29

Grammar / usage: Subject-verb agreement

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

EASY

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: a verb agrees in number with its subject — singular subject, singular verb; plural subject, plural verb. Three common traps: (1) intervening prepositional phrases — the verb agrees with the head noun, not the nearest noun ('The bouquet of roses is on the table'); (2) collective nouns can take singular or plural depending on whether the group acts as a unit or as individuals ('The committee has decided' / 'The committee have disagreed among themselves'); (3) 'either ... or' and 'neither ... nor' take a verb that agrees with the nearer subject.

Approach: find the head noun of the subject before deciding the verb form. Strike out prepositional phrases mentally. For collective nouns, ask whether the group is acting as one or as many. For correlative conjunctions, the verb is decided by proximity.

What an examiner expects: the rule stated cleanly in one sentence; corrected sentences with the change underlined; a one-line justification per sentence.

Common pitfalls: (1) matching the verb to the nearest noun rather than the head noun; (2) over-correcting collective nouns to always-singular; (3) ignoring the proximity rule for correlatives.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rule: subject and verb must agree in number.
- Trap 1 — intervening phrase: ignore prepositional phrases between subject and verb.
- Trap 2 — collective nouns: singular when acting as one, plural when acting as individuals.
- Trap 3 — either/or, neither/nor: verb agrees with nearer subject.
- 'Each', 'every', 'everyone', 'nobody' take singular verbs.
- 'A number of' takes plural; 'the number of' takes singular.
- Quantities and distances treated as a unit take singular ('Ten miles is a long way').

- Titles of books and names of companies treated as singular ('Great Expectations is on the syllabus').
- Compound subjects joined by 'and' usually take plural unless they refer to one thing ('bread and butter is on the table').
- Practice sentences for the examinee to correct.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong: 'The bouquet of roses are on the table.' Right: 'The bouquet of roses is on the table.' (head noun = bouquet, singular.)
- Wrong: 'Neither the principal nor the teachers was informed.' Right: 'Neither the principal nor the teachers were informed.' (verb agrees with nearer subject — teachers.)
- Wrong: 'A number of students was absent.' Right: 'A number of students were absent.' ('A number of' = plural.)
- Wrong: 'The committee are unable to take a decision yet.' Right: 'The committee is unable to take a decision yet.' (acting as one unit, hence singular.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: A verb agrees in number with its grammatical subject — singular subject, singular verb; plural subject, plural verb. Intervening prepositional phrases do not change the subject.

Worked examples: 'The bouquet of roses *is* on the table' (not *are*: the subject is *bouquet*, not *roses*). 'Neither the manager nor her assistants *were* informed' (verb agrees with the nearer subject, *assistants*). 'The committee *has* decided' (acting as one); 'The committee *have* disagreed' (acting individually).

Quick check:

1. The list of candidates (is/are) on the noticeboard. **is**
2. Either the captain or the players (was/were) at fault. **were**
3. Each of the students (has/have) submitted the essay. **has**
4. The number of applicants (was/were) lower this year. **was**
5. A jury of twelve citizens (deliver/delivers) the verdict. **delivers**

subject-verb agreement

head noun

collective noun

correlative conjunction

proximity rule

compound subject

quantifier

concord

Q30

Grammar / usage: Tense consistency

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

EASY

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: within a sentence or a closely linked passage, keep the tense consistent unless the meaning genuinely requires a shift. The most common error is mixing past and present in the same narration without reason. The sequence-of-tenses rule says that a subordinate clause normally moves into the past when the main clause is in the past ('He said that he was tired'), with three exceptions: universal truths, habitual actions, and historical present.

Approach: read your sentence aloud; if the time frame shifts mid-sentence and you cannot justify the shift, fix the verb. In reported speech, the reporting verb in the past pulls the reported verb back one tense ('I am' becomes 'he was').

What an examiner expects: the rule stated clearly; corrected sentences with the verb change underlined; a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) using historical present then drifting back to past; (2) failing to back-shift in reported speech; (3) over-correcting universal truths into past tense ('He said the earth moved around the sun').

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rule: keep tense consistent unless meaning requires a shift.
- Sequence of tenses: past main clause pulls subordinate clause to past.
- Exception 1: universal truths stay in present ('He said that the earth revolves around the sun').
- Exception 2: habitual present actions stay in present ('She told me she walks to school every day').
- Exception 3: historical present — narrating the past in present tense for vividness, but must be consistent within the passage.
- Reported speech: 'is' → 'was', 'has' → 'had', 'will' → 'would', 'can' → 'could', 'may' → 'might'.
- Time adverbs anchor tense — 'yesterday' fixes past, 'usually' fixes present, 'tomorrow' fixes future.
- Conditional sentences have their own sequence: 'If he comes, I will go' (open); 'If he came, I would go' (hypothetical); 'If he had come, I would have gone' (counterfactual).

