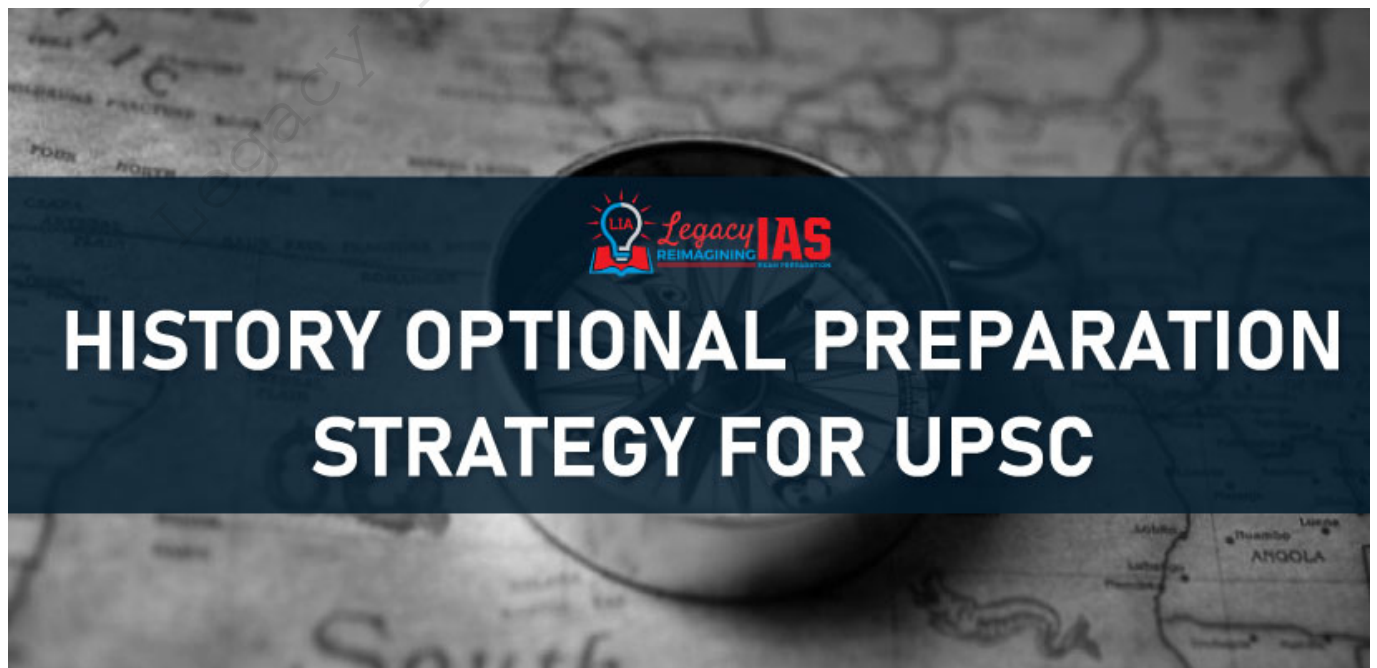




## History Optional Preparation Strategy for UPSC

### Preparation Strategy for History Optional Paper in UPSC Mains

History is one of the most lucrative Optional Subjects to choose for UPSC Mains with more than 1000 students appearing for the History Optional paper until 2017. There is a very observable drop in the number of students choosing History as their optional (over 2000 in 2012 to around 1500 in 2015 and just over 800 in 2018) – this can be attributed to the vastness of the syllabus, information-intensive nature of the subject and dropping success rates. Despite this, preparing for History as an optional subject would supplement the preparation for a significant chunk of the GS-I paper's syllabus and provide for some extra advantage in the Prelims exam as well. Due to the static nature of History as a subject and the ease of understanding – with the right **History Optional Preparation Strategy for UPSC Mains**, you can score well in your Optional Paper as well as GS-I, Essay, and Prelims paper.



Preparation Strategy for History Optional Paper in UPSC Mains

### Overview of History Optional

History is amongst the most popular Optional Subjects taken up by UPSC aspirants despite its



vast syllabus and the drop in a number of candidates opting for it as well as the success rate.

