

# ESSAY

## FOR UPSC CIVIL SERVICES EXAM

EXAM-ORIENTED

CONCEPT -CENTRIC

STRUCTURED & SIMPLIFIED

*“True justice is not just in the courtrooms, but in classrooms, streets, and homes.”*

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## **SECTION 1:**

# **BASIC ESSAY DEVELOPMENT**

## PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 2014   | 2015   |
| <b>Section A</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. With greater power comes greater responsibility.</li><li>2. Is the growing level of competition good for the youth?</li><li>3. Are the standardized tests good measure of academic ability or progress?</li><li>4. Words are sharper than the two-edged sword.</li></ol> <b>Section B</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. Was it the policy paralysis or the paralysis of implementation which slowed the growth of our country?</li><li>6. Is sting operation an invasion on privacy?</li><li>7. Fifty Golds in Olympics: Can this be a reality for India?</li><li>8. Tourism: Can this be the next big thing for India?</li></ol>           | <b>Section A</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Lending hands to someone is better than giving a dole.</li><li>2. Quick but steady wins the race.</li><li>3. Character of an institution is reflected in its leader.</li><li>4. Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make a man more clever devil.</li></ol> <b>Section B</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. Technology cannot replace manpower.</li><li>6. Crisis faced in India - moral or economic.</li><li>7. Dreams which should not let India sleep.</li><li>8. Can capitalism bring inclusive growth ?</li></ol>   |
| 2016   | 2017   |
| <b>Section A</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. If development is not engendered, it is endangered</li><li>2. Need brings greed, if greed increases it spoils breed</li><li>3. Water disputes between states in federal India</li><li>4. Innovation is the key determinant of economic growth and social welfare</li></ol> <b>Section B</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. Cooperative federalism: Myth or reality</li><li>6. Cyberspace and internet: Blessing or curse to the human civilization in the long run</li><li>7. Near jobless growth in India: An anomaly or an outcome of economic reforms</li><li>8. Digital economy: A leveller or a source of economic inequality</li></ol> | <b>Section A</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Farming has lost the ability to be a source of subsistence for majority of farmers in India</li><li>2. Impact of the new economic measures on fiscal ties between the union and states in India.</li><li>3. Destiny of a nation is shaped in its classrooms.</li><li>4. Has the Non- Alignment Movement(NAM) lost its relevance in a multipolar world.</li></ol> <b>Section B</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.</li><li>6. Fulfillment of 'new woman' in India is a myth.</li><li>7. We may brave human laws but cannot resist natural laws.</li><li>8. Social media is inherently a selfish medium.</li></ol> |
| 2018   | 2019   |

## 1. KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM PYQS

### 1.1. Understanding the Trends

The most significant trend in the UPSC Essay paper is a decisive **shift from concrete, topic-based questions to abstract, philosophical ones**. While earlier years offered a mix, recent papers almost exclusively feature quotes and metaphors that require deep interpretation and multidimensional thinking rather than just domain-specific knowledge.

## Recurrent Themes and Patterns

Across the years, several key themes consistently appear, though the way they are framed has changed.

- **Philosophy, Ethics, and Human Values:** This is the most dominant category. Topics frequently explore concepts like truth, reality, happiness, wisdom, and the human condition.
  - Examples include: "Wisdom finds truth" (2019), "Life is long journey between human being and being humane" (2020), "Happiness is the path" (2024), and "Truth knows no color" (2025).
- **Science, Technology, and Society:** The impact of technology on humanity is a recurring point of discussion, especially its dual nature as both a boon and a bane.
  - Examples include: "Technology cannot replace manpower" (2016), "Cyberspace and internet: Blessing or curse" (2017), "Rise of Artificial Intelligence: the threat of jobless future or better job opportunities" (2020), and "The process of self-discovery has now been technologically outsourced" (2021).
- **Socio-Economic Issues:** Essays often touch upon development, justice, education, and health as foundational pillars of a nation.
  - Examples include: "Education without values" (2016), "Destiny of a nation is shaped in its classrooms" (2017), "There can be no social justice without economic prosperity" (2021), and "A society that has more justice is a society that needs less charity" (2023).
- **Gender and Social Structures:** The paper has consistently included topics on gender, particularly the role and challenges faced by women.
  - Examples include: "Fulfillment of 'new woman' in India is a myth" (2018), "Patriarchy is the least noticed yet the most significant structure of social inequality" (2021), and "Girls are weighed down by restrictions, boys with demands - two equally harmful disciplines" (2023).
- **Polity, Governance, and Power:** Questions on power, responsibility, and the nature of institutions are common.
  - Examples include: "With greater power comes greater responsibility" (2014), "Character of an institution is reflected in its leader" (2016), and "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but to test the character, give him power" (2024).