- Perfect tenses signal sequence: past perfect indicates the earlier of two past events.
- Practice sentences below.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong: 'She opened the door and sees the dog.' Right: 'She opened the door and saw the dog.' (consistent past.)
- Wrong: 'He said the earth moved around the sun.' Right: 'He said the earth moves around the sun.' (universal truth — exception to back-shift.)
- Wrong: 'When he arrived, the train left.' Right: 'When he arrived, the train had left.' (past perfect signals earlier action.)
- Wrong: 'If he will come, I will help.' Right: 'If he comes, I will help.' (open conditional — present in the if-clause.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Maintain a consistent tense within a clause or related clauses; shift tense only when the time-frame genuinely changes. A reported main verb usually pulls dependent verbs into the same time-frame.

Worked examples: 'She said she *was* tired' (not *is*: reported speech in past). 'The film began before we *arrived*' (not *arrive*: both events past). 'I have lived here since 2019' (perfect tense continues into present; do not switch to simple past).

Quick check:

1. By the time we reached the station, the train (had left/has left). **had left**
2. If he calls, tell him I (was/am) busy. **am**
3. She admitted she (forgot/had forgotten) the keys. **had forgotten**
4. I knew you (will/would) come. **would**
5. While I was reading, the lights (go/went) out. **went**

tense consistency

sequence of tenses

back-shift

reported speech

universal truth

historical present

past perfect

conditional

Q31

Grammar / usage: Parallel structure

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

MEDIUM

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: when two or more items are joined by a coordinating conjunction ('and', 'or', 'but'), correlative conjunction ('either ... or', 'not only ... but also'), or by comparison ('rather than', 'as much as'), they must share the same grammatical form — all noun phrases, all verb phrases, all gerunds, all infinitives.

Approach: identify the conjunction; check the items on either side; force them into the same grammatical form. The repair is usually quick — change a gerund to an infinitive, or rephrase a noun phrase to match.

What an examiner expects: rule stated cleanly; corrected sentences with the parallel items underlined; a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) mixing gerunds and infinitives ('She likes hiking and to swim'); (2) breaking parallelism in lists of three or more; (3) breaking parallelism across correlative pairs ('not only ... but also').

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rule: items joined by conjunctions must share grammatical form.
- Lists of nouns: all nouns.
- Lists of verbs: all in the same form (all -ing, all infinitive, all simple).
- Correlative pairs: 'either ... or', 'neither ... nor', 'not only ... but also', 'both ... and' — items after each member must be the same form.
- Comparison: 'rather than X, Y' — X and Y must be the same form.
- Headings and bullet points also follow parallelism rules.
- Repair: change one item to match the others, not the other way around in isolation.
- Watch articles: 'a book, a pen and the eraser' — drop or repeat articles consistently.
- Watch prepositions: 'interested in art, music and in literature' — repeat or drop consistently.
- Practice sentences below.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong: 'She likes hiking, swimming and to read books.' Right: 'She likes hiking, swimming and reading books.' (all gerunds.)
- Wrong: 'He is not only a writer but also teaches.' Right: 'He is not only a writer but also a teacher.' (noun balances noun.)

- Wrong: 'The minister promised to cut taxes, reducing inflation and creating jobs.' Right: 'The minister promised to cut taxes, reduce inflation and create jobs.' (all infinitives.)
- Wrong: 'We were tired, hungry and feeling angry.' Right: 'We were tired, hungry and angry.' (all adjectives.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Items joined by coordinating conjunctions or listed in a series must share the same grammatical form — noun with noun, gerund with gerund, infinitive with infinitive, clause with clause.

Worked examples: 'She enjoys reading, writing and *painting*' (not *to paint*: keep gerunds parallel). 'The course teaches students to think critically, to write clearly and *to argue persuasively*' (parallel infinitives). 'He is wise, honest and *courageous*' (not *has courage*).

Quick check:

1. The job involves planning, scheduling and (to coordinate/coordinating) tasks. **coordinating**
2. She came not to complain but (helping/to help). **to help**
3. He is known for his diligence, his honesty and (he speaks well/his eloquence). **his eloquence**
4. The plan was bold, simple and (it could be executed/executable). **executable**
5. I prefer hiking to (swim/swimming). **swimming**

parallel structure

coordinating conjunction

correlative conjunction

gerund

infinitive

list

comparison

grammatical form

Q32

Grammar / usage: Modifiers — dangling and misplaced

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

MEDIUM

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: a modifier — a word, phrase or clause that describes another word — must sit next to the word it modifies. A misplaced modifier sits next to the wrong word ('She almost drove her kids to school every day'); a dangling modifier modifies a word that is not in the sentence at all ('Walking down the street, the trees were beautiful').

