

UPSC Optional Subjects List, Syllabus, Books, Preparation Tips

August 1, 2026 • vajiramandravi.com



The **UPSC Optional Subjects List 2026** is released by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) along with the official Civil Services Examination notification. The **UPSC Optional Subject** plays a decisive role in the UPSC Mains Exam, contributing **500 marks** through **Paper VI and Paper VII**, with each paper carrying **250 marks**.

Choosing the right subject from the **UPSC Optional Subjects List** is one of the most important decisions for aspirants, as it can significantly impact their final rank and selection chances. Candidates should select their **UPSC Optional Subject** based on factors such as interest, educational background, syllabus overlap with General Studies, availability of study material, and scoring trends. In this article, check the complete **UPSC Optional Subjects List 2026**, subject-wise details, and expert tips to choose the best optional subject for UPSC preparation.

Also Read: [UPSC Prelims Result 2026](#)

List of 48 Optional Subjects in UPSC

There are a total of 48 optional subjects in the **UPSC Mains** exam, which includes core subjects and literature optional.

- Agriculture
- Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Science
- Anthropology
- Botany
- Chemistry
- Civil Engineering
- Commerce and Accountancy
- **Economics**
- Electrical Engineering
- **Geography**
- Geology
- **History**
- Law
- Management
- **Mathematics**
- Mechanical Engineering
- Medical Science
- **Philosophy**
- Physics
- Political Science and International Relations
- Psychology
- Public Administration
- **Sociology**
- Statistics
- Zoology
- Literature of any one of the following languages: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and English.

Turn Preparation into Selection - Register Today for Vajiram & Ravi **UPSC Prelims Test Series 2026!**

How many Optional Subjects in UPSC?

There are a total of **48 subjects included in the UPSC optional subject list**, out of which candidates are required to choose only one. While choosing an optional subject is subjective and should align with an individual's interests and abilities, candidates have historically favoured certain subjects. Some popular UPSC optional subjects include:

- **History:** Offers an in-depth understanding of India's rich cultural heritage, world history, and socio-political developments.
- **Geography:** Covers physical, human, and environmental geography, providing insights into the Earth's diverse landscapes and the impact of human activities.

- **Public Administration:** Focuses on the functioning of public institutions, administrative theories, and governance mechanisms.
- **Political Science and International Relations:** Explores political ideologies, international relations, global issues, and the dynamics of governance.
- **Sociology:** Examines social structures, institutions, and the dynamics of social change and interaction.

UPSC Optional Subjects Significance

The UPSC Mains examination is known for its vast syllabus covering a wide range of subjects. While candidates must clear compulsory papers, optional subjects offer an opportunity to showcase expertise and interest in a particular field. These subjects allow candidates to delve deeper into a subject of their choice and enable them to leverage their existing knowledge and skills to their advantage.

Moreover, selecting an optional subject for UPSC that aligns with one's background or academic strengths can enhance overall performance and confidence during the examination.

UPSC Optional Subjects 2026 Preparation Tips

Preparing for the optional subject in the UPSC examination requires a systematic and focused approach. Here are some preparation tips to help you effectively tackle your chosen optional subject:

- Familiarise yourself thoroughly with the syllabus of your optional subject. Break it down into smaller topics and sub-topics to create a clear roadmap for your preparation.
- Choose standard and reliable study materials for your optional subject. Refer to textbooks, reference books, online resources, and study materials provided by coaching institutes or reliable sources.
- Answer writing is crucial for the Main examination. Practice writing answers to previous year's question papers and mock tests. Pay attention to structuring your answers, presenting your arguments logically, and maintaining a coherent flow.
- Find ways to integrate current affairs with your optional subject. Understand the contemporary relevance of topics within your subject and stay updated with recent developments.
- Analyse **UPSC previous year question paper** to understand the pattern, question types, and weightage given to different topics.
- If possible, seek guidance from subject matter experts or experienced mentors. They can provide valuable insights, clarify doubts, and provide guidance on effective preparation strategies.

Success Rates of UPSC Optional Subjects

According to the last Report released by the Department of Personnel & Training, the success rate of the Optional Subjects for the 2019 UPSC Mains Exam is given below.

Success-Rate of Optional in UPSC 2019

Optional Subjects for UPSC	Number of Candidates		Success Rate (Percent)
	Appeared	Recommended	
Geography	1916	105	5.5%
Sociology	1263	126	10.0%
Commerce & Accountancy	183	20	10.9%
Economics	243	26	10.7%
Agriculture	124	13	10.5%
Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Science	16	3	18.8%
Anthropology	1189	108	9.1%
Botany	28	2	7.1%
Electrical Engineering	200	16	8.0%
Chemistry	156	13	8.3%
Geology	30	0	0.0%
History	751	51	6.8%
Law	186	19	10.2%
Management	54	6	11.1%
Mathematics	539	45	8.3%

Public Administration	705	58	8.2%
Civil Engineering	146	15	10.3%
Statistics	2	0	0.0%
Zoology	44	4	9.1%
Political Science & International Relations	1662	137	8.2%
Psychology	164	15	9.1%
Mechanical Engineering	213	12	5.6%
Medical Science	247	26	10.5%
Philosophy	439	27	6.2%
Physics	165	12	7.3%

Other Related UPSC Optional Syllabus		
UPSC Commerce Optional Syllabus	UPSC Geography Optional Syllabus	UPSC Geology Optional Syllabus
UPSC History Optional Syllabus	UPSC Law Optional Syllabus	UPSC Maths Optional Syllabus
UPSC Medical Science Optional Syllabus	UPSC Philosophy Optional Syllabus	UPSC Physics Optional Syllabus
UPSC PSIR Optional Syllabus	UPSC Psychology Optional Syllabus	UPSC Sociology Optional Syllabus
UPSC Zoology Optional Syllabus	UPSC Economics Optional Syllabus	UPSC Agriculture Optional Syllabus
UPSC Anthropology Optional Syllabus	UPSC Botany Optional Syllabus	UPSC Chemistry Optional Syllabus
UPSC Civil Engineering Optional Syllabus	UPSC Management Optional Syllabus	UPSC Mechanical Engineering Optional Syllabus
UPSC Public Administration Optional Syllabus	UPSC Statistics Optional Syllabus	UPSC Electrical Engineering Optional Syllabus
UPSC Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Science Optional Syllabus		

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/optional-subjects-for-upsc/>

© Vajiram & Ravi. For personal use only.