## Influence of Thinkers and Ideas

The essay topics frequently draw from the ideas of prominent global thinkers, even if they aren't named explicitly. This suggests that candidates are expected to have a broad understanding of history, philosophy, and literature.

- **Philosophers:** The influence of classical and modern philosophy is evident.

- "The real is rational and the rational is real" (2021) is a direct quote from German philosopher **G.W.F. Hegel**.
- "History repeats itself, first as a tragedy, second as a farce" (2021) is a famous line from **Karl Marx**.
- Topics like "The doubter is a true man of Science" (2024) echo the principles of Socratic inquiry and scientific skepticism.
- **Political Leaders and Strategists:** Quotes and ideas from influential leaders are also a source.
  - "The Empires of the future will be the empires of the mind" (2024) is a quote attributed to **Winston Churchill**.
  - "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting" (2025) is a central tenet from **Sun Tzu's The Art of War**.
- **Poets and Writers:** Literary wisdom is often tested.
  - "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (2022) is a direct quote from the poet **Percy Bysshe Shelley**.
  - "A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ship is for" (2022) is a popular saying by **John A. Shedd**.
  - "Not all who wander are lost" (2023) is a line from a poem in **J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings**.

## Evolution and Changing Nature of the Paper

The character of the essay paper has evolved significantly over the decade.

- **From Specific to Abstract:** In the initial years (2014-2016), the topics were often specific and grounded in current affairs or policy debates. For example, "Was it the policy paralysis or the paralysis of implementation which slowed the growth of our country?" (2014) or "Water disputes between states in federal India" (2016). These topics have a clear, defined scope.
- **The Rise of Metaphor and Philosophy:** From around 2018 onwards, and almost entirely after 2020, the paper has been dominated by abstract and philosophical statements. This requires candidates to first **deconstruct the metaphor or quote** and then construct an argument using a wide array of interdisciplinary examples.
  - Compare a direct topic like "Digital economy: A leveller or a source of economic inequality" (2017) with a metaphorical one like "A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ship is for" (2022) or "The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining" (2022).
- **Emphasis on Original Thought:** The newer topics are designed to prevent candidates from using pre-prepared content. An essay on a topic like "Your perception of me is a reflection of you; my reaction to you is an awareness of me" (2021) or "Thinking is like a game, it does not begin unless there is an opposite team" (2023) cannot be written without genuine, on-the-spot critical thinking and self-reflection.

| Period | Nature of Topics | Dominant Themes & Examples |
|--------|------------------|----------------------------|
|--------|------------------|----------------------------|

|                                       |   |  |  |   |  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Early Years (2014-2016)</b>        | <b>Concrete &amp; Direct.</b><br>A mix of topics grounded in policy, current affairs, and straightforward proverbs. Required less abstract interpretation.        | <b>Governance &amp; Economy:</b> "Was it the policy paralysis or the paralysis of implementation which slowed the growth of our country?" ,<br><br><b>"Tourism:</b> Can this be the next big thing for India?" . | <b>Social Issues:</b> "Is the growing level of competition good for the youth?"  | <b>Federalism:</b> "Water disputes between states in federal India"   | <b>Simple Proverbs:</b> "Lending hands to someone is better than giving a dole".   |
| <b>Transitional Years (2017-2019)</b> | <b>Balanced &amp; Shifting.</b> A clear move towards more philosophical topics, while still retaining some concrete, GS-style questions.                          | <b>Technology &amp; Society:</b> "Digital economy: A leveller or a source of economic inequality" .  | <b>Education:</b> "Destiny of a nation is shaped in its classrooms" .  | <b>Rising Philosophy:</b> "Wisdom finds truth" , "A people that values its privileges above its principles loses both"  | <b>Geopolitics:</b> "Has the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) lost its relevance in a multipolar world".   |
| <b>Recent Years (2020-2025)</b>       | <b>Abstract &amp; Philosophical.</b> Overwhelmingly dominated by metaphorical quotes and abstract concepts that require deep interpretation and original thought. | <b>Deep Philosophy:</b> "The real is rational and the rational is real" , "History repeats itself, first as a tragedy, second as a farce"  | <b>Metaphorical Wisdom:</b> "A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ship is for" , "The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining" | <b>Psychology &amp; Perception:</b> "The process of self-discovery has now been technologically outsourced" , "A smile is the chosen vehicle for all ambiguities" . | <b>Nature of Thought:</b> "Thinking is like a game, it does not begin unless there is an opposite team" , "The Empires of the future will be the empires of the mind". |

## 1.2. Contextual understanding of topics

2014

- **Topic:** "Was it the policy paralysis or the paralysis of implementation which slowed the growth of our country?"
- **Context:** The term "**policy paralysis**" was a central theme in the political and economic discourse leading up to the 2014 Indian General Election. It was used to critique the preceding government's handling of the economy, making this topic a direct reflection of a major national debate.
- **Topic:** "Is sting operation an invasion of privacy?"
- **Context:** The ethics of media sting operations and their conflict with the right to privacy was a recurring debate, fueled by high-profile cases and judicial observations on the matter.