Year	No. of candidates appeared	No. of candidates recommended	Success rate
2012	2090	174	8.3%
2013	1303	100	7.7%
2014	1560	102	6.5%
2015	1821	102	5.6%
2017	1074	59	5.5%
2018	848	52	6.1%

Notable toppers who had opted for History as their Optional Subject include Ishwar Kumar Kandoo who secured rank 187 in UPSC 2017 while scoring the highest marks in History Optional during that year (316/500) and Aparajita who secured rank 40 in UPSC 2017. Their successes in UPSC 2017 come despite the significant drop in the number of candidates and a marginal drop in the success rate in that year.

- Although it is relatively quite rare to see a score of more than 320/500 in History Optional despite the large number of candidates taking up the challenge, it is actually quite common to score the average of 280/500 marks with History optional with a good command over the subject.
- The vast syllabus of History optional is actually divided in a unique manner, by splitting the time-line, across the two papers. Paper 1 includes topics from Pre-history and Proto-history to the Eighteenth Century. Paper 2 continues from the end of Paper 1 by including topics from European Penetration into India to the Post-Independent developments in India. Paper 1 also includes World History and other theories such as Imperialism, Colonialism, Industrialization etc.
- Covering such a vast syllabus in accordance with the timeline while preparing for History optional will provide a huge boost to the overlapped syllabus in the GS-I paper as well as the Prelims paper.
- In addition to the overlapped syllabus, preparing for History optional also provides the student with an arsenal of information required to add a historical dimension to Essays and Mains GS Answers.

## Reasons for Selecting History Optional for UPSC

- The syllabus covered in-dept for History optional will prove to be a 'score-booster' in both GS-I paper in the Prelims exam and General Studies Paper I in the UPSC Mains



exam.

- The number of questions from History in GS-I Prelims paper is always on the higher side, ranging from 14 to 22 questions since 2012 to 2018.
- Topics from Indian Art and Culture, Ancient, Medieval and Modern history, Freedom struggle and World history form a major portion of the GS-I Mains Paper.
- Concepts like Industrial Revolution, Developments in the world after the World wars covered in History optional will support the understanding of concepts in International relations, Economy etc.
- Substantiating answers with a historical example and adding a historical perspective in Essays will also help in improving the overall scores in the Main examination.
- History is easier to understand due to the absence of complex concepts or theories.
- There is an abundance of reliable sources to cover the entire syllabus of History.
- One can also go through some interesting documentaries and videos related to history while relaxing and yet not stray too far from the syllabus.
- There is a lack of dynamism as well, so you don't have to suffer from the fear of missing out on as many new developments such as research as seen in other subjects like Psychology or Anthropology.

## Disadvantages of taking History as the Optional subject

The Syllabus takes a lot more time to cover when compared with most other humanities subjects.

- It is difficult to stand out in your answers, hence, it is generally considered that one needs to develop really good writing skills to score good marks.
- Although it is a misconception that all the facts and dates are required to be memorized, there is still a lot more factual content that requires to be remembered as opposed to some other popular optional subjects.
- A lack of genuine interest in history will prove to be your Achilles' heel and seriously hamper your chances of clearing the exam.

## The Best Optional Preparation Strategy for History

### I- Get familiarized with the vast syllabus

- Only when you are familiar with the History Optional Syllabus (History Optional



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Preparation Strategy for UPSC) will you be able to even decide if you can truly take up the challenge and cover the syllabus. A lot of candidates think it is redundant to go through the syllabus after selecting the optional because they will go through all of the topics anyway. However, this is the opposite of what is actually supposed to be done, as one needs to memorize the syllabus after selecting the optional to channel their studies in the right path and stay within the ambit of UPSC's requirements. This is no different for History as well, and one needs to remember all the topics and subtopics mentioned in the optional syllabus.

## II- Divide the syllabus appropriately

- The History Optional syllabus can be categorized into 4 parts, 2 in each paper.
  - Paper I: Ancient History and Medieval History
  - Paper II: Modern History and World History
- The syllabus is given in the form of a timeline, thus helping you in maintaining a good “flow” in your preparation. You should make use of this strategy of covering the syllabus in parts so that you don't get overwhelmed by the vastness of the syllabus.

