

**PRASHANT YADAV**

# **THE FIVE INVISIBLE MISTAKES**



**Discover Mistakes That Civil Services Aspirants  
Realize Only After Failed Attempts.....  
And Learn How to Avoid Them**

# Why I Wrote This Book

Multiple tabs were open on my web browser as I was trying to find a website that could teach me about the exchange rate in simple words. When I could not find an easy explanation, I picked up my textbook and began reading it in frustration. Despite my best efforts, nothing was getting into my head that day.

My previous attempt at the civil services exam had made me realize the importance of understanding economics, a subject that students with a science background like me considered a nightmare.

Yet, my frustration that afternoon wasn't just about economics. There was something else that frustrated me every day around the same time.

Every morning, as I sat reading the newspaper with the sound of birds chirping in the background, the day felt great. But by afternoon, after lunch, everything changed. The bright and hot sunlight entering my room made it difficult to concentrate.

After we shifted to a new house in 2022, my room setup felt fine initially, with a wooden bed in one corner and my study table near the window. However, as the months went by, I noticed how much the sunlight affected me in the afternoons.

If I closed the curtains, it blocked air circulation. But if I left them open, the bright sunlight made it impossible to focus. Since there wasn't much space in the room, relocating the desk seemed like an insignificant solution. So, I ignored it.

Fast forward to 2023, just a few days before Diwali, we moved things around during a clean-up, and I got a new spot for my desk. Now, the sunlight no longer hit my face, even with the curtains open. I could finally study for hours without the constant frustration.

That small change saved me four to five hours of wasted time every single day. It made me realize how something so small and seemingly insignificant could significantly impact my studies.

That thought led me to identify five small elements that most aspirants ignore. This book is about those five invisible elements.

Some of you may overlook one of them, while others may unknowingly ignore all five. These mistakes may seem small, but they can greatly affect your preparation.

The purpose of this book is to help you identify and overcome these invisible mistakes before they cost you your precious time.



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01



# **SACRIFICING SLEEP**

**SKIPPING SLEEP MAY SEEM LIKE A STUDY  
SHORTCUT, BUT IT ACTUALLY REDUCES YOUR  
ABILITY TO THINK, LEARN, AND FOCUS.**

When I was in school, I would usually wake up around 5 a.m. to revise before my exams. As I progressed to higher classes, my morning alarm time shifted even earlier. In 12th standard, the pressure of board exams made me stay awake until late at night and wake up early in the morning.

By cutting down on sleep, I was able to get extra study time.

When I got into engineering college, the syllabus was so vast that I started avoiding sleep entirely before exam days. For example, if I had an exam the day after tomorrow, today would be the last day I slept. It was only in the exam hall that the consequences of this habit became obvious.

I could only recall things I had crammed that same morning. Anything I learned earlier seemed to vanish. I felt exhausted, irritated, and would even stammer while talking with my classmates after the exam.

A few days after my first attempt at the civil services exam, I began creating plans to completely avoid sleep for the next three months, until the end of 2020. I tried but did not succeed. Then I tried again and again. The consequences became painfully clear each time.

I continued making the same mistakes until November 2021, when I finally began paying attention to my sleeping habits.

When you decide to prepare for UPSC, you're signing up for one of the toughest challenges of your life. The syllabus feels endless, the competition intense, and every hour suddenly seems too short. In the middle of this pressure, sleep often becomes the first thing you sacrifice.

You tell yourself, *"If I stay up late, I can finish one more chapter, or I will sleep less and wake up early to revise."* It feels like you're being productive, like you're doing what it takes to reach your goal.

But here's the truth: ignoring your sleep is a silent mistake that takes more from you than it gives back.

You spend hours reading Lakshmikant, but when you wake up, you can barely remember what you studied. Even though you're working hard, it feels like you're not getting anywhere. You keep reading despite being tired, feeling sleepy, and getting more distracted.

That's what sleep deprivation does, it steals the sharpness of your mind, the very tool you need the most in this journey.

# How Lack of Sleep Affects Your Studies

Lack of Sleep



It gets difficult to follow the study schedule.



You feel exhausted even before you start reading.



Your mind feels foggy while reading.



It gets difficult to connect ideas as your thinking is compromised.



Understanding the material takes longer.



You don't remember what you read.

Studying without sleep is like driving a car without fuel. You might force it forward for a while, but eventually, it comes to a stop.

When you don't get enough rest, the hours you spend studying don't bring any results. Your brain needs time to absorb and organize what you learn.

Without it, recalling information becomes a struggle, and all your effort starts slipping away.

UPSC preparation isn't just about memorizing facts, it's about connecting ideas, analyzing problems, and thinking clearly.

A tired mind makes even simple questions feel complex, leaving you frustrated and stuck.

The journey is already mentally exhausting, and missing out on rest only adds to the weight.

It heightens anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt, making it harder to stay focused and motivated.

Whether it's picking the right topics, managing your time, or knowing when to rest, a tired mind struggles to decide, leading to wasted effort and slowed progress

## Here is a checklist to get better sleep.



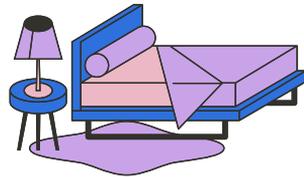
Limit screen time **one hour** before bed.