Approach: after an introductory participial phrase, ask ‘who or what is doing this action?’ — that word must be the subject of the main clause. If it is not, either change the subject or rewrite the phrase as a full subordinate clause.

What an examiner expects: rule stated cleanly; corrected sentence with modifier moved or rewritten; a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) leaving ‘only’, ‘almost’, ‘just’ in the wrong place; (2) starting sentences with -ing phrases without checking the subject; (3) using ‘while’ or ‘after’ phrases without a clear subject.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rule: a modifier sits next to what it modifies.
- Misplaced modifier: in the wrong place in the sentence.
- Dangling modifier: modifies a word absent from the sentence.
- ‘Only’, ‘just’, ‘almost’, ‘nearly’ belong immediately before the word they modify.
- Introductory participial phrases must agree with the subject of the main clause.
- Repair option 1: change the subject of the main clause.
- Repair option 2: rewrite the phrase as a full subordinate clause with its own subject.
- Squinting modifier — sits between two words it could modify, ambiguous (‘Students who study often get good grades’).
- Limit one modifier per noun where possible to avoid pile-ups.
- Practice sentences below.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong (misplaced): ‘She almost drove her kids to school every day.’ Right: ‘She drove her kids to school almost every day.’
- Wrong (dangling): ‘Walking down the street, the trees were beautiful.’ Right: ‘Walking down the street, I noticed that the trees were beautiful.’ (subject is now ‘I’)
- Wrong (dangling): ‘After completing the form, the application will be processed.’ Right: ‘After you complete the form, the application will be processed.’ (subordinate clause with subject ‘you’.)
- Wrong (squinting): ‘Students who study often get good grades.’ Right: ‘Students who often study get good grades.’ OR ‘Students who study get good grades often.’

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: A modifier must sit next to the word it modifies. A dangling modifier lacks a clear subject; a misplaced modifier sits beside the wrong word.

Worked examples: ‘Walking to office, the rain began’ is wrong — rain does not walk. Correct: ‘Walking to office, I felt the rain begin.’ ‘She almost drove six hours’ suggests she nearly drove; better: ‘She drove *almost* six hours.’

Quick check:

1. Tired after a long day, _____. **she sank into the sofa**
2. He only eats vegetables on Tuesdays. **He eats only vegetables on Tuesdays.**
3. Running across the field, my hat blew off. **Running across the field, I lost my hat.**
4. She nearly read every page. **She read nearly every page.**
5. To pass the exam, hard work is needed. **To pass the exam, students must work hard.**

modifier

misplaced modifier

dangling modifier

participial phrase

squinting modifier

subordinate clause

subject agreement

ambiguity

Q33

Grammar / usage: Articles — a, an, the

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

EASY

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: indefinite articles ‘a’ and ‘an’ introduce a singular countable noun mentioned for the first time or generic in reference; ‘a’ before consonant sounds, ‘an’ before vowel sounds. The definite article ‘the’ is used when the noun refers to something specific or previously mentioned, or unique (‘the sun’, ‘the Prime Minister’). Plural and uncountable nouns take no article when used in a general sense.

Approach: for each noun ask: countable or uncountable? Singular or plural? Specific or generic? First mention or repeat mention? Unique? Use this checklist to choose.

What an examiner expects: the rule stated clearly; corrected sentences with the article change underlined; a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) using ‘a’ before vowel sounds — sound, not spelling, decides (‘an honest man’, ‘a university’); (2) using ‘the’ before plural generic nouns (‘the dogs are loyal’ should be ‘dogs are loyal’ for a general claim); (3) dropping the definite article from unique singulars.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rule: a / an for first-mention singular countable; the for specific or unique.
- 'A' before consonant sounds, 'an' before vowel sounds — sound decides, not spelling.
- 'The' before nouns made specific by context, prior mention, or uniqueness.
- No article before plural generic ('Dogs are loyal') or uncountable generic ('Honesty is a virtue').
- 'The' before superlatives ('the tallest building'), ordinals ('the second chapter'), unique singulars ('the sun', 'the President').
- 'The' before names of rivers ('the Ganga'), seas ('the Arabian Sea'), mountain ranges ('the Himalayas'), groups of islands ('the Andamans').
- No article before names of single mountains ('Mount Everest'), single islands ('Sri Lanka'), most countries (exceptions: 'the USA', 'the UK', 'the Netherlands').
- 'The' before adjectives used as nouns ('the rich', 'the poor', 'the elderly').
- 'The' before musical instruments ('plays the sitar') but not before sports ('plays cricket').
- Practice sentences below.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong: 'He is a honest man.' Right: 'He is an honest man.' ('Honest' begins with a vowel sound.)
- Wrong: 'The dogs are loyal animals.' Right: 'Dogs are loyal animals.' (Generic plural — no article.)
- Wrong: 'Ganga flows into Bay of Bengal.' Right: 'The Ganga flows into the Bay of Bengal.' (Rivers and seas take the.)
- Wrong: 'She plays violin and likes football.' Right: 'She plays the violin and likes football.' (Musical instrument takes the; sport does not.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Use *a/an* for an unspecified countable singular noun; *the* when the noun is specific, previously mentioned, unique, or restricted by context. Use no article for plural or uncountable generalities.

