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ULTIMATE GUIDE FOR DESCRIPTIVE ENGLISH

For Bank and Government Exams

Several bank and government examinations include a descriptive part. Unlike the objective part where the candidate must select the correct answer choice out of 4 or 5 given options, the descriptive part is all about how the candidate can convey information in the formal (or informal) context in a concise and accurate manner. Examinations such as the UPSC, SSC CGL, SBI PO, RBI Grade B, BOB PO, IBPS PO and many other examinations include a descriptive part wherein the candidate must finish an essay writing, letter writing, Precis writing task, etc. in a given word limit.

Here's a Sample Question:**(UPSC 2018 - Essay)**

Write two essays, choosing one topic from each of the following Sections A and B, in about 1000-1200 words each:

Section A

- Alternative technologies for a climate change resilient India
- A good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge
- Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere
- Management to India border disputes-a complex task

Section B

- Customary morality cannot be a guide to modern life
- 'The past' is a permanent dimension of human consciousness and values
- A people that values its privileges above its principles loses both
- Reality does not conform to the ideal, but confirms it

Q2.**(RBI Grade B Phase II 2017 – Memory Based)****I. Write an Essay of 300 words on any 1 topic from the following:**

- Merger of SBI and its 5 associates
- Solving Problem of NPA in India
- Digitization and Ransomware
- Nuclear Power Plant
- Uniform admission policy for Higher Secondary Schools in India

II. Write a Précis (170 words) on Gold and Paper Currency

In competitive exams, as little as 1 mark can make a lot of difference. For your assistance, we bring to you an Ultimate Guide for Descriptive English. In this E-Book you'll find:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| • Essay Writing | • How to Write a Good Letter; Sample Letter |
| • How to write effective Essays | • Precis Writing |
| • Sample Essays | • Steps to Write a Précis |
| • Letter Writing | • Sample Précis |

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Essay Writing

What should an Essay comprise of?

An essay is nothing but a short piece of writing on a particular topic. What sets an essay apart is not just being error free in terms of grammar and spelling but also the structure and flow of ideas in the essay. A basic but ideal structure to follow is:-

1) Introduction:- This should contain a brief introduction of the topic with an explain the background of the topic. Use this section also to briefly mention your view on the topic before elaborating on that in the body paragraphs.

2) Body Paragraphs:- The body paragraphs (or the middle paragraphs) are used to present one's point of view on the subject in a detailed manner. You should restrict the number of paragraphs here to 2 or 3. The purpose of the body is to list out in detail the examples that support your view. It is always advised to put forth your strongest argument first followed by the second strongest one and so on. Each paragraph should contain one idea and sentences supporting it.

3) Conclusion:- The conclusion is place to restate the main argument/view you made by showing the connections made between the different points in your essay. However, one should not use the same words to do so.

The conclusion should also not be a place to introduce any new idea or thought but just a summarizing of your main argument using some of the strongest evidence supporting it.

Plan Before You Type:-

Although it may seem like a waste of time, it is important to spend a few minutes to first plan and think about what you are writing instead of immediately writing. If you have 15 minutes for one essay, spending about 5 minutes on planning your essay can save a lot of time on thinking while you type. Most people who dont plan before writing tend to get stuck in the middle or run out of ideas and are forced to think after writing a portion of the essay. This will hamper the flow and structure of your essay if one tries to generate ideas while typing.

Spend a few minutes on outlining the points you want to make. Make rough points on the introduction, the stance you are taking along with supporting arguments. Make sure you have your sequence with the strongest arguments first and then the remaining arguments.

DOs and DONTs:-

- Make a time strategy while you practice. For eg: If it's 15 minutes for one essay, then have 5 - 7- 3 plan where you spend 5 minutes planning, 8 minutes typing and then 2 minutes to read through the final essay to eliminate any grammatical or spelling errors. Make sure you do get the time to read and check for any errors. You can tweak the time-break up and choose one that works for you.
- Stick to the word limit provided. If no word limit is provided, try to limit your essay to around 250-300 words.
- Avoid using colloquial, slang, SMS 'lingo' while you type. No using of "I'm", "wat", "thx", "ASAP", "gr8" etc. or use informal language such as 'veggies' instead of vegetables, 'Kids' instead of Children, 'Anyways' instead of Nevertheless etc.

