

EDITORIAL

Enforce rules for debate

A well-functioning parliament is essential for a healthy democracy to promote constructive discussions on public issues in parliament. The need of the hour is to establish and enforce rules for debate, including time limits, respectful language, and relevance to the topic at hand. Provide parliamentarians with access to reliable data, research, and expert opinions to inform their discussions. Encourage parliamentarians to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue, avoiding personal attacks and inflammatory language. Allow citizens to provide feedback and input on public issues through various channels, such as public hearings, petitions, and online forums. Develop and enforce clear consequences for parliamentarians who disrupt proceedings or engage in obstructive behavior. Foster a culture of constructive opposition, where parliamentarians can express dissenting views without disrupting the proceedings. Offer alternative mechanisms for opposition, such as motions, amendments, and parliamentary inquiries. Broadcast parliamentary proceedings to increase transparency and allow citizens to hold their representatives accountable, make parliamentary records, including transcripts, minutes, and reports, publicly available to promote transparency and accountability. Establish an independent parliamentary watchdog to monitor parliamentary proceedings and ensure that parliamentarians are held accountable for their actions. Organize public outreach programs to educate citizens about parliamentary procedures, public issues, and the role of parliamentarians. Develop platforms for citizens to engage with parliamentarians, provide feedback, and participate in public consultations. Collaborate with civil society organizations to promote public awareness and engagement on public issues. By implementing these measures, parliament can function more effectively, promote constructive discussions on public issues, and increase transparency and accountability. The mandate of Parliament is a noble one upholding democratic values, represent the interests of India's citizens and ensure that governance aligns with the principles of our Constitution. Yet, too often, it has been reduced to an extension of election campaigns, a space for making short-term political and electoral gains, rather than a deliberative forum for addressing national challenges. But Parliament hasn't always functioned this way, which gives us hope that change is possible. One of the surest signs of a failing democracy is the ill health of its institutions, particularly the institutions designed to check power. Like the Indian Parliament. Whatever may be the purpose of a parliament in our imagination, the Constitution envisages it as a representative, law making, accountability seeking institution. It is struggling to properly do any of these things. To put all the blame on the Opposition for the impasse in Parliament obscures the government's share of responsibility for this denouement. With both sides unwilling to give in, acrimonious events marked the session with legislators on both sides engaging in competitive disruption.



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As Artificial intelligence grows increasingly sophisticated, our commitment to these skills will determine whether we remain active participants in innovation—or passive consumers. In an era increasingly defined by technological innovation, reading and writing—cornerstones of human intellect—are facing a profound transformation. While artificial intelligence bots like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google Bard redefine the boundaries of information generation, the necessity of cultivating human literacy has never been more crucial. The transition from Neanderthals to modern

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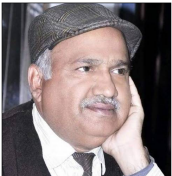
Why reading and writing matter more in the age of Artificial intelligence



human involved significant cognitive and cultural advancements, but Neanderthals themselves did not read or write. Reading and writing developed after modern humans became the dominant hominid species. These are not merely communication tools but exercises that keep our cognitive faculties sharp and resilient. When we read, our brains decode symbols, conjuring vivid images, emotions, and concepts. This intricate process activates the left temporal cortex, which is responsible for language processing and strengthens neural connectivity. Studies underscore that reading enhances memory, concentration, and analytical thinking. Engaging with diverse genres deepens empathy and broadens perspectives, fostering a nuanced understanding of the world. Writing, on the other hand, is an intellectual partner to reading. Crafting words—whether in a journal, essay, or story—requires us to organise thoughts, synthesise ideas, and express them clearly. This process activates the prefrontal cortex, the brain's hub for decision-making and problem-solving. Writing is more

than an intellectual task; it is therapeutic. Research shows that expressive writing can alleviate stress, enhance mood, and even bolster the immune system. The tactile act of writing also strengthens memory, embedding information deeply within our minds. Reading and writing foster neuroplasticity, enabling the brain to adapt and form new connections. They are antidotes to cognitive decline and shields against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's. Regular engagement with these skills cultivates intellectual independence, creativity, and emotional depth—uniquely human attributes. Yet, as AI bots revolutionise the way we consume and produce information, there is an alarming decline in human literacy. Tools like Book AI, which transforms any book into a conversational chatbot, exemplify AI's capacity to digest and reproduce complex information effortlessly. AI lacks the intrinsic human qualities of creativity, empathy, and ethical judgment. As AI literacy surges, the stagnation of human literacy risks creating a dangerous imbalance. Over-reliance on AI can diminish critical thinking and communication skills, weakening the very attributes that distinguish humans from machines. While the fear of displacement is understandable, the answer lies in shifting our perspective. AI is not an adversary but a powerful partner that can amplify human capabilities and drive innovation. Individuals can leverage their unique strengths to complement AI capabilities by prioritising the development of reading and writing skills. In an environment controlled by artificial intelligence, these abilities are necessary to navigate complicated concepts, understandably articulate them, and affirm human importance. The development of artificial intelligence highlights the significance of human expertise rather than diminishing it. By committing to studying throughout our lives, we can ensure that technology will not replace our humanity but rather improve it.