Worked examples: 'I saw *a* dog yesterday. *The* dog was friendly' (first mention indefinite; second definite). '*The* Ganga flows through northern India' (unique geographical name). 'Honesty is the best policy' (uncountable abstract — no article).

Quick check:

1. She is (a/an) honest officer. **an** (silent *h*, vowel sound)

2. (The/—) Mount Everest is the highest peak. — (no article with most mountain peaks)
3. He plays (the/—) violin beautifully. **the**
4. (A/The) sun rises in the east. **The**
5. She is (a/an) university student. **a** (consonant y-sound)

article

definite article

indefinite article

countable noun

uncountable noun

generic reference

specific reference

vowel sound

Q34**Grammar / usage: Prepositions — common confusions**

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

MEDIUM

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: a preposition links a noun or pronoun to another word in the sentence and shows a relationship of place, time, direction or manner. English prepositions are largely idiomatic — there is no rule that explains every choice, so the safest method is to learn fixed verb-and-preposition combinations and common contrasts.

Approach: learn the four high-frequency contrasts — in / at / on (place and time), between / among (two vs more than two), since / for (point vs duration), different from / different than (BrE prefers from). Maintain a small notebook of verb-preposition pairs ('comply with', 'consist of', 'depend on', 'refer to').

What an examiner expects: the rule stated cleanly; corrected sentences with the preposition change underlined; a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) using 'discuss about' — discuss does not take a preposition; (2) using 'between' for more than two items; (3) using 'since' with a duration ('since two hours' instead of 'for two hours'); (4) using 'married with' instead of 'married to'.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rule: prepositions are largely idiomatic; learn pairs.
- in / at / on (place): 'in a country', 'at an address', 'on a street'.
- in / at / on (time): 'in a month or year', 'at a clock time', 'on a day or date'.
- between (two) / among (more than two): 'between you and me', 'among the four candidates'.

- since (point in time) / for (duration): 'since 2020', 'for three years'.
- Verb + preposition fixed pairs: comply with, consist of, depend on, refer to, succeed in, prevent from, accuse of, congratulate on.
- No preposition needed: discuss (not 'discuss about'), enter (not 'enter into' a room), reach (not 'reach to' the airport), marry (not 'marry with' her).
- Adjective + preposition: afraid of, fond of, similar to, different from, responsible for, capable of.
- Noun + preposition: an answer to, an effect on, an increase in, a solution to, a reason for.
- Practice sentences below.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong: 'We discussed about the proposal.' Right: 'We discussed the proposal.' ('Discuss' takes no preposition.)
- Wrong: 'I have been waiting since two hours.' Right: 'I have been waiting for two hours.' ('Since' marks a point; 'for' marks a duration.)
- Wrong: 'She got married with her classmate.' Right: 'She got married to her classmate.' ('Marry' takes 'to'.)
- Wrong: 'The prize was divided between the five winners.' Right: 'The prize was divided among the five winners.' ('Among' for more than two.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Prepositions are fixed by usage rather than logic; the right preposition follows the verb, noun or adjective it pairs with. Learn common pairings as units.

Worked examples: 'She is good *at* mathematics' (not *in*). 'He died *of* cancer' (cause of death — not *from*). 'I agree *with* you *on* this issue' (agree with a person, on a topic). 'The book consists *of* five chapters' (not *from*).

Quick check:

1. She is married (with/to) a doctor. **to**
2. He insisted (on/upon) paying the bill. **on** (both accepted; *on* commoner)
3. The team is composed (of/from) five members. **of**
4. I prefer tea (than/to) coffee. **to**
5. We discussed (about/—) the matter. — (no preposition after *discuss*)

preposition

idiomatic usage

verb-preposition

between vs among

since vs for

in / at / on

fixed pair

adjective preposition

Q35

Grammar / usage: Punctuation in formal writing

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

MEDIUM

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: punctuation marks the structure of a sentence and the relations between its parts. In formal writing, the central marks are the comma (lists, parenthetical remarks, separating subordinate from main clauses), the semicolon (joining two independent clauses without a conjunction, or separating list items that themselves contain commas), the colon (introducing a list, explanation or quotation), and the apostrophe (possession and contraction). The dash and the parenthesis offer parenthetical asides; the question mark is reserved for direct questions, never indirect ones.

Approach: for each clause, ask whether it is independent or subordinate; that decides whether a comma, semicolon or full stop is appropriate. For lists, use the serial (Oxford) comma when needed to remove ambiguity. For possessives, place the apostrophe before the 's' for singular owners, after the 's' for regular plural owners.

