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UPSC Mains 2020 Essay

Year-wise PYQ pack · WRAP model answers with canonical links

Official UPSC stems in exam order. Each live answer sits on one WRAP URL; this PDF is the year pack, not a second copy of the article. Open the link under a question for the full page.

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains/essay/2020/>

Q1 · 125 marks

Life is a long journey between human being and being humane.

Essay · 2020 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a bench, a dog, an unseen beggar. Stand:** species vs practice.
- **Headings:** self, caste/care, constitution, world, then one counter.

Earn **Gandhi** once; **Ambedkar** once.

Close on a widened we.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A man shares a bench with a stray dog and a beggar. He feeds the dog. He does not see the beggar. He is a human being. The second seeing would be humane. The topic is the distance between the two, walked over a life - and a republic's life.

One stand

- **Human being is membership in a species. Humane is a practice:** pity with justice, strength without cruelty. Write the journey as daily, not as a conversion scene.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Human being:** body, hunger, fear, a name in a census.
- **Being humane:** the extra we owe - dignity, restraint, a widened 'we'.
- **Long journey:** unfinished; backsliding is normal. Honesty about that.

Self

- Anger is the species. A pause is the walk.
- **Gandhi:** means as the walk itself.

Society

- **Caste, a riot, a joke in a wedding WhatsApp:** the species defending a small 'we'.
- **Langar, a blood bank:** humane as organisation, not only mood.

State

- **Art. 21, 17, 15:** the republic's attempt to write humane into the file.
- **A lock-up, a demolition at dawn:** the journey reversing in khaki.

World

- War, a refugee camp, climate - the species at scale. Humane is a convention and a hospital.

The counter

- **Do not preach humane to a starving household as if pity were calories. Ambedkar:** a hungry man is not first a moral project; he is owed a floor. The journey includes the state's walk, not only the saint's.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** widen the 'we' by one person this week, and by one clause in a file. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2020/life-is-a-long-journey-between-human-being-and-being-humane/>

Q2 · 125 marks

Mindful manifesto is the catalyst to a tranquil self.

Essay · 2020 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with three lines before email. Stand:** trained quiet, then duty.
- **Headings:** self, feed, office, public pause, then one counter.

Earn **Buddha** or Marcus once. Peg a pause after rumour.

Close on stillness that acts.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

- **A young officer writes three lines before opening email:** what I control, what I don't, whom I must not harm today. It is a small manifesto. The inbox still shouts. The self is a little less for sale. The topic is that catalyst - mindful, written, used.

One stand

- **Mindful:** attention without the extra story. Manifesto: a few rules you can reread. Tranquil self: less panic, not less duty. Write against both the wellness industry and the cult of rage.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Mindful manifesto:** a short, repeatable discipline (breath, a pause, a code).
- **Catalyst:** it starts a reaction; it is not the whole life.
- **Tranquil:** stoic / Buddhist cousin - one nod.

Self

- A feed is an anti-manifesto. Sleep, a walk, a phone in another room.

Digital

- Notifications as a raid on tranquillity. Design vs will (cousin of FOMO 2024).

Office

- A noting that waits one night. A meeting without a performance of anger.
- **Kautilya's watchmen of the self:** the king's first fortress.

Public

- **A leader's pause after a riot rumour:** tranquillity as statecraft, not as cowardice (cousin of muddy water 2025).

The counter

Tranquillity preached to a beaten wife is a second blow. A hungry queue does not need your calm more than a ration. And a manifesto can be branding (a corporate 'mindfulness' that speeds the same grind). Stillness is to see clearly, then move.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** write three lines, then open the file. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page —

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2020/mindful-manifesto-is-the-catalyst-to-a-tranquil-self/>

WRAP Exams

Q3 · 125 marks

Ships do not sink because of water around them, ships sink because of water that gets into them.

Essay · 2020 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a boy blaming the sea and a father pointing at tar. Stand:** inlets, not the ocean.
- **Headings:** self, firm, republic, world, then one counter.

Earn the image honestly. Peg CAG or a bridge.

Close on June's tar.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A fishing boat in a swell. The boy blames the sea. The father points to a seam they did not tar. Ships do not sink because of water around them; they sink because of water that gets in. The topic is the seam.

One stand

- **Outer water:** markets, opposition, a pandemic, a neighbour. Inner water: compromise of the hull - hypocrisy, a captured regulator, a mind that forwards anything. Write the seam.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Water around:** adversity, criticism, global shocks - not automatically fatal.
- **Water within:** the leak you permitted.
- A nautical image - do not fake an admiral.

Self

- A habit, a secret, a rage. Integrity is tar.

Organisations

- **A university, a party, a newsroom:** one compromised editor is a seam.
- **Peg:** NPAs, a collapsed bridge - water that was already in the books.

Republic

- **Constitution as hull. Communal poison, a captured statistic, a lie in the House:** inlets.
- **CAG, a free press, a commission:** pumps. Use them or drown in a calm sea.

