

CSS MENTOR

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Muhammad Bin Ashraf

1st Position, CSS-2009

Kindly tell us about your educational background in detail and achievements.

I did matriculation from Army Public School, Rahim Yar Khan in 1999 in first division. Then I got admitted in Government College, Rahim Yar Khan, and passed inter and graduation exams. After graduation, I took admission in Department of English Language and Literature, University of the Punjab, Lahore, and did masters in 2006, in first division.

During my college and university days, I frequently participated in extracurricular activities including

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plays, sports and presentations etc. and my performances were often appreciated by my teachers.

Being first position holder in CSS, what was your strategy for preparation?

For me, the first thing you need to qualify this exam is motivation. When I started my preparation, I was so much motivated to do this task that I was never before in my life.

The next step, of course, is the selection of subjects of your interest and collection of relevant material for study and the last step is the continuous hardwork you must do to get authority over your subjects.

What sort of guidance should a candidate seek?

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SOURCE OF INSPIRATION

Did you prepare from any academy or just on your own. If on your own, then how did you manage to get this privileged position?

For me, the academies are not necessary for CSS preparation. I never went to any academy but once, when it became abundantly clear to me that it's just a waste of time and money to attend any academy.

Still I managed to get this privileged position because I had faith in myself and chose standard books for study, and continuously worked hard to achieve this goal.

Did you prefer books or notes or both?

I always preferred books over ready-made notes available from different academies because I thought that these notes are prepared by people who might be lower in mental capabilities than me.

So even if you are more comfortable with notes, it's better to prepare your own notes which are always much better than any so-called golden or diamond notes. Otherwise, relying on books alone would

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also do the trick for you as was the case with me.

What is the prerequisite of CSS examination?

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What are the strategies to differentiate oneself from the rest of the students and get top position in CSS?

The strategy to make oneself different from others is to rely on standard books and never depend on shortcut guides. Then

it is also important to read at least two different books on a single subject in order to get a variety of views on a subject and then try to make your own opinion about different topics regarding your subject.

This is really important in history subjects where different phases of history are contentious between different authors. For Indo-Pak paper, I read two books, one by a Muslim writer and the other by a Hindu writer to get a viewpoint of both the parties and then developed my own views about different questions which were an amalgam of both, but balanced and rational.

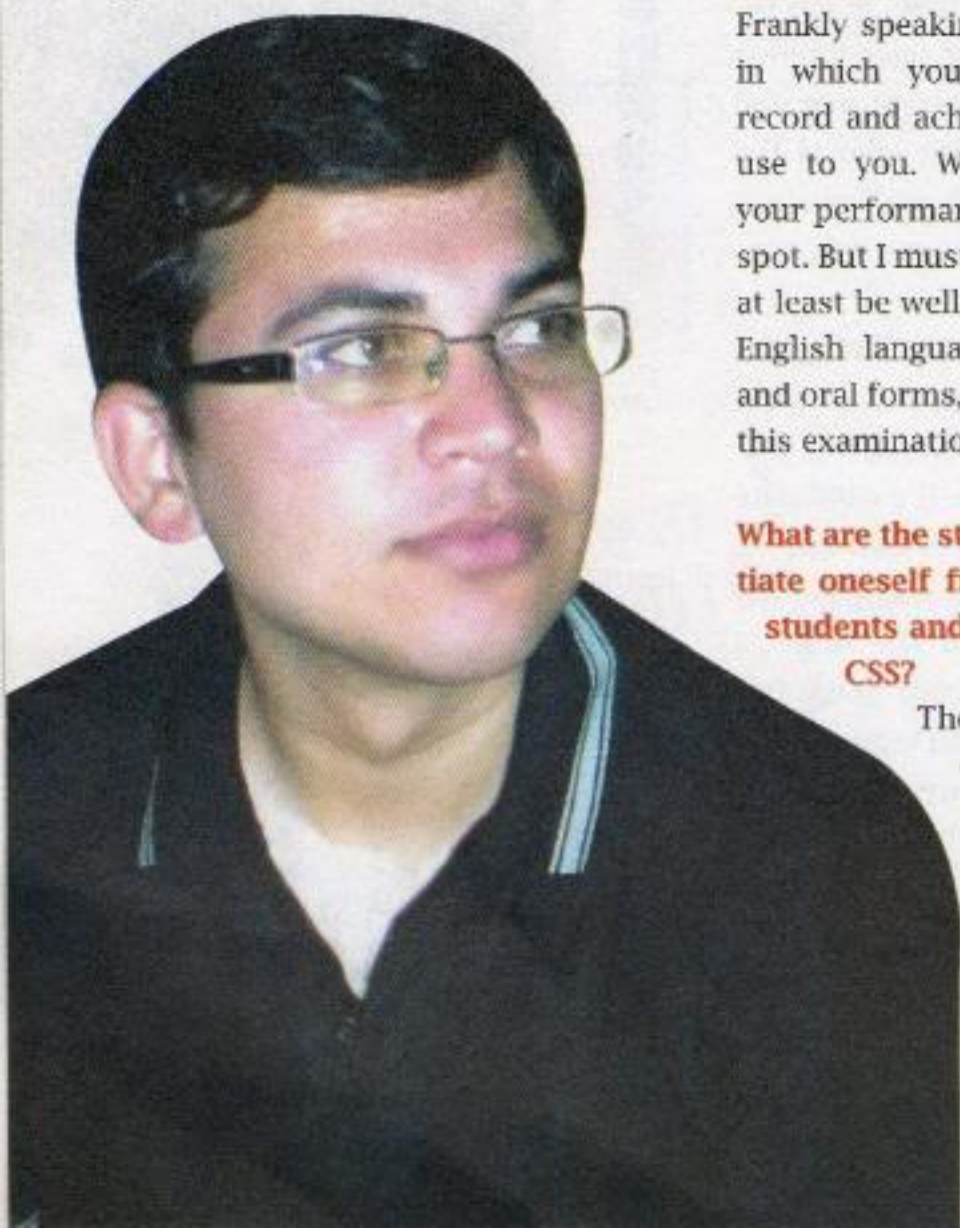
What are the steps for the preparation especially English essay, grammar and composition?