How differently abled aspirants can ace the UPSC Personality Test



VIJAY GARG

The UPSC Civil Services Examination (CSE) Mains 2024 results are out and shortlisted candidates, including differently abled individuals, are preparing for the Personality Test. While differently abled candidates face challenges throughout the process, they should avoid overemphasising their disability during the Personality Test as that can push them on the back foot. Key pitfall "A major stumbling block is focusing excessively on one's disability. This hyper-awareness can lead to a loss of composure, resulting in a lack of presence of mind. Candidates must remember that the interview board is not evaluating them on their disability



but by their suitability for a public role, ability to think critically, and interpersonal skills. Another mistake that differently abled candidates make during the interview round is adopting a defensive tone. While it's natural to anticipate questions about one's circumstances, responding with positivity, clarity, and self-assurance demonstrates resilience," former IAS officer and UPSC mentor. "It's important not to leverage disability as an excuse to gain brownie points. "Differently abled should always remain optimistic. American President Franklin D. Roosevelt governed an entire country from a wheelchair, proving that disability is no longer a hurdle in governance. Believing in one's potential to accomplish good results is crucial; personality training can make this possible. While physical barriers and pain exist, they must be overcome with determination and resilience," says chairman, Absolute IAS Academy, who trains differently abled candidates for the Personality Test. Preparation hurdles Preparing for the UPSC exam is daunting for disabled candidates, and the challenge lies in the need to perform at par with peers. "Preparation hurdles often stem from logistical issues, such

as limited access to mock interviews or expert guidance outside major hubs like Delhi. Travelling to cities with coaching infrastructure, especially when faced with mobility constraints or lack of accessible resources. These challenges emphasise systemic support's importance for creating equitable exam preparation opportunities." The differently abled candidates must strategise meticulously. "They should begin by dissecting the detailed Application Form (DAF)—their place of birth, cadre preferences, hobbies, and extracurriculars are all fair game for questioning. They should anticipate every possible angle and build a robust response structure akin to answer writing. Practice is non-negotiable. They could have someone ask them questions daily, use their phone camera to record themselves while answering, and focus on vocalising and refining their thoughts. This is particularly critical for counterarguments—handling them thoughtfully and assertively is a skill that must be honed. Mock interviews are invaluable; candidates must take as many as they can, even virtually, to simulate real-time pressure and familiarise themselves with the dynamics of an interview. Persistence and preparation go hand in hand," adds Kapoor. Success in the UPSC Personality Test hinges on persistence, calm temperament, and the ability to think analytically under pressure. Being polite yet assertive is a delicate balance—candidates must project confidence without appearing arrogant. "Candidates should develop on-the-spot thinking by practising structured responses that remain thoughtful and logical. A calm demeanour can set them apart even when faced with unexpected or provocative questions. Lastly, persistence is their most reliable ally," elaborates Kapoor. The numbers game To put things in perspective, over 10 lakh people prepare for prelims, about 15,000 get the opportunity to write Mains, and only 2,500 get the opportunity to reach the interview stage. "This year, UPSC has announced around 30-35 vacancies for the differently abled across categories, and nearly 60 to 70 of them would be appearing for the interview. On average, a minimum of 3000-4000 differently abled people prepare for the UPSC exams," says Kottaram.

Two levels of CBSE subjects — opportunity or limitation?

VIJAY GARG

Proposal to introduce dual levels of Science and Social Science is a step that warrants careful deliberation. While it offers the promise of catering to diverse learners, its success hinges on how thoughtfully it is executed. CBSE subjects levels All students of Mathematics, whether they opt to write the Standard or Basic Mathematics exam at Grade X level, have to complete the same syllabus and go through the same set of concepts. Two roads diverged in the woods, and the path we chose will make all the difference. CBSE is mulling the introduction of two levels each of Social Science and Science subjects at the secondary level. It has been suggested that while the content may remain the same, there will definitely be two kinds of assessment papers – Advanced and Basic. This structure is similar to the existing levels of Mathematics, Maths Standard and Basic. However, this approach has not fully delivered on its promise of providing flexibility in learning. Without careful planning and foresight, there is a real risk of repeating these shortcomings. All students of Mathematics,



whether they opt to write the Standard or Basic Mathematics or related fields in the coming years. For example, courses like engineering require the student to have studied core Mathematics in Grades XI and XII. It turns out that this experiment has given rise to unintended challenges. Over the years, the competency levels between the exam papers of Standard and Basic level have been narrowing. So the experiment seems to be creating more obstacles than removing any. We are aware that students who opt for Basic Mathematics are denied the chance to study Core Mathematics in Grade XI. (One

must admit that during Covid years, a relaxation was provided and the students who opted for Basic Mathematics were allowed to study Mathematics in Grades XI and XII. This relaxation still stands.) Hence, the two levels of Mathematics currently offered for Grade X differ only in the final assessment, with everything else remaining essentially the same. We expect a similar scenario in Science and Social Science in the coming years? Will students who opt for Basic Science be barred from pursuing Physics, Chemistry, Biology, or Computer Science in Grade 11? Likewise, will those choosing Basic Social Science be restricted from studying History, Political Science, Economics, or Geography? What options would remain for a student who chooses basic for both? A central concern with such dual-level systems is that they may shift focus from the learning process to the end assessment. By introducing an easier level, students might be guided to choose a path that prioritises short-term results over long-term understanding and potential. Instead of fragmenting levels, what we need is a comprehensive reimagining of the curriculum itself. A well-designed curriculum can cater to diverse learners while maintaining rigor, ensuring that all students develop foundational skills without compromising depth and breadth. This becomes especially critical in the shadow of Artificial Intelligence and other technological advancements, which are rapidly transforming the way we learn and assess. The rise of AI necessitates a major transformation in Science and Social Science curricula. Regardless of whether students later specialise in these fields, they must develop a sound understanding of fundamental concepts and their applications. The obsession with narrow and specialised learners is a troubling trend. Today's world, with its blurring boundaries between disciplines, demands individuals with wide-ranging, non-siloed understandings. Science and Social Science are no longer isolated fields; they intersect in areas like climate change, public health, and technology policy. If students are funneled into oversimplified tracks early on, they may miss out on opportunities to explore and integrate knowledge across fields.

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