Topper Marks Handbook

The highest marks in every UPSC Mains paper and the interview, what a typical topper scores, and what separates AIR 1–10 from the rest. From 236 real marksheets of rank holders, CSE 2022–25.

Index of marks	Median topper · CSE 2022–25
Essay	116
GS Paper I	97
GS Paper II	112
GS Paper III	88
GS Paper IV (Ethics)	115
Optional (Papers I + II)	276
Interview (Personality Test)	179
The median topper	978

Median marks of 236 rank holders. Out of 2,025.

Before you start

This handbook answers one question with real numbers: **what do UPSC toppers actually score?** Every figure comes from the marks UPSC publishes for recommended candidates after each final result. We use a marksheet only when every paper is present and adds up. That leaves 236: 125 from CSE 2022, 105 from CSE 2023, 4 from CSE 2024, 2 from CSE 2025.

Read the medians before the records. A record tells you what is possible. The median tells you what is normal for someone who made the list, and that is the number to plan around.

How UPSC marks add up

Paper	Marks	Counts for rank?
Paper A (Indian language) and Paper B (English)	300 each	No, qualifying only
Essay	250	Yes
General Studies I, II, III and IV (Ethics)	250 each	Yes
Optional Papers I and II	250 each	Yes
Written total	**1,750**	
Interview (Personality Test)	275	Yes
Final total	**2,025**	

Prelims only decides who sits Mains. If you fail either language paper, the rest of your Mains is not evaluated. Check the qualifying standard in the notification for your year.

Six things the data says

1. **Nobody crossed 150 in Essay.** The record is 149. Only 12 of 236 toppers reached 140.
2. **GS III is everyone's weakest paper.** In 15 of 16 AIR 1–10 marksheets, it was the lowest of the five common papers. The median topper scored 88.
3. **Ethics is where GS marks are easiest to bank.** Median 115, record 143.
4. **The top 10 win on GS and Essay, not the optional.** 64 of their 94-mark written lead over ranks below 300 comes from the four GS papers.
5. **No topper is perfect.** 62 of 70 top-100 rankers scored below 100 in at least one GS paper.
6. **The interview can move you hundreds of ranks.** Two candidates with 800 and 798 written marks finished at AIR 85 and AIR 765.

Highest marks in every paper

Records across 236 complete marksheets, with the median topper and the score that puts you in the top 10% of rank holders.

Paper	Record	Scored by	Median	Top 10%
Essay	**149** of 250	Gautam Vivekanandan AIR 211, 2022	116	135
GS Paper I	**121** of 250	Ishita Kishore AIR 1, 2022 Malavika G Nair AIR 172, 2022	97	111
GS Paper II	**137** of 250	Arjun Gupta AIR 32, 2023	112	123
GS Paper III	**111** of 250	Aditya Vikram AIR 9, 2024	88	99
GS Paper IV (Ethics)	**143** of 250	Aditya Srivastava AIR 1, 2023	115	127
Optional (Papers I + II)	**334** of 500	Pururaj Singh Solanki AIR 21, 2023	276	300
Interview (Personality Test)	**215** of 275	Aniket Shandilya AIR 12, 2023	179	198
Written total (Mains)	**901** of 1,750	**Ishita Kishore** AIR 1, 2022	**802**	**849**
Final total	**1,099** of 2,025	**Aditya Srivastava** AIR 1, 2023	**978**	**1,033**

AIR 1 vs the cut-off

The cut-off is the General-category score of the last person on the final list.

Year	AIR 1	Written	Interview	Total	Cut-off
CSE 2025	Anuj Agnihotri · Medical Science	867	204	**1,071**	Not yet published
CSE 2024	Shakti Dubey · PSIR	843	200	**1,043**	947 (+96)
CSE 2023	Aditya Srivastava · Electrical Engineering	899	200	**1,099**	953 (+146)
CSE 2022	Ishita Kishore · PSIR	901	193	**1,094**	960 (+134)

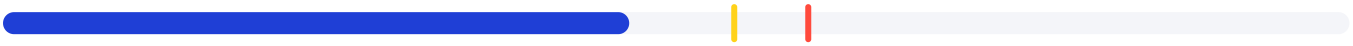
96 to 146 marks. That is how far AIR 1 finished above the last General-category selection. Over eight papers, it is about 12 to 18 marks a paper. The gap between "selected" and "AIR 1" is a steady extra 10 to 15 marks almost everywhere.