## III- Narrow down the sources and categorize them

There is an abundance of sources to refer to for covering the History optional syllabus (History Optional Preparation Strategy for UPSC) which is all reliable for the most part. However, one should not burden themselves with the unnecessary task of trying to cover all the books that are available because it is obvious that the variation in information, however slight/extensive it may be, will do more harm than good.

**The books that we recommend for your History Optional Preparation are:**

- Ancient India:
  - India's Ancient Past by R.S Sharma
  - Ancient and Early Medieval India by Upinder Singh
- Medieval India:
  - Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas by Romila Thapar
  - Medieval India: From Sultanate to Mughals – 1 by Satish Chandra
  - Medieval India: From Sultanate to Mughals – 2 by Satish Chandra
- Modern India:



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- Modern India by Bipin Chandra
  - Modern India History - Spectrum
  - India after independence by Bipin Chandra
  - Plassey to Partition by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (Selective Reading)
  - World History:
    - History of the World by Arjun Dev
    - Mastering Modern World History by Norman Lowe

#### IV- Allocate sufficient time

- Even with the advantage of being easy to understand for those who have an interest in History, the syllabus requires a little over 5 months to prepare comprehensively. With a lot of short-notes that are required to be made for such a vast syllabus, one needs to allocate sufficient time and divide it across activities such as attending classes, making notes, writing answers and revising.

#### V- Make consolidated Notes

- Since each of the major topics under the [History Optional syllabus](#) (History Optional Preparation Strategy for UPSC) have more than 1 book with relevant information, you need to consolidate your knowledge from the classes, the multiple books as well as additions from other sources into one set of comprehensive notes. Apart from this set, you will also require another set of short notes to facilitate for easy revision before the exam. This step cannot be overlooked as the syllabus is too huge for any comprehensive notes to be suitable for quick revisions.

#### VI- Join the right coaching classes

- Even though a lot of candidates try to cover History syllabus on their own without taking up any classes owing to the stable and easy-to-understand nature, taking up [UPSC coaching classes](#) for History Optional (History Optional Preparation Strategy for UPSC) when you lack educational background in the subject will be very useful in gaining clarity on what to read and help you stay relevant to the [UPSC syllabus](#) throughout your preparation.
- It is important to take guidance from the right mentor who can help you in covering the syllabus in the shortest amount of time (possible for you) without compromising on quality of preparation in any way.



## VII- Take up test series

- As mentioned earlier, it is considered that one needs a really good answer-writing skill set to stand out in answers and score more marks than the competition. Hence, without any compromise, you should take up all the History Optional tests conducted by the institute where you are taking up coaching classes.
- In case you are not taking up any coaching and preparing for the optional on your own, you should definitely take up History optional test-series at any institute for gaining confidence and understanding your weaknesses.
- It is also important to make sure that you are getting feedback on your answers from the right mentor and work on the feedback to improve consistently.

## VIII- Go through toppers' answer sheets

In order to beat the competition with your answer writing skills alone (since the knowledge base required is standard and simple without much room for innovation in answers), you need to know what are the best techniques used by toppers in their History Optional papers. This exercise will also help you in identifying which parts of the vast syllabus is more important.

## IX- Practice maps

It is one of the most important skills to develop for enriching your answers by quickly drawing a map and representing what you want to put across to the valuator. You should practice and hone the skill of drawing maps and refer to multiple sources for this as some sources may not give the correct information on maps.

Following such an Optional Preparation Strategy for History as mentioned above would boost your chances of success to the maximum and help you in scoring well, not only in your optional subject but in your GS-I papers in Prelims and Mains as well. Irrespective of the optional subject that one selects, it all comes down to the level of comfort and interest in a particular subject and how meticulously one prepares for their optional subject. Therefore, a holistic approach in the **History Optional Subject Preparation Strategy** that you follow will be a deciding factor in the chances of clearing the exam and beating the competition.



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Read More:

1. [Sociology Optional Preparation Strategy for UPSC](#)
2. [How To Read The Newspaper For UPSC Exam?](#)
3. [Best Optional Subject for UPSC](#)
4. [How To Revise Prelims Exam Syllabus Within 4 Months](#)

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