What an examiner expects: the rule stated cleanly; corrected sentences with the punctuation change underlined; a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) the comma splice — joining two independent clauses with a comma alone; (2) confusing 'its' (possessive) with 'it's' (it is); (3) putting a question mark after an indirect question ('She asked whether he was coming?'); (4) misusing the semicolon as a colon.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Comma: separates list items, sets off parenthetical remarks, follows introductory subordinate clauses.
- Semicolon: joins two independent clauses without a conjunction; separates list items that contain commas.
- Colon: introduces a list, explanation or quotation; never a substitute for a comma.
- Apostrophe: marks possession ('the minister's speech', 'the ministers' speeches') and contraction ('it's = it is').

- Dash and parenthesis: parenthetical asides; dash is more emphatic, parenthesis more discreet.
- Quotation marks: enclose direct speech and exact titles; punctuation usually inside the closing mark in BrE for full sentences quoted, outside for fragments.
- Question mark only for direct questions — never after indirect questions.
- Avoid the comma splice; use a semicolon, a full stop, or a conjunction.
- Use the serial (Oxford) comma to avoid ambiguity in lists.
- Practice sentences for the examinee to repunctuate.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong (comma splice): 'It was raining, we stayed indoors.' Right: 'It was raining; we stayed indoors.' OR 'It was raining, so we stayed indoors.'
- Wrong (apostrophe): 'The committee published it's report.' Right: 'The committee published its report.' ('Its' = possessive; 'it's' = it is.)
- Wrong (question mark): 'She asked whether the meeting was over?' Right: 'She asked whether the meeting was over.' (Indirect question — no question mark.)
- Wrong (semicolon as colon): 'There are three options; oral, written and practical.' Right: 'There are three options: oral, written and practical.' (Colon introduces the list.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Formal punctuation clarifies structure — commas separate items, semicolons join related independent clauses, colons introduce a list or explanation, dashes mark a strong break, apostrophes mark possession or contraction.

Worked examples: 'The report is long; however, it is well argued' (semicolon before conjunctive adverb). 'There are three goals: speed, accuracy and clarity' (colon introducing list). 'The Minister's statement was clear' (apostrophe for possession).

Quick check:

1. She said she would come however she did not. **She said she would come; however, she did not.**
2. The schools children performed well. **The school's children**
3. My three priorities are reading writing and listening. **My three priorities are reading, writing and listening.**
4. Its raining. **It's raining.**
5. He arrived at 9 a m sharp. **He arrived at 9 a.m. sharp.**

punctuation

comma

semicolon

colon

apostrophe

comma splice

quotation mark

serial comma

Q36

Grammar / usage: Tense agreement across clauses

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

MEDIUM

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: within a complex sentence, the verb in the subordinate clause is selected by the time relation to the main clause, not by the clock time of the writer. When the main verb is in the past, the subordinate verb typically moves one step back ('He said that he was busy'); when the main verb is in the present or future, the subordinate verb takes whatever tense the meaning requires. Three exceptions to the back-shift survive: universal truths, habitual actions, and historical present.

Approach: identify the main verb's tense first; then ask whether the subordinate event is earlier, simultaneous or later; pick the tense that signals that relation. Time adverbs ('yesterday', 'usually', 'tomorrow') anchor tense and should not be ignored.

What an examiner expects: the rule stated in one sentence; corrected sentences with the verb change underlined; a one-line justification per sentence.

Common pitfalls: (1) failing to back-shift after a past main verb; (2) over-back-shifting universal truths; (3) ignoring perfect tenses, which signal sequence ('had + past participle' for the earlier of two past events).

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rule: subordinate verb agrees in time-relation with main verb.
- Past main → past subordinate (default back-shift).
- Present main → any tense the meaning requires.
- Future main → present in subordinate after 'when', 'if', 'as soon as'.
- Exception 1 — universal truths stay in present ('She said the earth revolves around the sun').
- Exception 2 — habitual present actions stay in present ('He said he walks to work').
- Exception 3 — historical present once chosen, must be consistent.
- Past perfect ('had + past participle') signals the earlier of two past events.
- Time adverbs anchor tense — never ignore 'yesterday', 'usually', 'tomorrow'.

- Practice sentences for the examinee to correct.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong: 'When he arrives, I went home.' Right: 'When he arrived, I went home.' (past anchors both clauses.)
- Wrong: 'She told me she will come tomorrow.' Right: 'She told me she would come the next day.' (back-shift after past main verb.)
- Wrong: 'After he ate dinner, he goes for a walk.' Right: 'After he ate dinner, he went for a walk.' (consistent past.)
- Wrong: 'The teacher explained that water boiled at 100 degrees.' Right: 'The teacher explained that water boils at 100 degrees.' (universal truth — exception to back-shift.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Tense in a subordinate clause normally follows the tense of the main clause: a past main verb pulls dependent verbs into a past form; a present or future main verb leaves them free.