Avoid heavy meals **right before bed.**



Limit **water intake** before bed.

Keep your bedroom **cool and dark.**



Set a **fixed time** to go to bed every night.

Wake up at the **same time** each morning.



## **So, how much should you sleep?**

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that adults aged 18-60 should aim for at least 7 hours of sleep each night.

Remember, quality sleep matters more than quantity.

### **Bonus Tip:**

Spending some time in natural sunlight soon after waking up improves sleep quality at night.

02



# **EXCESSIVE PHONE USAGE**

**THIS DEVICE IS THE GATEWAY TO ENDLESS  
DISTRACTIONS.**

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*“This is going to be the last time. I’ll just see what everyone else is doing, and then I’ll deactivate the app,”* I told myself before re-installing Instagram. This was in 2024.

I had created my account back in 2018. At first, it was just for fun, but over time, I found myself glued to it day and night.

Eventually, I deactivated it, but the fear of missing out always pulled me back, and I would reactivate it.

This cycle of deactivating and reactivating happened once every month.

In 2024, when I logged in again, I got completely absorbed in it. I saw my school friend showing off his biceps, another friend getting engaged, and others taking pictures with their kids.

Time seemed to pass too quickly, and what bothered me most was how, for the next 2-3 days, I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

Once again, I found myself glued to the screen.

Something similar was happening with YouTube. Every time I searched for something to learn, the recommendation section would fill up with random videos like mysterious world secrets.

I couldn't resist clicking on them, and before I knew it, I was lost in an endless sea of suggested content.

To gain some perspective, I texted a few batchmates, asking if they could pinpoint one specific thing that wasted their time.

Almost all of them replied with the same answer: "my phone"

If you decide to put your phone away for a day but keep feeling the urge to grab it, that's phone addiction.

As your phone usage increases, it slowly absorbs your life into it. Your day starts and ends with it and the more you scroll, the more disconnected you feel from your real life.

If you're angry or anxious, a quick scroll might make you feel better for a moment. But when you stop, hours have passed, and regret kicks in.

To escape that regret, you pick up your phone again. This cycle keeps you stuck and makes it harder to focus on what's important, like studying.

# How Excessive Phone Usage Affects Your Studies

Phone usage disrupts your study routine, making it harder to stay consistent.

(your routine is the first thing affected)



Frequent switching between phone and books reduces focus.

( your ability to focus takes a hit)



It prevents deep engagement with your study material, leading to shallow understanding.

(Lack of focus means you can't engage deeply with your studies)



More time spent on your phone means less time for studying, slowing your progress.

(Because of distractions, study time is reduced)



It causes delays in starting or finishing important tasks.

(Reduced study time leads to procrastination and missed deadlines)



The more you use your phone, the less you feel like studying.

(Over time, phone addiction grows, and motivation to study weakens)

Let me share some practical ways that helped me and can help you manage your phone usage, especially with platforms like YouTube and Instagram.

## **Tackling YouTube Screen Time**

It starts with one educational video, but before you know it, you're watching some random conspiracy theories. Here's how you can manage it:

### **Use the Unhook Extension:**

If you're using YouTube on a computer, this browser extension can be a lifesaver.

It hides the recommendation section and trending videos, so you only see the content you came for.

### **Avoid YouTube on Your Phone:**

The mobile app is designed to keep you hooked with an endless stream of recommended and short videos. Avoid using it altogether on your phone.

### **Set App Timers to Zero:**

This worked wonders for me. By setting the YouTube timer to zero, I forced myself to stop using it. This helped me break the cycle of mindless scrolling.

## Managing Instagram and Other Apps

Instagram feeds on your fear of missing out, and the endless scrolling makes it easy to lose track of time. Here's how to manage it:

### **Set App Timers:**

Give yourself a specific limit for apps like Instagram. You can start with 10 or 15 minutes a day and gradually reduce it if needed.

### **Designate Phone Usage Time:**

Decide a fixed time to check your phone.

For example, allow yourself 15 minutes after lunch or in the evening, and stick to it.

### **Keep Your Phone Away While Studying:**

When you're preparing or studying, keep your phone switched off and in another room. This physical separation helps you stay focused.

# Unhook Extension & App Limit

## Install The Unhook Extension

Go to the Chrome Web Store, search for Unhook: Remove YouTube Recommended Videos, and click Add to Chrome.

It removes distractions like recommended videos on YouTube.

## Set App Limit

iPhone: Go to Settings > Screen Time > App Limits, select the app, and set a time limit.

Android: Go to Digital Wellbeing > Dashboard, find the app, and set a limit.

It's not about quitting apps entirely but about using them with purpose and discipline.

Start with small changes and stay consistent.

## Bonus Tip:

Avoid using your phone for at least 1 hour before bed and immediately after waking up. This helps improve your sleep quality and lets you start and end your day with more focus and clarity.

03



# BEING IMPULSIVE

THE STRUGGLE TO STAY PRESENT: MANAGING  
IMPULSIVE URGES

I was tapping my legs on the ground, the urge to just stand up and leave becoming stronger, but somehow I controlled myself and sat there, thinking it would all end soon.