## 2016

- **Topic:** "Cooperative federalism: Myth or reality"
- **Context:** This was highly topical. The NITI Aayog had been established in 2015 to foster cooperative federalism. Furthermore, 2016 was the year the landmark Goods and Services Tax (GST) constitutional amendment was passed, a process that required immense cooperation between the central and state governments.
- **Topic:** "Fifty Golds in Olympics: Can this be a reality for India?"
- **Context:** The **Rio Olympics** were held in 2016. National discussions about India's sporting performance, infrastructure, and policy were at their peak during this period.

## 2017

- **Topic:** "Impact of the new economic measures on fiscal ties between the union and states in India"
- **Context:** This was a direct reference to two major economic events. The **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** was implemented on July 1, 2017, fundamentally reshaping Union-State fiscal relations. The impacts of the **2016 demonetization** were also a subject of intense debate throughout 2017.
- **Topic:** "Digital economy: A leveller or a source of economic inequality"
- **Context:** In the wake of demonetization, the government launched a massive push for a "digital economy." This sparked a nationwide debate on digital literacy, the urban-rural digital divide, and whether this shift would lead to inclusive growth or widen inequality.

## 2018

- **Topic:** "Management of Indian border disputes - a complex task"
- **Context:** The **Doklam military standoff** with China had occurred in 2017. The strategic implications of this event and the broader complexities of managing borders with both China and Pakistan were major national security topics in 2018.
- **Topic:** "Alternative technologies for a climate change resilient India"
- **Context:** Having ratified the Paris Agreement, India's focus on climate change and renewable energy (especially the International Solar Alliance) was a key policy area. This topic reflected the ongoing global and national push for sustainable development.

## 2019

- **Topic:** "Biased media is a real threat to Indian democracy"
- **Context:** 2019 was a General Election year in India. The role of the media, allegations of bias, and the spread of "fake news" were central to the political discourse, making this a highly relevant and debated issue.

- **Topic:** "Neglect of primary health care and education in India are reasons for its backwardness"
- **Context:** The launch of **Ayushman Bharat**, a major public health insurance scheme, in 2018 had put the spotlight on the country's healthcare infrastructure, particularly the need for stronger primary care.

## 2020 & Beyond

From 2020, while topics became more abstract, they still resonated with the zeitgeist.

- **Topic (2020):** "Rise of Artificial Intelligence: the threat of jobless future or better job opportunities through reskilling and upskilling"
- **Context:** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalization and remote work globally, intensifying the ongoing debate about the future of jobs in the age of AI.
- **Topic (2021):** "Technology as the silent factor in international relations"
- **Context:** This reflected the growing global consciousness of cyber warfare, US-China tech rivalry, and the geopolitical influence of tech giants.
- **Topic (2024):** "Social media is Triggering 'Fear of Missing Out' amongst the youth, precipitating depression and loneliness"
- **Context:** This directly taps into the widespread contemporary concern for mental health and the well-documented negative impacts of social media on the well-being of young people.

## 2025

- "Truth knows no color."
  - This statement about the objective nature of truth is incredibly pertinent today. The central issue it connects to is the global crisis of **misinformation and AI-driven deepfakes**. In 2025, governments and societies are grappling with how to regulate generative AI and social media platforms to prevent the spread of sophisticated disinformation that threatens social cohesion and democratic processes. The topic directly addresses the contemporary search for truth in a "post-truth" era saturated with biased narratives.
- "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."
  - This is directly applicable to modern geopolitics. The primary global conflicts are increasingly being waged not on the battlefield, but through **economic statecraft, cyber warfare, and technological competition**. The ongoing "chip wars," strategic competition over critical mineral supply chains, and the use of comprehensive economic sanctions as a primary foreign policy tool are all real-world examples of attempting to achieve strategic goals without direct military engagement.
- "Thought finds a world and creates one also."
  - This idea is at the heart of the current focus on **innovation and national vision**. It's highly relevant to India's "Viksit Bharat 2047" initiative, which is a conscious national effort to create a future reality through present-day thought and planning. Furthermore, the exponential progress in fields like synthetic biology and quantum computing demonstrates how abstract scientific thought is actively creating new technologies and capabilities that are reshaping our world.
- "Best lessons are learnt through bitter experiences."
  - This proverb powerfully resonates with the world's current efforts to build resilience after recent crises. Policies being implemented in 2025 around strengthening global supply chains, ratifying the new WHO Pandemic Treaty for public health