World

- A state with a strong army and a rotten currency. Inner water.

The counter

Some seas are mines (invasion, a virus). A perfect hull still needs lifeboats. The line does not blame the drowned for the cyclone. It blames the owner who skipped the tar in June. Also: a leak can come from above - a law that opens the seam.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** tar the seam you can reach. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2020/ships-do-not-sink-because-of-water-around-them-ships-sink-because-of-water-that-gets-into-them/>

WRAP Exams

Q4 · 125 marks

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.

Essay · 2020 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with seventeen annexures vs one page. Stand:** earned simple, not lazy simple.
- **Headings:** self, UPI/GST, speech, tech, then one counter.

Earn da Vinci or **Gandhi** once. Peg ORS or a window.

Close on a clean true sentence.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A ration form with seventeen annexures and a thumbprint that still does not open the shop. A later officer cuts it to one page and a queue that moves. That cut is not dumbing-down. It is sophistication that learned what the poor already knew.

One stand

Simple is the core that survives committee (cousin of 2024's large-consequence ideas). Write against both clutter and a slogan that hides a theft.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Simplicity:** few moving parts, sayable, usable.
- **Ultimate sophistication:** earned by knowing the complexity first (a doctor's short advice after a long training).
- da Vinci (as commonly given) - one nod.

Self

- A life of fewer performances. **Gandhi's** spinning as a simple that was not naive.

Policy

- UPI, ORS, a single-window that actually is one window.
- GST's idea was simple; the return was not. Name the gap.

Speech

- A manifesto in one page vs a gazette of fog. **Ambedkar** could be simple and still sharp.

Tech

- A public good with a clean interface; a 'simple' app that hides a consent trap.

The counter

Some truths are not simple (a tax on carbon, a language, a climate model). 'Keep it simple' can be anti-intellectual or a thief's friend (a simple rumour). Sophistication includes knowing when to show the working. The poor deserve simple access, not a simple lie.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** cut the annexure, keep the safeguard. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page —

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2020/simplicity-is-the-ultimate-sophistication/>

WRAP Exams

Q5 · 125 marks

Culture is what we are, civilization is what we have.

Essay · 2020 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with three phones and no meal vs a courtyard and a leak. Stand:** being vs kit; refuse both swaggers.
- **Headings:** self, caste/boast, feed, border, then one counter.

Earn **Tagore** and **Ambedkar**.

Close on drain plus a non-humiliating song.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A family owns three phones and no shared meal. Another owns a courtyard song and a leaking roof. Culture is what they are when the kit is off. Civilisation is the kit and the city. The line asks which one we are becoming - and what we only have.

One stand

- **Culture:** meanings, restraints, a language of respect. Civilisation: surplus, law, science, a drain that works. Write against both civilisational swagger and a romance of poverty as culture.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **What we are:** habits of the heart (**Tagore** vs a museum of the past).
- **What we have:** GDP, missiles, a metro, a stack of rights on paper.
- **Risk:** using 'culture' to freeze caste as being.

Self

- Manners without a library; a library without manners.

India

- **A civilisational boast that skips a manual scavenger.** **Ambedkar:** annihilate that being.
- **A temple and a lab:** having and being can sit together (**Nehru** plus a bhakti line).

Tech

- We have a feed; we are an attention span. **Digital civilisation**, thin culture.

World

- A high-GDP **civilisation** that cannot be kind at a border.

The counter

The leaking roof is not culture; it is a missing civilisation of drains. Do not baptise deprivation. And 'having' a constitution is also a kind of being if we practise it. The line is a diagnostic, not a ranking that always prefers the song to the hospital.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** build the drain, keep the song that does not humiliate. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page —

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2020/culture-is-what-we-are-civilization-is-what-we-have/>

WRAP Exams

Q6 · 125 marks

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

Essay · 2020 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with an empty godown and a locked full one. Stand:** surplus plus a fair key.
- **Headings:** growth, caste as production, welfare, ecology, then one counter.

Earn **Ambedkar** once. Peg NFSA or 1991.

Close on both clauses every round.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A godown with nothing cannot run a ration. A godown with grain and a lock that only one caste can open is a full emptiness. The line is both rooms: prosperity as a condition, justice as the meaning.

One stand

Social justice needs resources and power. Economic prosperity needs legitimacy or it rots. Write the order as a spiral, not as a one-way wait until 'we are rich'.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **No SJ without prosperity:** schools, hospitals, a wage - someone must produce.
- **Prosperity without SJ meaningless:** a skyline beside a slum is a failure of meaning, not only of PR.
- **DPSPs plus growth** - the republic's old double brief.

Economy

- 1991 enlarged the godown. The key remains a politics.
- **Peg:** jobs, a Gini we should not fake; talk quality of the road (cousin of journey 2025).

Caste and gender

- Who is allowed to produce, to own, to enter a mill. Justice is also a production function.

