

How to succeed in entrance exams

KNOW YOURSELF

Understanding your motivation and analysing your strengths and weaknesses lay the foundation for performing well in an exam, writes

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Abhishek lived with his parents and three brothers in a major city in a small 10 x10 room, which had no electricity. His father earned a living as a cobbler and his mother added to the family's meagre earning as a tailor. Abhishek helped his father during the day and would study in the night when his mother's sewing machine doubled up as a study table, lit by a kerosene lamp.

Sometimes, he worked as a labourer to finance his books and stationery. Though deprived of all comforts, he had a passion to become an aerospace engineer. His passion, hard work and determination, together with help from his teachers, were enough to get him a top rank in the JEE and admission into IIT.

When Aman Goel was in class nine, the school took him to a trip to an IIT. Mesmerised by the beauty of the campus, he decided to make it to such an amazing place. Soon, a friend's brother made it to IIT, which created a compelling atmosphere and motivation for Aman to work hard and made it to the IIT through the JEE.

You would probably be more fortunate than Abhishek, with a congenial and supportive environment. The stories of Abhishek and Aman are rare, though not unique. The common factors in students who make it to such top institutes, are their strong passion and determination to succeed despite all the hurdles.

Selection process

Many top educational institutes have more aspirants than the seats available, making it necessary to have entrance exams as a part of the selection process. For students, it's also a process of understanding personal talent and relating to their dream career.

But what's talent? Talent is a capability or skill, which comes naturally to do a task with ease or excellence, with minimum effort. Most of the entrance exams focus on testing your talent in academics (like Science, Mathematics, Computers etc) and



life skills such as languages, communication skills, interpersonal skills etc.

If you are preparing for the highly competitive entrance exams such as JEE, CAT, GMAT, GRE etc., the following guideline should help you succeed.

Self-discovery

Do you know your strengths and weaknesses? Activate introspection by asking yourself, "Do you really want to do it?" Are you really passionate about your future career? Are you determined to counter the challenges of entrance exams?

After these introspecting questions help you discover yourself, consider few other questions:

- What are you most passionate about?
- What are your most interesting subjects?
- What knowledge/skills do you possess?
- What knowledge/skills do you require for the course and career?
- Which activities do you excel in compared with your friends?

Discovering your academic and life skills will boost your determination and confidence to get through the exams, with desired rankings.

Planning

To formulate a winning strategy, follow these steps:

- Firstly understand what's being tested in the exam. Study the earlier exam papers to understand the objective in terms of what theoretical and problem solving skills are being tested.
- What's your goal? The cut-off rankings generally show an upward trend and hence, you need to have a clear and specific goal. Find out the previous year's cut-off

rankings to assess the desired ranking.

■ Understanding the format of exams involves collecting information about time available per question, negative markings, minimum marks per section etc. which are crucial to plan your strategy.

■ Balance speed and accuracy. A key strategy to succeed is all about balancing speed and accuracy. Attempt simpler sections and questions, before attempting the tougher ones.

Depending on your competencies and comfort levels, have a subject wise strategy. Students often tend to leave questions, even when there are no negative marks for wrong answers. Do an intelligent guess by eliminating one or two possible wrong answers, to gain crucial additional marks.

Practice is the key

Gain mastery over problem solving questions by continuously practising with earlier exam papers. Practising is indeed a hard part of learning, requiring a lot of determination and patience. Like champions who keep practising and playing, until they get it right, persist till you reach your goal.

Quality of preparation

Students keep asking about how many hours should one study for success. The answer is simple. It's not the number of hours but the quality of studying in those hours, which matters.

Focus on the bigger picture

Problems of time management, monotony of studying and practising, distractions and sudden bursts of overconfidence, can upset the rhythm of your preparation. Focus on the bigger picture of a successful

career ahead with determination, hard work and self-motivation to translate your dreams into action.

Entrance exams are designed to identify your aptitude to succeed in the course and potential to acquire knowledge and skill sets for a successful career ahead. However, success doesn't mean the absence of failures. A well planned strategy ensures success avoiding disappointments and multiple attempts.

An energetic mind and body, determination, a strong belief in your ability, with a well-executed strategy, are four pillars that can take you to the pedestal of success into any top institution in the world.

Tips for success

- Set a desired target of percentage or rank in the exam.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses, and formulate an appropriate strategy.
- Balance speed and accuracy.
- Practise mock tests, individually and in a peer group.
- Be positive and calm on the day of the exam.
- Listen/read instructions carefully.
- Attempt answering from sections you are strongest.
- Be wary of tricky questions, intended to mislead.
- Be honest in answering general aptitude questions.
- Make intelligent guess, understanding the pros and cons.

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