

CDS Syllabus and Study Plan

IMA, INA, AFA and OTA | Syllabus, timetable, 6-month and 12-month plans

1. About CDS

The Combined Defence Services (CDS) examination is held twice a year by UPSC for officer entry to the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Indian Naval Academy (INA), Air Force Academy (AFA) and Officers Training Academy (OTA). Candidates are graduates (final-year students can apply). Confirm age limits and qualifications in the latest UPSC notification.

2. Exam Pattern

Academy	Written papers	Written marks	SSB marks
IMA, INA, AFA	English, General Knowledge, Elementary Mathematics	300 (100 each)	300
OTA	English, General Knowledge	200 (100 each)	200

- Each paper has 100 questions and lasts 2 hours. Questions are objective (MCQ), 1 mark each.
- Negative marking: one-third of the marks for each wrong answer.
- Selection: written exam, then SSB interview (5 days), then medical examination and merit list.
- Entry specifics: INA needs an engineering degree, AFA needs a degree with Maths and Physics at Class 12, and IMA and OTA accept any degree.

3. Detailed Syllabus

English (100 marks)

- Spotting errors, sentence improvement, ordering of words and sentences.
- Synonyms, antonyms, idioms and phrases, one-word substitution.
- Fill in the blanks, reading comprehension, cloze test, active and passive voice, direct and indirect speech.

General Knowledge (100 marks)

- **Current affairs:** national and international, defence, sports, awards, science and technology, last 12 months.
- **History:** Ancient, medieval and modern India, freedom movement, world history.
- **Geography:** Earth, climate, Indian geography, resources, world geography.
- **Polity and economy:** Constitution, governance, Panchayati Raj, basic economics, budget.
- **Science:** Physics (motion, heat, light, sound, electricity), Chemistry (acids, bases, metals, everyday chemistry), Biology (human body, diseases, nutrition).

Elementary Mathematics (100 marks, IMA/INA/AFA only)

Area	Topics
Arithmetic	Number system, HCF and LCM, percentage, ratio and proportion, average, profit and loss, simple and compound interest, time and work, time-speed-distance
Algebra	Polynomials, linear and quadratic equations, inequalities, sequences and series

Area	Topics
Geometry	Lines, angles, triangles, circles, congruence and similarity
Mensuration	Area and volume of cuboids, cylinders, cones and spheres
Trigonometry	Ratios, identities, heights and distances
Statistics	Mean, median, mode, standard deviation, graphs and charts

4. Daily Timetable

For a graduate or working candidate: 5 to 6 hours a day.

Time	Activity
5:30-6:30 AM	Running and exercise
7:00-8:30 AM	Elementary Mathematics (concept plus practice)
6:00-7:00 PM	English: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension
7:30-8:30 PM	General Knowledge (History, Geography, Polity, Science in rotation)
8:30-9:15 PM	Newspaper and current affairs
9:15-9:45 PM	Revision and mistake notebook

Saturday: Sectional test and weak topics.

Sunday: Full mock (3 papers, 2 hours each, or one paper at a time), then analysis.

5. 6-Month Plan

Months	Plan
1	Arithmetic and algebra, English grammar, history and geography. Start the newspaper habit.
2	Geometry, mensuration, trigonometry, polity and economy. Start fitness routine.
3	Statistics, general science, vocabulary building. Complete one full revision of the syllabus.
4	Solve 8 to 10 years of previous CDS papers. One mock a week. Start OIR and PPDT basics.
5	Two mocks a week, detailed analysis, current affairs revision. Work on accuracy because of negative marking.
6	Revision, SSB mock sessions, last 12 months of current affairs. No new topics in the last 2 weeks.

6. 12-Month Plan

Months	Plan
1-4	Learn: complete Maths (arithmetic first), English from basics, and GK from NCERT. Test after each topic.
5-7	Practice: previous papers, topic-wise tests, one mock a week. Start SSB basics.
8-10	Sharpen: two mocks a week, 2 to 3 hours of analysis each, formula revision, vocabulary 20 words a day.
11-12	Finish: mocks, current affairs, SSB mock sessions, group tasks and mock interviews.

7. SSB Preparation

Stage	What happens
Stage 1	OIR (verbal and non-verbal reasoning) and PPDT (picture perception and group discussion). Only those who pass go ahead.

Stage	What happens
Stage 2	Psychology tests (TAT, WAT, SRT, SDT), group tasks (GTO) and personal interview, spread over 4 days.

- Write positive, action-based responses and stay honest.
- Know your own background, hobbies, strengths and weaknesses.
- Practice group discussions and leadership in group tasks.
- **Fitness:** 2.4 km run under 12 minutes, push-ups, sit-ups and stamina training.

8. Key Tips

- The cutoff in English and GK is often the deciding factor. Do not neglect these because of Maths.
- Accuracy matters. Guess only when you can eliminate two options.
- Take at least 20 full mocks before the exam.
- Keep a mistake notebook and review it weekly.
- Read a newspaper daily for English and current affairs together.