Cut-offs from UPSC final results, CSE 2022, 2023, 2024. Mains cut-offs (out of 1,750): 748, 741, 729.

Paper by paper

Essay

149 of 250 · Gautam Vivekanandan (AIR 211, 2022)



Median 116 · Top 10% from 135 · Record 149 · of 250

Nobody in 236 marksheets crossed 150. The median topper scored 116, and only 12 reached 140.

Essay is where the very top pulls away: the median AIR 1–10 essay was 132, against 111 for ranks below 300. That 21-mark gap comes from one paper. **Write one full essay a week under time, and get it marked hard.**

Top three: Gautam Vivekanandan 149 · Ramesh Chandra Verma 148 · Smriti Mishra 145

GS Paper I

121 of 250 · Ishita Kishore (AIR 1, 2022), Malavika G Nair (AIR 172, 2022)



Median 97 · Top 10% from 111 · Record 121 · of 250

Scores sit in a tight band. 111 already puts you among the best rank holders. **Make sure you never drop below 95, rather than chasing 130.**

Top three: Ishita Kishore 121 · Malavika G Nair 121 · Prashant Raj 120

GS Paper II

137 of 250 · Arjun Gupta (AIR 32, 2023)



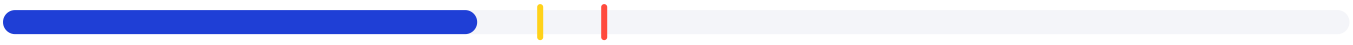
Median 112 · Top 10% from 123 · Record 137 · of 250

The friendliest GS paper after Ethics: 45 of 236 crossed 120. **The right article or committee, a current example and a short way forward, every time.**

Top three: Arjun Gupta 137 · Vaishali Chopra 135 · Kunal Rastogi 134

GS Paper III

111 of 250 · Aditya Vikram (AIR 9, 2024)



Median 88 · Top 10% from 99 · Record 111 · of 250

The hardest paper on the marksheet. In 15 of the 16 AIR 1–10 marksheets we hold, GS III was their weakest paper, and the top-10 lead here is only 12 marks.

Do not try to win GS III. Protect it. Aim for the mid-90s with data-backed answers, and spend the hours you save on Essay and Ethics.

Top three: Aditya Vikram 111 · Sudhir Pratap Singh Charan 108 · Madhav Aggarwal 107

GS Paper IV (Ethics)

143 of 250 · Aditya Srivastava (AIR 1, 2023)



Median 115 · Top 10% from 127 · Record 143 · of 250

The highest-scoring GS paper: median 115, and 18 toppers crossed 130. Case studies are half the paper. **Name the stakeholders, weigh the options, choose one.**

Top three: Aditya Srivastava 143 · Shakti Dubey 141 · Garima Lohia 141

Optional (Papers I + II)

334 of 500 · Pururaj Singh Solanki (AIR 21, 2023)



Median 276 · Top 10% from 300 · Record 334 · of 500

500 marks with the widest spread of any paper. Only 24 of 236 crossed 300. The top 10 do not win here: their median optional was 282, against 266 below AIR 300. **A strong optional keeps you in the race; it rarely decides AIR 1.**

Top three: Pururaj Singh Solanki 334 · P K Siddharth Ramkumar 326 · Nidhi Pai 325

Interview (Personality Test)

215 of 275 · Aniket Shandilya (AIR 12, 2023)



Median 179 · Top 10% from 198 · Record 215 · of 275

27 toppers made the final list with less than 160, so a weak interview does not end your chances if your written is strong.

Top three: Aniket Shandilya 215 · Annapurna Singh 212 · Samiksha Sarwari 210

CSE 2022 · Hindi Literature

Bharat Jai Prakash Meena

Written **800** · Interview **198**

AIR 85

CSE 2022 · Zoology

Komal Meena

Written **798** · Interview **127**

AIR 765

Almost the same written marks. A 71-mark difference in the interview separated them by 680 ranks. The interview is 275 marks you can prepare for: your application form, your state, your subject and the last six months of news cover most of it.

What the top 10 do differently

How far the median AIR 1–10 marksheet is ahead of the median rank below 300, paper by paper.