- Use simple language. Even if your vocabulary is very strong, use words and sentences that you believe most of the readers will understand. No extra points are given for using difficult words that very few understand. In fact, it can be detrimental. For eg: “The deleterious effects of smoking.... ” vs “The harmful effects of smoking... ”
- Do NOT use “I think...”, “I feel...”, “In my opinion” etc. Avoid the use of first person and second person pronouns throughout the essay.
- Do NOT make broad generalizations such as “Everyone knows that Narendra Modi is a good Prime Minister”. Instead one could say that “Several people believe that Narendra Modi is a good Prime Minister” and this statement can be supported by text in the essay.

A Good (Sample) Essay : With Analysis

Technology has highly evolved over time. In fact, nowadays almost everybody has some sort of machine at hand, be it computers, cars, or even washing machines. But although machinery was devised to benefit mankind, it has also brought along many flaws to match.

[The topics is introduced and developed in this paragraph. The writer talks about both, the good and the bad aspects. This not only indicates knowledge of the topic but will also help him present a “range of ideas” in the subsequent paragraphs.]

Firstly, when it comes to technological equipment such as computers, disruption most often arises between the person using the computer, and the household he or she is surrounded by, or living with. For example, many old family traditions such as eating meals with your relatives at the dining table seldom take place now that one of the family members might be too busy working on his Mac. laptop. Thus, family values and morals have changed in order to adapt to this technological age.

Secondly, having many kinds of machinery at hand is not only destroying family traditions, but is also very harmful to our environment. Many people are careless about allowing their car engines to run haphazardly or leaving their laptops on for long periods of time, however they do not seem aware of the fact that all this energy and electricity consumption is dangerous to not only our local environment, but to the world as a whole. Additionally, it is the over-usage of machinery, big or small that is bringing our society ever closer to Global Warming, and we must stop.

As mentioned in the introduction, technological equipment was never programmed to damage nature per se, but to help people all around the globe. Now that nuclear families aren't as closely intact compared to the 1950s or 1990s, technology has given us an alternative method to keep in touch with our relatives thanks to computer applications such as Skype, or even cell phone applications such as VIBER or WhatsApp. Machinery has most definitely done wonders in our lives, and we as people should be grateful to easily possess cars, and/or phones when poorer countries do not even have the chance to.

[In the above three paragraphs, the usage of pointers, such as ‘firstly’ and ‘secondly’ shows the logical cohesiveness of the essay. The writer has developed each supporting point richly by using examples and connected the ideas together so that the essay reads smoothly.]

However, with all the advantages machinery has brought to us all, I personally believe that possessing too many cars or phones, or even consuming too much of their energy and battery, is beginning to get out of hand and needs to be controlled.

[Note that the writer has also, made a conclusion. This is a very important part of an essay. The entire essay shows a proficiency with grammatical structures and vocabulary.]

Letter Writing

There are basically two types of letters asked in competitive exams: -

- **Informal letters** (written to friends, relatives, parents, siblings (brother/ sister)
- **Formal letters** (written to a bank manager, news editor, government department/ officials etc.)

How to Write a Good Letter – General Tips

The following are the general tips that you can follow to ensure that you write letters more effectively:

- **Read more and read often**

The idea of letter writing is to verify whether you can convey necessary information in an accurate and concise manner or not. Almost always, you can expect the letter to be regarding some social issue or problem; therefore, reading more helps because you will gain a wider idea of various elements of the Indian society as you continue to read. Reading the newspaper daily helps gain an idea of the state of current affairs in the country. So, if you are aware about an issue (that you read in the newspaper) and the same topic comes as a question in the letter writing task, then you can score well. At the same time, if you find to have all the 3 tasks that are not familiar, then you might find it harder to compose a letter as you will not be sure about the information to include in the same.

- **Practice regularly**

It is quite important that when you practice, you keep up the momentum. Letters can be on any topic that may pertain to any aspect or dimension of the society. However, only if you practice regularly, only then you shall be able to keep up your speed and accuracy. For the best results, it is advisable to practice writing a letter every other day.

