UPSC Mains Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) — All PYQs (2013–2026)

Complete 14-Year Compilation (104 questions) organized year-wise with official marks, word limits, syllabus micro-topics & directives. Free from preplord.com.

UPSC CSE Mains 2026 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: KVMS-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Oxymorons reflect the ironies of life.

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A grateful mind is very beautiful.

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A thorn is a changed bud.

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled.

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Environment & Nature [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Nature is the symbol of the spirit.

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Shelving hard decisions is the least ethical course.

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A good leader is one who follows the followers.

UPSC CSE Mains 2025 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: SLPM-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Truth knows no color.

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Thought finds a world and creates one also.

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Best lessons are learnt through bitter experiences.

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Muddy water is best cleared by leaving it alone.

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
The years teach much which the days never know.

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
It is best to see life as a journey, not as a destination.

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Contentment is natural wealth; luxury is artificial poverty.

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UPSC CSE Mains 2024 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: PHKM-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Forests precede civilizations and deserts follow them.

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
The empires of the future will be the empires of the mind.

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
There is no path to happiness; Happiness is the path.

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Education, Science & Knowledge [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
The doubter is a true man of science.

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Social media is triggering 'Fear of Missing Out' amongst the youth, precipitating depression and loneliness.

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Nearly all men can stand adversity, but to test the character, give him power.

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
All ideas having large consequences are always simple.

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
The cost of being wrong is less than the cost of doing nothing.

UPSC CSE Mains 2023 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: SKYC-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Thinking is like a game, it does not begin unless there is an opposite team.

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Visionary decision-making happens at the intersection of intuition and logic.

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Not all who wander are lost.

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Inspiration for creativity springs from the effort to look for the magical in the mundane.

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Girls are weighed down by restrictions, boys with demands — two equally harmful disciplines.

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Education, Science & Knowledge [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Mathematics is the music of reason.

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A society that has more justice is a society that needs less charity.

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Education, Science & Knowledge [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.

UPSC CSE Mains 2022 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: N/A (typeset PYQ))

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Environment & Nature [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Forests are the best case studies for economic excellence

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Education, Science & Knowledge [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Education, Science & Knowledge [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
History is a series of victories won by the scientific man over the romantic man

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ship is for

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
You cannot step twice in the same river

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A smile is the chosen vehicle for all ambiguities

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Just because you have a choice, it does not mean that any of them has to be right

UPSC CSE Mains 2021 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: HXS-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
The process of self-discovery has now been technologically outsourced.

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Your perception of me is a reflection of you; my reaction to you is an awareness of me.

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Philosophy of wantlessness is Utopian, while materialism is a chimera.

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
The real is rational and the rational is real.

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Education, Science & Knowledge [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
What is research, but a blind date with knowledge!

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
History repeats itself, first as a tragedy, second as a farce.

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
There are better practices to "best practices".

UPSC CSE Mains 2020 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: URC-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Life is long journey between human being and being humane

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Mindful manifesto is the catalyst to a tranquil self

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Ships do not sink because of water around them, ships sink because of water that gets into them

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Culture is what we are, civilization is what we have

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]

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There can be no social justice without economic prosperity but economic prosperity without social justice is meaningless

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Patriarchy is the least noticed yet the most significant structure of social inequality

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Technology as the silent factor in international relations

UPSC CSE Mains 2019 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: SDF-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Wisdom finds truth

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Values are not what humanity is, but what humanity ought to be

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Best for an individual is not necessarily best for the society

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Courage to accept and dedication to improve are two keys to success

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
South Asian societies are woven not around the state, but around their plural cultures and plural identities

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Neglect of primary health care and education in India are reasons for its backwardness

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Biased media is a real threat to Indian democracy

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Education, Science & Knowledge [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Rise of Artificial Intelligence : the threat of jobless future or better job opportunities through reskilling and upskilling

UPSC CSE Mains 2018 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: EGT-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Environment & Nature [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Alternative technologies for a climate change resilient India

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Management of Indian border disputes—a complex task

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Customary morality cannot be a guide to modern life

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
'The past' is a permanent dimension of human consciousness and values

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
A people that values its privileges above its principles loses both

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Reality does not conform to the ideal, but confirms it

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UPSC CSE Mains 2017 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: STH-G-ESSY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Farming has lost the ability to be a source of subsistence for majority of farmers in India.

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Impact of the new economic measures on fiscal ties between the union and states in India.

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Education, Science & Knowledge [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Destiny of a nation is shaped in its classrooms.

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Has the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) lost its relevance in a multipolar world?

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Fulfilment of 'new woman' in India is a myth.

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
We may brave human laws but cannot resist natural laws.

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
'Social media' is inherently a selfish medium.

UPSC CSE Mains 2016 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: M-ESC-O-ESY)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
If development is not engendered, it is endangered

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Need brings greed, if greed increases it spoils breed

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Governance, Ethics & Leadership [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Water disputes between States in federal India

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Innovation is the key determinant of economic growth and social welfare

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Cooperative federalism : Myth or reality

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Society, Gender & Inclusion [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Cyberspace and Internet : Blessing or curse to the human civilization in the long run

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Near jobless growth in India : An anomaly or an outcome of economic reforms

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Digital economy : A leveller or a source of economic inequality

UPSC CSE Mains 2015 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: C-AVZ-O-DRRX)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Lending hands to someone is better than giving a dole.

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Quick but steady wins the race.

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A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Character of an institution is reflected in its leader.

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make a man more clever devil.

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Technology cannot replace manpower.

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Crisis faced in India – moral or economic.

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Dreams which should not let India sleep.

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Can capitalism bring inclusive growth?

UPSC CSE Mains 2014 — Essay Paper (Philosophical & Policy Prompts) (8 Qs | Code: C-DRN-N-GTTZ)

A1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
With greater power comes greater responsibility.

A2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Is the growing level of competition good for the youth?

A3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Are the standardized tests good measure of academic ability or progress?

A4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Words are sharper than the two-edged sword.

B1 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Was it the policy paralysis or the paralysis of implementation which slowed the growth of our country?

B2 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • Philosophical / Epigrammatic → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Static / Evergreen]
Is sting operation an invasion on privacy?

B3 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Fifty Golds in Olympics : Can this be a reality for India?

B4 • 125 Marks • 1200 Words • GS / Policy-Driven → Self, Mind & Philosophy [Essay | Current-Affairs Linked]
Tourism : Can this be the next big thing for India?

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