Worked examples: 'He said he *was* ready' (not *is*: past main → past dependent). 'She knows that he *has* arrived' (present main → present perfect retained). 'I will tell you when he *arrives*' (future main → present in time clause).

Quick check:

1. She told me that she (is/was) leaving. **was**
2. He believes that honesty (is/was) the best policy. **is** (universal truth)
3. I knew that they (will/would) help. **would**
4. She will call as soon as she (reaches/will reach) home. **reaches**
5. He admitted that he (forgot/had forgotten) the date. **had forgotten**

tense agreement

back-shift

sequence of tenses

subordinate clause

main clause

universal truth

past perfect

time adverb

Q37

Grammar / usage: Reported and direct speech

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

MEDIUM

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: direct speech reports the speaker's exact words inside quotation marks; reported (indirect) speech restates them in a subordinate clause introduced by 'that' (or by 'whether' for yes/no questions). The conversion typically requires three changes — back-shift of tense, shift of pronouns, and shift of time/place adverbs.

Approach: work through the three shifts in order. First, the reporting verb's tense (usually past) pulls the reported verb back. Second, first-person pronouns become third person from the reporter's standpoint. Third, time adverbs ('today' → 'that day', 'tomorrow' → 'the next day') and place adverbs ('here' → 'there') shift to the reporter's standpoint.

What an examiner expects: the rule stated in one sentence; the three shifts applied correctly in worked examples; corrected sentences with changes underlined.

Common pitfalls: (1) forgetting the pronoun shift while remembering the tense shift; (2) using 'that' before questions instead of 'whether/if'; (3) reporting questions with the question word order ('He asked where was she' instead of 'He asked where she was').

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rule: indirect speech uses a 'that'-clause and applies three shifts — tense, pronoun, time/place.
- Tense back-shift: 'is' → 'was', 'has' → 'had', 'will' → 'would', 'can' → 'could', 'may' → 'might'.
- Pronouns shift to the reporter's standpoint.
- Time adverbs: 'today' → 'that day', 'tomorrow' → 'the next day', 'yesterday' → 'the previous day', 'now' → 'then'.
- Place adverbs: 'here' → 'there', 'this' → 'that', 'these' → 'those'.
- Reported questions: use 'whether/if' for yes-no questions; use statement word order, not question word order.
- Reported commands: 'tell/ask/order/request someone to + infinitive' ('He told me to leave').
- Universal truths and habitual present do NOT back-shift.
- Reporting verb choice changes nuance — 'said', 'told', 'asked', 'replied', 'admitted', 'explained'.
- Practice sentences for the examinee to convert.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Direct: 'He said, "I am busy today."' Indirect: 'He said that he was busy that day.' (tense and adverb shifts.)
- Direct: 'She asked, "Where are you going?"' Indirect: 'She asked where I was going.' (statement word order; no question mark.)
- Direct: 'The officer said, "Submit the form by Friday."' Indirect: 'The officer asked us to submit the form by Friday.' (command → infinitive.)
- Direct: 'The teacher said, "The sun rises in the east."' Indirect: 'The teacher said that the sun rises in the east.' (universal truth — no back-shift.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Converting direct to reported speech requires three shifts — pronouns (to suit the reporter), tense (back-shift after a past reporting verb), and time/place markers (*now* → *then*, *here* → *there*, *today* → *that day*).

Worked examples: Direct: 'He said, "I am tired."' Reported: 'He said *he was* tired.'
 Direct: 'She said, "I will come tomorrow."' Reported: 'She said *she would* come *the next day*.'

Quick check:

1. Direct: 'I have finished,' she said. Reported: **She said she had finished.**
2. Direct: 'Where do you live?' he asked. Reported: **He asked where I lived.**
3. Direct: 'Don't go,' she said. Reported: **She told me not to go.**
4. Direct: 'I am going home now,' he said. Reported: **He said he was going home then.**
5. Direct: 'Did you call?' she asked. Reported: **She asked whether I had called.**

reported speech

direct speech

back-shift

pronoun shift

adverb shift

reporting verb

question conversion

command conversion

Q38

Grammar / usage: Conditional sentences

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

MEDIUM

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: English conditionals come in four main patterns. Zero conditional ('If you heat water, it boils') states a general truth — present in both clauses. First conditional ('If it rains, we will stay') is open — present in the if-clause, future in the main clause. Second conditional ('If I had time, I would help') is hypothetical — past in the if-clause, would + infinitive in the main clause. Third conditional ('If I had known, I would have helped') is counterfactual about the past — past perfect in the if-clause, would have + past participle in the main clause.

Approach: identify the kind of condition being expressed — habitual truth, real future possibility, present unreality, or past unreality — and match the pattern. Never use 'will' or 'would' in the if-clause itself.