- **Increase your typing speed**

This is a continuation of the previous point. When you practice regularly, your typing speed is also likely to increase. Given as how you do not have more than 30 minutes to complete both the letter-writing and the essay-writing tasks, it is necessary that you can type fast. This does not mean you have to type super-fast like going with 60-70 words per minute, but at least a speed of 30-40 words per minute is advisable for optimal results. Therefore, whenever you practice, ensure that you do not do it manually on paper with pen, but instead opt for the word processor on the computer and proceed with the same.

- **Time your practice**

Bank examinations or even competitive examinations in general are not a test of just intelligence. They also test your mental agility and mental endurance; therefore, to ensure that you get better at the letter-writing tasks, start with using a timer whenever you practice. This will help you get used to the exam pressure as you know that the time is passing out due to which you will be forced to think faster. When you practice for the first or second time, you may do so without a timer, but ever since, it is strongly recommended that you time your practice.

How to Write a Good Letter – Step-by-Step

To better understand and illustrate the points that have just been suggested, it is advisable to take a practical example and follow the same. Given below are the questions which are quite similar to that of what might come in the examination. You shall be given few options or choices, and you need to select any one of them.

- Write a letter to the manager of your bank's branch manager inquiring regarding the non-credit of funds into your personal savings account.
- Write a letter to the editor of your preferred newspaper highlighting a social issue.
- Write a letter to your younger sibling advising them on career options after they graduate from high school.

So, for the sake of illustration, we have chosen topic #1, which is where we need to write a letter to the bank's branch manager inquiring them about the non-credit of funds into our personal savings account.

Step 1: Write the correct format for a letter

As most students are possibly likely to forget what a letter's format is, they risk losing some marks there and then which could have been avoided. Therefore, ensure that you use the correct format: if needed make a small image of it before you start just to ensure that you do not forget the format. Since we have chosen a formal letter, the format would be as such:

Components of a formal letter

- Sender's Address
- Date
- Receiver's Address
- Salutation (Dear Sir/ Dear Madam)
 - Subject
 - Content of Letter
- Introduction/Purpose of Letter
- Body of Letter/Further Information
- Conclusion
- Yours Sincerely/ Yours Truly
- Sender's Full Name

Step 2: Decide on the introduction of the letter

The introduction is the most important part of the letter both in the case of exam as well as in real life, because only if the introduction is relevant and correct will the reader read it and the rest of the letter. In this case, we could start with something like, "I intend to draw your attention to an unresolved issue I am facing despite my repeated complaints." The idea here is to keep the introduction as short and simple as possible. The main reason for that being that the person reading the letter would often not have much time or interest so it is best to get to the point straight.

Step 3: Prepare the body of the letter

The body needs to further elaborate on the introduction of the letter; the body should state points or relevant information that care to tell the reader about what is exactly and absolutely needed from them. In this case, three points that can be mentioned here include:

- All that has been tried thus far (your current situation or context)
- Outcome or result of existing efforts and attempts to fix the problem
- Problems faced due to the issue not been resolved

Once again, every statement should be written thoughtfully to ensure that no more than what's absolutely needed is presented.

Step 4: Write the conclusion

Once the other factors have been accounted for, the last step is the conclusion. The conclusion of the letter is quite important because it revisits the main idea of the letter in which case the reader is reminded about what they must take action on. Also, the tone must be diplomatic or neutral; in this case, one of the ways to conclude the letter would be, "I hope I shall be able to enjoy your bank's services once again without any disruptions or problems".

If you have taken care of all those points, then it is for certain that you will score well in your letter-writing task. Just ensure to keep practicing so that you do not forget any part.

A Formal (Sample) Letter

Sender's Address

#34, GMR Layout
3rd Cross, Sanjay Nagar
Bangalore- 560094

Date

January 19, 2016

Complete name, title and address of the recipient

Use "Mr." for a male recipient. If you do not know how a female recipient prefers to be addressed, it is best to use "Ms."

Mr. Mahesh Kumar
996, PMP Layout
Chandigarh

Salutation

Dear Mr. Kumar/Dear Sir/Dear

Body of the letter

Start with an introduction, as in why you are writing this letter. In the next paragraph, provide the necessary details. Be concise and avoid redundancy. Also, use double spacing in between two paragraphs. Restrict yourself to 2-3 paragraphs.

