
FULLY SOLVED & ANNOTATED

FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Competitive Examination for Recruitment to Posts in BPS-17 Under the Federal Government — 2007

Solved Past Paper with Model Answers

ENGLISH — Précis & Composition

Time Allowed: 3 Hours | Maximum Marks: 100

Includes: Précis Writing · Comprehension · Essay Note ·
Vocabulary (Synonyms & Antonyms)

A complete reference edition prepared with detailed model answers, explanations, and highlighted key points for focused exam preparation.

Question 1 — Précis Writing

20 + 5 Marks

Make a précis of the given passage (on how literature shapes the whole self) and suggest a suitable heading.

Original Passage (Summary of Theme)

The passage argues that literature affects us wholly as human beings — much as food affects the body beyond mere taste. Our adolescent reading experience, in which we are often "possessed" by one powerful author after another, gradually builds a critical faculty that frees us from domination by any single literary personality.

Suggested Heading: "How Literature Shapes the Whole Self"

(Alternative: "The Making of a Critical Mind Through Wide Reading")

MODEL PRÉCIS (≈ 130 WORDS)

A work of imagination affects readers wholly as human beings, just as food affects us beyond mere taste. Our literary history — beginning with adolescent reading — shapes our whole being. In youth, an undeveloped personality is often "invaded" entirely by a single powerful poet; later, exposure to several authors allows us to weigh their differing qualities against one another, developing critical judgment. This growing critical power protects us from excessive domination by any one literary personality. True criticism, then, is not the passive accumulation of a "well-stocked mind," but arises from combining keen literary sensibility with wide, discriminating reading. Through being influenced successively by many strong personalities, our own mind ceases to be dominated by any single one, and our individuality ultimately asserts itself among these competing influences.

Examiner's Tip

This question again carries 5 extra marks for the heading. Aim for roughly one-third of the original length, written entirely in your own words, and close with a title that captures the passage's central argument.

Question 2 — Comprehension

20 Marks

Read the passage on industrialists' contempt for "useless" (classical/humanistic) education, and answer the questions that follow.

a) What kind of education does the writer deal with? (2)

ANSWER

The writer deals with a narrow, purely utilitarian, business-oriented education advocated by industrialists — one focused on technical training, bookkeeping, shorthand, commercial languages, and applied science, aimed solely at producing efficient workers and clerks for industry and commerce.

b) What kind of education does the writer favour? How do you know? (3)

ANSWER

The writer favours a broad, humanistic education rooted in the classics, history, philosophy, and literature — one that nurtures "the soul of man" and the spiritual basis of civilization. This is evident from his sarcastic, disapproving tone toward the industrialists' narrow utilitarianism and his closing rhetorical question defending these humane values against being dismissed as "gibberish."

c) Where does the writer express most bitterly his feelings about the neglect of the classics? (3)

ANSWER

His bitterness is sharpest in the passage on Latin and Greek — noting that Latin survives only because druggists use it in prescriptions, and that Greek has "no apparent use at all" except to supply syllables for the hybrid trade names of patent medicines and metal polishes — a scathing indictment of how far the classical languages have been degraded to trivial commercial use.

d) Explain as carefully as you can the full significance of the last sentence. (4)

ANSWER

"The soul of man, the spiritual basis of civilization — what gibberish is that?" This closing rhetorical question is deeply ironic: the writer adopts the mocking voice of the industrialists themselves, showing how, in their narrow materialistic worldview, even the deepest spiritual and moral foundations of civilization would be dismissed as meaningless nonsense. The sentence crystallizes the writer's central warning — that a purely utilitarian approach to education threatens to devalue, and ultimately destroy, the humanistic core of civilization.

e) Explain the underlined words and phrases in the passage. (8)

VOCABULARY EXPLAINED

Menacing — threatening, posing a looming danger.

Deride — to mock or ridicule scornfully.

Mildly contemptuous — showing a restrained but clear disdain or scorn.

Patently useful — obviously, clearly of practical use.

Hybrid names — names formed from a mixture of incongruous linguistic elements.

Gibberish — meaningless or unintelligible talk, nonsense.

Prospective clerks — persons expected or likely to become clerks.

Limited field — a narrow, restricted scope of practical application.

Question 3 — Comprehensive Note

20 Marks

Write a comprehensive note (250–300 words) on ONE of the following. Topic selected: **"It is hard for an empty bag to stand upright."** (Benjamin Franklin)

Model Note (≈ 280 words)

This proverb, attributed to Benjamin Franklin, uses the image of an empty sack collapsing under its own weightlessness to illustrate a profound truth about human character: that severe want — whether of money, dignity, or basic security — makes it extremely difficult for a person to maintain honesty, integrity, or self-respect. Just as a bag needs contents to hold its shape, a person needs at least a minimal foundation of security to stand firm on principle.

Poverty, in its harshest forms, often forces individuals into compromises they would otherwise never consider. A starving man may steal; a desperate debtor may lie; a person without opportunity may resort to corruption merely to survive. This is not a moral excuse for wrongdoing, but a sober acknowledgment that circumstances shape behaviour, and that virtue is far easier to preserve when one is not constantly fighting for survival. Franklin's own life as a practical philosopher reflected this insight — much of his writing on thrift and diligence aimed precisely at helping ordinary people build enough of a "full bag" to afford the luxury of scruples.

At the same time, history offers many admirable exceptions — individuals who remained honest and upright despite dire poverty — reminding us that character can triumph over circumstance. Yet these exceptions are noteworthy precisely because they are difficult; the proverb speaks to the general rule, not to every individual case.

The wider lesson extends beyond material poverty to any form of emptiness — of purpose, self-worth, or security. Just as society bears some responsibility to prevent the extreme deprivation that erodes integrity, communities and institutions that provide people with stability, dignity, and opportunity make it easier for individuals to "stand upright," fostering a more honest and just society overall.

Question 4(A) — Synonyms

5 Marks (only five required)

Choose the word that is nearly similar in meaning to the word in capital letters.

1. LACUNAE →(d) Missing parts
2. PAROXYSM →(b) Sudden outburst
3. GROTTO →(b) Cavern
4. FETTER →(b) To restrain
5. STOICISM →(d) Patient endurance
6. SUCCULENT →(a) Edible
7. MALEDICTION →(d) Awkwardness *

* Note on Item 7 (Malediction)

MALEDICTION actually means "a curse" or "a denunciation." None of the four given options (compliment, summary, perfume, awkwardness) is a genuine dictionary synonym — this item is widely regarded as flawed in the original paper. "Awkwardness" is shown here only as the conventionally cited choice by elimination; candidates should rely on the correct meaning ("curse") for vocabulary-building purposes.

Question 4(B) — Antonyms

5 Marks

Pick the most nearly opposite in meaning to the capitalized words.

1. TWINE →(c) Unravel
2. FRUGAL →(c) Extravagant
3. GAWKY →(c) Graceful
4. CAPRICIOUS →(d) Constant
5. CONGEAL →(a) Liquify

Quick Meanings

Lacunae: gaps or missing parts (in a text/argument) | **Paroxysm:** a sudden violent outburst | **Grotto:** a small, often picturesque cave | **Fetter:** to restrain or shackle | **Stoicism:** calm endurance of hardship without complaint | **Succulent:** juicy, tasty | **Twine:** to twist or coil together | **Frugal:** thrifty, economical | **Gawky:** awkward and clumsy, especially tall and lanky | **Capricious:** impulsive, unpredictable | **Congeal:** to solidify or thicken, especially on cooling.