Welfare

- **NFSA, a scholarship, a disability pension:** justice that spends the surplus.
- A subsidy captured by the wrong lock.

Ecology

- A prosperity that eats the forest is a desert (cousin of 2024). Justice to the unborn.

The counter

'Wait for growth' has been a farce for those outside the lock. Some justice (a right, a vote, Art. 17) cannot wait for a GDP date. And a purely redistributive politics on an empty godown is another cruelty. Hold both clauses in every paragraph.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** fill the godown, copy the key. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2020/there-can-be-no-social-justice-without-economic-prosperity-but-economic-prosperity-without-social-justice-is-meaningless/>

WRAP Exams

Q7 · 125 marks

Patriarchy is the least noticed yet the most significant structure of social inequality.

Essay · 2020 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a photograph nobody captions. Stand:** furniture that assigns sitting.
- **Headings:** home, work, ritual, police/panchayat, then one counter.

Earn **Ambedkar** or Beauvoir once. Peg NFHS or 73rd.

Close on a visible chair.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

- **A family photograph:** the men sit. The women stand behind, smiling. No one captions the standing as a structure. Patriarchy is that caption nobody wrote - least noticed, most significant, still assigning who may sit.

One stand

- **Not a private mood of 'bad men'. A system of rules:** descent, property, honour, a voice in a panchayat. Write it as infrastructure. Link to 2023's two disciplines without copying that paper.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Least noticed:** it looks like nature, like 'our culture', like a joke.
- **Most significant:** it organises labour, violence, the state inside the house.
- **Social inequality:** beside caste and class - intersecting, not a side quest.

Home

- Unpaid hours, a curfew, a missing girl at birth (NFHS).
- Who eats last.

Work

- A labour-force number that cannot see the home.
- A glass ceiling that is also a glass floor (who cleans).

Ritual and culture

- A priestly monopoly, a surname, a festival that parades a boy.

State

- **Peg:** 73rd seats, maternity, POSH, marital rape debates - the file entering the photograph.
- A police desk that sends a woman home to 'compromise'.

The counter

Class and caste can crush a man who still sits in the photograph. Patriarchy is not the only furniture. And a policy that only scolds mothers will miss capital and khap. Also: men as allies who rock the cradle (cousin of 2021) - structure can be moved without a war on persons.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** caption the standing. Then give a chair, a wage, a street at night. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2020/patriarchy-is-the-least-noticed-yet-the-most-significant-structure-of-social-inequality/>

WRAP Exams

Q8 · 125 marks

Technology as the silent factor in international relations.

Essay · 2020 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a cut cable and a blinking exchange. Stand:** quiet infrastructure of power.
- **Headings:** telegraph-to-bomb, sanctions/stock, cyber-space, standards, then one counter.

Earn one historical peg. Name DPI or a patent debate.

Close on making plus governing.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A submarine cable is cut and a stock exchange blinks. No shot was fired. A meeting still issues a paragraph on 'shared values'. The values travelled on that cable. Technology is the silent factor - silent until it is not.

One stand

- **IR textbooks list armies and treaties. Under them:** standards, patents, a payment rail, a satellite, a vaccine recipe. Write the silence, then the moment it speaks.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Silent:** not on the first page; works as infrastructure of power.
- **Factor:** it changes who can coerce, who can see, who can eat.
- **Not techno-utopia:** a factor among others (oil still spills).

History

- Steam, the telegraph, the bomb. Silence that ended an age.
- Non-alignment also had a radio.

Economy

- Supply chains, rare earths, a payment system shut-off as a sanction.
- **Peg:** digital public infrastructure as a diplomatic export; also a dependency if the stack is foreign.

Security

- Cyber, space, a dual-use drone. A 'civilian' app as a map.
- **Nuclear:** the loudest silent factor.

Norms

- Who writes the standard (a 5G argument, a data localisation fight).
- **WHO, a patent waiver debate:** tech as ethics in IR.

The counter

A cable does not abolish a border or a hunger. Diplomacy, a navy, a grain still decide. Tech-determinism is another silence - the kind that forgets the last person. And 'silent' can be a cover for an undeclared war. Name it.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** hear the cable in the communicate. Build enough to not only be a customer. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2020/technology-as-the-silent-factor-in-international-relations/>

WRAP Exams

Compiled answer key

Last pages of this pack. Each question links to the WRAP model answer on wrapexams.com.

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Q1 125 marks	Q2 125 marks	Q3 125 marks	Q4 125 marks
Q5 125 marks	Q6 125 marks	Q7 125 marks	Q8 125 marks

Question-wise key

Q1 · 125 marks Solution

Q2 · 125 marks Solution

Q3 · 125 marks Solution

Q4 · 125 marks Solution

Q5 · 125 marks Solution

Q6 · 125 marks Solution

Q7 · 125 marks Solution

Q8 · 125 marks Solution

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