The top 10 are not people with one brilliant paper. **They are people with no bad paper.**

A typical marksheet at every rank

Rank band	Essay	GS I	GS II	GS III	Ethics	Optional	Interview	Total
AIR 1–10 16	132	112	126	96	127	282	187	**1,058**
AIR 11–50 30	119	98	118	94	123	287	189	**1,028**
AIR 51–100 24	119	96	116	90	116	281	179	**999**
AIR 101–300 66	116	100	110	87	115	275	180	**982**
AIR 301 and below 100	111	92	109	84	112	266	171	**953**

Median marks in each band. The number after the band is how many marksheets it holds.

Highest marks by optional subject

Optional	Toppers	Median	Highest	Scored by
PSIR	40	269	**313**	Ishita Kishore AIR 1, 2022
Sociology	34	278	**315**	Komal Aggarwal AIR 303, 2022
Anthropology	28	282	**326**	P K Siddharth Ramkumar AIR 4, 2023
Geography	22	279	**298**	Vishwajeet Souryan AIR 126, 2022
Mathematics	17	289	**312**	Gagan Singh Meena AIR 120, 2022
Law	14	260	**288**	Jayshree Pradhan AIR 52, 2023
Economics	10	278	**299**	Arjun Gupta AIR 32, 2023
Hindi Literature	9	259	**282**	Divya Tanwar AIR 105, 2022
Commerce & Accountancy	7	267	**285**	Garima Mundra AIR 80, 2023
Electrical Engineering	7	297	**308**	Aditya Srivastava AIR 1, 2023
History	6	280	**308**	Nausheen Siddiqui AIR 9, 2023
Medical Science	6	267	**292**	Anuj Agnihotri AIR 1, 2025
Psychology	5	268	**279**	Cibilu Pradeep AIR 253, 2022

Both optional papers together, out of 500. Subjects with at least five marksheets. A higher median usually reflects a smaller group with a strong background in the subject, not an easier paper.

Your target marksheet

Aim at a typical topper, not the record. Write your own last mock or Mains marks in the last column and look for the paper with the biggest gap.

Paper	To make the list	Top-100 rank	Record	Your marks
Essay	116	121	149	
GS Paper I	97	100	121	
GS Paper II	112	118	137	
GS Paper III	88	92	111	
GS Paper IV (Ethics)	115	122	143	
Optional (Papers I + II)	276	284	334	
Written total (Mains)	**802**	**834**	**901**	
Interview (Personality Test)	179	186	215	
Final total	**978**	**1,023**	**1,099**	

Medians of all 236 rank holders, and of the 70 who ranked inside 100. Medians do not add up exactly to the totals.

Five moves this data supports

1. **Fix your weakest paper first.** The top 10 have no paper far below the median. Find yours in the table above.
2. **Treat Essay as two papers.** It gives the biggest top-10 lead of any single paper. One timed essay a week, marked by someone strict.
3. **Bank Ethics.** It is the most generous GS paper. Practise case studies until the structure is automatic.
4. **Protect GS III, don't chase it.** The mid-90s is already a top-10-percent score.
5. **Prepare the interview like a paper.** It is 275 marks, and near the middle of the list each mark is worth several ranks.

See the answers behind these marks. Every topper named in this handbook has a free profile with marks, strategy and answer copies at upscprepnotes.in/toppers. Sort all 236 marksheets by any paper at upscprepnotes.in/toppers/marks-database.

Where the numbers come from

After each final result, UPSC publishes the marks of every recommended candidate. We take the paper-wise marks of rank holders from those lists and keep a marksheet only when every paper is present, within the maximum, and adds up to the published total.

Two honest limits. This is a sample of toppers, not every candidate, so the medians are higher than for the whole list. And "highest" means highest in this data: UPSC does not publish an all-time record, and an unlisted candidate may have scored more in a single paper.

Spotted an error? Write to **hello@upscprepnotes.in** with the name, year and paper, and we will check it against the UPSC list.

Keep going

Highest marks in UPSC
This handbook online, updated as new marks are published.

Topper marks database
Every marksheet, sortable by any paper.

Topper answer copies
How the marks above were actually written.

Optional subject marks analysis
Which optional scores, and why.

How to write Mains answers
Structure, time and presentation.

Data methodology
How we collect and check marks.

UPSCPrepNotes

The archive of real topper work. Marksheets, answer booklets and paper-by-paper marks of UPSC rank holders, shown as they are.

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