What an examiner expects: the four patterns named cleanly; corrected sentences with the verb forms underlined; a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) using 'will' in the if-clause of a first conditional ('If he will come, I will help'); (2) mixing second and third conditional forms; (3) using 'was' instead of 'were' after 'if I' in the formal hypothetical ('If I were you').

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Zero conditional: 'If + present, present' — general truth.
- First conditional: 'If + present, will + infinitive' — open future.
- Second conditional: 'If + past, would + infinitive' — present unreality.
- Third conditional: 'If + past perfect, would have + past participle' — past unreality.
- Never use 'will' or 'would' in the if-clause.
- Use 'were' (not 'was') with 'I/he/she/it' in the formal hypothetical ('If I were you').
- Mixed conditional: past condition with present result ('If I had studied, I would be a doctor today').
- 'Unless' = 'if not' and takes the same verb forms.
- 'Provided that', 'as long as', 'on condition that' behave like 'if'.
- Practice sentences for the examinee to correct.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong: 'If he will come, I will help.' Right: 'If he comes, I will help.' (first conditional — present in if-clause.)

- Wrong: 'If I was rich, I would travel.' Right: 'If I were rich, I would travel.' (formal hypothetical takes 'were'.)
- Wrong: 'If I would have known, I would have helped.' Right: 'If I had known, I would have helped.' (third conditional — past perfect, then would have.)
- Wrong: 'Unless you will study, you will fail.' Right: 'Unless you study, you will fail.' ('Unless' = 'if not' — no 'will' in the if-clause.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Conditional sentences pair an *if*-clause with a result clause. Type 1 (real future): present + will/may. Type 2 (unreal present): past + would. Type 3 (unreal past): past perfect + would have.

Worked examples: 'If it *rains*, the match *will be* cancelled' (type 1). 'If I *were* the chief minister, I *would* reform schools' (type 2). 'If she *had studied*, she *would have* passed' (type 3 — fact contrary to past reality).

Quick check:

1. If he (works/will work) hard, he will succeed. **works**
2. If I (was/were) you, I would apologise. **were**
3. If they had left earlier, they (would catch/would have caught) the train. **would have caught**
4. She would help us if she (has/had) the time. **had**
5. Unless you (hurry/will hurry), you'll miss the bus. **hurry**

conditional

zero conditional

first conditional

second conditional

third conditional

hypothetical

counterfactual

unless

Q39

Grammar / usage: Modal verbs and their shades of meaning

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

MEDIUM

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: modal verbs (can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must, ought to, need, dare) take the bare infinitive and do not change form for person or number. They express ability, permission, obligation, advice, possibility, certainty, habit and prediction — shades

that English's main verbs cannot mark on their own. Past-tense modals (could, might, should have) signal not only past time but also weaker possibility or tentativeness.

Approach: identify the shade of meaning the writer needs — ability vs permission, advice vs obligation, possibility vs certainty — and choose the modal that marks that shade. Watch the perfect modals ('must have arrived' for past deduction, 'should have arrived' for past expectation unmet).

What an examiner expects: the rule stated cleanly; corrected sentences with the modal change underlined; a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) using 'can' for permission in formal writing ('Can I leave?' instead of 'May I leave?'); (2) using 'must' for personal advice instead of 'should'; (3) collapsing 'must have', 'might have' and 'should have' into one form.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Ability: can (present), could (past or polite request).
- Permission: may (formal), can (informal); 'might' is the polite version of 'may'.
- Obligation: must (strong, internal), have to (external), should/ought to (advice).
- Possibility / certainty: may, might, could (less certain), must (deduction), will (prediction).
- Past modals carry past time AND weaker tone — could, might, should.
- Perfect modals — past time only: 'must have arrived' (deduction), 'should have arrived' (expectation unmet), 'might have arrived' (uncertainty).
- Modals take the bare infinitive — no 'to', no -s in third person.
- Two modals cannot be combined ('will can' is wrong; use 'will be able to').
- Negative forms: cannot / mustn't / shouldn't / mightn't — note 'mustn't' (prohibition) differs from 'needn't' (absence of obligation).
- Practice sentences for the examinee to correct.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Wrong: 'He can to swim.' Right: 'He can swim.' (modals take bare infinitive — no 'to'.)
- Wrong: 'You must consult a doctor for general advice.' Right: 'You should consult a doctor.' (advice — should, not must.)
- Wrong: 'He must have came earlier.' Right: 'He must have come earlier.' (perfect modal — past participle.)
- Wrong: 'She needn't to apologise.' Right: 'She need not apologise.' OR 'She doesn't need to apologise.' ('Need' as modal takes bare infinitive.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: Modal verbs (can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, will, would) carry shades of possibility, permission, obligation and advice. Choose by the strength and the certainty intended.