For preparation of English essay, daily reading of a quality newspaper like Dawn is very helpful. In addition, it is better to have a sprinkling of literary quotes in your essay.

I attempted the essay on Terrorism and wrote three relevant poems from English literature and five quotes by well-known English writers in my essay. For composition, I think only a thorough study of standard grammar book like University English Grammar is enough.

What combination should the students opt for the optional subjects in order to get higher marks?

For optional subjects, opt for those subjects in which you have interest. People told me that Indo-Pak history and international law are not scoring subjects but I did not lend ear to such voices because I had



interest in my subjects and I knew that no examiner can refuse to give less marks to me if I would prepare myself well.

And I think time proved my decision right. So opt for those subjects which are of interest to you and don't try to just blindly copy others in subject selection.

What are the ways to get higher marks in the written and interview and write down your written and interview scores in detail?

Try to be different by developing an independent and analytical approach towards different topics and issues in both your written as well as interview. I have concluded that different but rationale based ideas are appreciated in this exam. My marks are:

Essay - 70, Composition - 49, Every Day Science - 61, Current Affairs - 47, Pakistan Affairs - 42, Islamiat - 74, Geography Paper I - 64, Paper II - 76, Indo-Pak History, Paper I - 77

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Paper II - 74, International Law - 81, Journalism - 69, Total = 784, Viva = 211, Grand total = 995

What should be the strategy to attempt the paper either adding more headings or just writing paragraphs?

Try to be more logical in your answers. This is a kind of an exam in which you can present even radical ideas if you give potent reasons to prove your proposition. Regarding headings or paragraphs, I think it depends upon the type of question you are attempting.



If you are asked a discussion type of question, it's better to use paras. But if the question is regarding different aspects of something, answering in points or paras is more effective.

How many months and daily hours are required for CSS preparation?

In my case, I studied for 10 months with 12-14 hours daily with full concentration. Remember, it's better to study for 10 hours with full concentration than to keep on studying for

16 hours with just looking at the book and not retaining anything.

Do you believe in luck factor in CSS as a number of average students get allocation while the talented and scholarly students are unable to qualify this prestigious exam? What do you think?

Yeah! there is a luck factor in CSS also but sincerely, the proportion of luck is much lower than hard work in this exam. Luck will only favour you if you have worked excessively hard.

What are the general problems of a CSS candidate?

Distractions are always there, sometimes in the form of tension or pressure, and sometimes in the form of domestic assignments. Although I was badly needed in my house as I was the eldest of my brothers and my father had also died by that time, yet I left my home and went to Lahore and started living in a private hostel there just to avoid wasting my time in small household jobs.

So just try to devote all your time to the preparation when you are in this process of extensive reading.

Any message.

Have faith in yourself. No academy or guide can make you succeed in this exam if you are not confident enough to achieve success on your own.

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Conducted by: Zahid Ashraf