Closing

Use “Sincerely, ” for closing. Leave four blank spaces and type your full name. The blank space should be used for your signature

Sincerely,

(Your signature)

Atul Sharma

Enclosure

If you have enclosed some documents with the letter (for ex, CV, Certificates etc), leave two spaces below your name and write Enclosure/Enclosures. If you have enclosed more than one document, mention the number in brackets. For example, if you have enclosed three documents, write- Enclosures (3)

A promotional banner for Oliveboard. It features a dark blue background with a lighter blue abstract graphic on the right. The text is in white and yellow. At the top left is the Oliveboard logo. The main headline is 'NEW PATTERN ENGLISH TESTS' in large, bold, yellow and white letters. Below this, it says 'FOR :-' in yellow, followed by a bulleted list of exam types: 'IBPS PO & Clerk', 'RBI Grade B & Assistant', and 'SBI PO & Clerk' in white. At the bottom, it says 'Get 2 Free Mock Tests' in yellow, and a red button with the text 'Attempt Now' in white.

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Precis Writing

A précis (*pronounced pressee*) is a summary; hence, précis-writing aims at summarizing content. A précis should be written in simple and lucid language. The goal of writing a précis is to present all the important points in the passage in a few words, so that it makes an easy read.

The Length of a Précis:

A précis must always be much shorter than the. An ideal précis would not contain more than one-third of the number of words in the original text.

Generally, the number of words is given at the end of the paragraph. All you need to do is divide the number by three.

Be sure to count all the words in the paragraph. Some guides do not include the articles and prepositions in the count, while most do.

It is time-consuming to actually count the words in the time given for all segments in the descriptive paper in the exams, so an approximation would be okay, until the summary is less than one-third of the original text.

Quick tip: You can count the words in one line and then multiply the count with the number of lines in the paragraph to get a fairly accurate number of words.

Approach for writing a Précis:

In order to write a good précis read the passage in question carefully. It is advisable to read the passage multiple times.

- Ask yourself questions like:
- What is the basic theme of the passage?
- Which are the most important points in the passage?
- Which are the points that I can eliminate?
- A good practice would be to make a rough note of these points.
- Always write the précis in a rough draft. Revise your draft multiple times before you make a fair copy on a fresh page.

Points to keep in mind:

- Try to express in your own words what is said on each of the main points. You may rearrange the ideas in your own way, but your final copy does not seem to be series of sentences patched together. It should read as a complete paragraph.
- A précis should not contain any extra information. Avoid the rhetorical questions and do not give your own opinions. Also, directly quoting phrases from the original text should be avoided.
- Convert the direct speech into indirect while writing a précis.
- It is necessary to avoid exclamations, interrogations etc. Simplify the figures of speech.

E.g.: He fought like a lion in the battlefield.

– He fought bravely.

- You should avoid being repetitive.
- Passages which contain advice should be written in the first or third person even if the passage itself is in the second person.

E.g.: Obey your elders:

– We must (or should) obey our elders.

- Eliminate the examples to shorten the text.

E.g.: Great leaders, take Gandhi, or Mandela, or our beloved President Lincoln, or even Hitler have, one thing in common

– Great leaders have one thing in common.

- For those passages written in first person, you can convert them into third person by using 'the author' or 'the writer'.
- Finally, give a suitable title to your précis. It may be one of the key sentences in the passage or a phrase, a word, or a short sentence which summarizes the passage.

Sample précis:

Trees give shade for the benefit of others, and while they themselves stand in the sun and endure the scorching heat, they produce the fruit of which others profit. The character of good men is like that of trees. What is the use of this perishable body if no use is made of it for the benefit of mankind? Sandalwood, the more it is rubbed, the more scent does it yield. Sugarcane, the more it is peeled and cut up into pieces, the more juice does it produce. The men who are noble at heart do not lose their qualities even in losing their lives. What matters whether men praise them or not? What difference does it make whether they die at this moment or whether lives are prolonged? Happen what may, those who tread in the right path will not set foot in any other. Life itself is unprofitable to a man who does not live for others. To live for the mere sake of living one's life is to live the life of dog and crows. Those who lay down their lives for the sake of others will assuredly dwell for ever in a world of bliss.

Answer:

Good men live for others

The character of good men is like that of trees. They live for others and do not lose their qualities even in losing their lives. They always follow the right path. Praise is immaterial to them. To live for one's own sake is to lead the life of beasts. Only those who lay down their lives for others will live for ever in a world of bliss.

Image credit: Crack an interview

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