Worked examples: ‘You *must* wear a helmet’ (legal compulsion). ‘You *should* wear a helmet’ (advice). ‘It *may* rain’ (open possibility). ‘It *might* rain’ (slightly weaker possibility). ‘He *can* swim’ (ability). ‘He *could* swim as a child’ (past ability).

Quick check:

1. You (must/should) submit the form today — it is the deadline. **must**
2. She (can/could) play the violin when she was ten. **could**
3. (May/Can) I borrow your pen, please? **May** (formal request)
4. He (must/might) be tired — he has worked all day. **must** (deduction)
5. Students (shall/will) sit only in the assigned hall. **shall** (formal regulation)

modal verb

ability

permission

obligation

advice

possibility

deduction

perfect modal

Q40

Grammar / usage: Word formation — prefixes and suffixes

10 MARKS

100 WORDS

8 MIN

EASY

GRAMMAR

ANSWER OUTLINE

Rule: new English words are typically formed by attaching a prefix (added at the front, usually changing meaning) or a suffix (added at the end, usually changing the part of speech). Knowing the productive families — negative prefixes (‘un-’, ‘in-’, ‘im-’, ‘il-’, ‘ir-’, ‘dis-’, ‘non-’), and noun-forming suffixes (‘-tion’, ‘-ment’, ‘-ity’, ‘-ness’), verb-forming suffixes (‘-ise/-ize’, ‘-ify’, ‘-en’) and adjective-forming suffixes (‘-able’, ‘-ful’, ‘-less’, ‘-ous’) — helps both reading speed and writing precision.

Approach: identify the base word’s part of speech; decide what part of speech is needed; choose a suffix that performs that transformation. For negation, the choice between ‘un-’, ‘in-’, ‘im-’, ‘il-’, ‘ir-’ is partly determined by the first letter of the base (‘il-’ before ‘l’, ‘ir-’ before ‘r’, ‘im-’ before ‘b/m/p’).

What an examiner expects: the rule stated cleanly; correct forms supplied for prompts (verb to noun, adjective to noun, noun to adjective); a one-line justification.

Common pitfalls: (1) using the wrong negative prefix ('unpossible' instead of 'impossible'); (2) doubling consonants incorrectly when adding suffixes; (3) confusing '-ic' and '-ical' adjectives (economic vs economical).

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Prefix: added at the front, changes meaning (usually).
- Suffix: added at the end, changes part of speech (usually).
- Negative prefixes: un-, in-, im- (before b/m/p), il- (before l), ir- (before r), dis-, non-.
- Verb → noun: -tion (educate → education), -ment (achieve → achievement), -ance (perform → performance), -al (refuse → refusal).
- Adjective → noun: -ity (able → ability), -ness (kind → kindness), -ce (silent → silence).
- Noun/adjective → verb: -ise/-ize (modern → modernise), -ify (simple → simplify), -en (broad → broaden).
- Noun → adjective: -ful (care → careful), -less (hope → hopeless), -ous (danger → dangerous), -al (form → formal), -ive (act → active).
- Adjective → adverb: -ly (quick → quickly); some adjectives end in -ly already (friendly, lovely).
- Spelling rules: drop final -e before -ing/-able/-ous (use → using, value → valuable); double final consonant after short stressed vowel (run → running).
- Practice prompts for the examinee.

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Verb to noun: 'develop' → 'development'; 'analyse' → 'analysis'; 'apply' → 'application'.
- Adjective to noun: 'happy' → 'happiness'; 'curious' → 'curiosity'; 'efficient' → 'efficiency'.
- Negation: 'possible' → 'impossible' (im- before p); 'legal' → 'illegal' (il- before l); 'regular' → 'irregular' (ir- before r); 'happy' → 'unhappy'.
- Wrong: 'unpossible'. Right: 'impossible'. (Negative prefix before 'p' is im-.) Wrong: 'economical growth'. Right: 'economic growth'. (-ic for relating to economy; -ical for thrifty.)

MODEL ANSWER

Rule: A prefix attached to a base word modifies meaning (*un-, dis-, re-, pre-, mis-*); a suffix attached to a base word changes grammatical class (*-ness, -ity, -tion, -able, -ly*).

Worked examples: *Happy* → *unhappy* (negation by prefix); *happy* → *happiness* (noun by suffix); *govern* → *misgovern, government, governable*. Prefixes seldom change part of speech; suffixes usually do.

Quick check:

1. The opposite of *visible* is _____. **invisible**
2. The noun form of *create* is _____. **creation**
3. Add a prefix to *read* to mean 'read in advance': _____. **preread**
4. The adjective form of *respond* is _____. **responsive** (or *responsible*)
5. The adverb form of *quick* is _____. **quickly**

prefix

suffix

word formation

negation

part of speech

spelling rule

derivation

morphology

About Anantam IAS

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