I had accompanied my father to the bank, where we were talking to the manager. I didn't understand anything he was saying, I just found it unbearably hard to sit in his cabin. I was fighting the overwhelming urge to leave, but I forced myself to stay seated.

When I got home, I couldn't stop thinking about it. Why did I feel that way? Why was it so hard to sit still? And how could I stop it from happening again?

The next morning, I sat down to read the newspaper. Everything was fine while I was skimming the headlines, but when I decided to read an article in depth, I suddenly felt the urge to check my phone. I gave in and checked it.

When I tried to return to the article, I felt thirsty and went to the kitchen for water. I came back, sat down, and started reading again but this time, I felt the need to take a walk outside. I followed the urge. And when I returned to the newspaper, I thought, "*Maybe I should read something else instead.*"

That's when it clicked. I was having difficulty staying in one place for long periods, and that same difficulty was what I'd felt in the bank.

This struggle can manifest in different ways like the urge to check your phone, to get up and grab a snack or even to clean your room before studying. It's like your mind is constantly searching for an excuse to avoid fully engaging with a task.

In simple terms, an impulse is the urge to act immediately on an idea, often choosing short-term satisfaction over long-term goals.

To overcome this, I realized I needed to prioritize my long-term goals over these impulses. I had to teach my body and mind to stay in one place for longer periods, starting with 45 minutes at a stretch.

To build this skill, I began solving sudoku puzzles, which you can often find after the editorial page in "THE HINDU" newspaper. The day after the bank incident, I spent eight hours with sudoku, not in a single stretch, but in parts. I couldn't solve the puzzle, but I was training myself to sit still and focus.

Sudoku is a great way to train your mind to stay focused. As you solve it, you learn to sit still, think clearly, and ignore distractions. It helps you build patience and stop acting on every small urge.

# How Being Impulsive Affects Your Studies

Impulsive urges make it hard to sit and study for long.



You struggle to stay with one topic before switching to another.



Tasks feel unfinished because you keep shifting focus.



You prioritize short-term urges over long-term study goals.



This leads to an inconsistent study routine and lack of deep learning.



Over time, studying feels frustrating, and progress slows down.

Now that you have the basic knowledge of impulsiveness, you'll be able to detect when similar urges arise in your own life.

Recognizing these moments is the first step in taking control. Next time you feel an urge to act impulsively, pause for a moment, take a deep breath, and decide whether it's worth following through or whether it's just a distraction.

With practice, you'll start to notice these impulses before they control you.

The greatest advantage I gained from managing my impulses was the extra time it gave me to deeply engage with the topic at hand, making my learning much more effective.

### **Bonus Tip:**

#### **Practice the 5-Minute Pause**

When you feel the urge to act impulsively, take a 5-minute break instead. Focus on your breath, stretch, or just observe your surroundings. This short pause helps calm the urge and allows you to make more thoughtful decisions.

04



# **AVOIDING YOUR EMOTIONS**

**HOW AVOIDING EMOTIONS LEADS TO MISTAKES  
AND HOW TO MANAGE THEM EFFECTIVELY**

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Whenever I tried reading economics, a wave of anxiety would hit me. The more I looked at the syllabus, the more overwhelmed I felt.

My stress kept building and soon, I found myself texting others for advice on how to tackle it. But no matter what I tried, nothing seemed to work.

Eventually, I started avoiding the subject altogether.

Looking back, I realize it wasn't the subject itself that was the real challenge. It was the stress and fear I was experiencing, the emotions I was avoiding, that made the task seem impossible.

Preparing for UPSC is tough, and it's normal to feel stressed, frustrated, or doubtful. These emotions can pile up, especially when things don't go as planned. However, ignoring these feelings won't help, they only make the stress worse.

When we push emotions aside, they often show up in unexpected ways like feeling irritated over small things, procrastinating, or struggling to concentrate.

The key is to acknowledge and manage your emotions, so they don't control your actions.

If I had managed my emotions better back then, I would have been able to tackle the subject with a clearer mind.

# How to Stay Calm and Focused While Preparing

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## **Take Breaks:**

Step away from your study space to recharge. A change of scenery can help reset your mind.

## **Practice Deep Breathing:**

Take a few minutes to breathe deeply, which can calm your nervous system and help you refocus.

## **Stay Positive:**

Focus on progress rather than perfection. Small wins add up over time.

## **Talk It Out:**

Share your feelings with someone you trust. Sometimes, just talking helps release built-up stress.

## **Set Small Goals:**

Break your tasks into smaller steps to make them more manageable and less overwhelming.

## **Exercise or Move:**

Physical activity helps reduce stress and boost concentration, even if it's just a short walk.

Ignoring emotions can also lead to negative self-talk, like thinking "I'm not good enough" or "I'll never get this." These thoughts slowly drain motivation and make studying feel even harder.

By recognizing and managing emotions as they arise, you can stay calm and focused, even when the pressure is high.

Addressing emotions head-on makes the challenges of UPSC preparation much more manageable, and can ultimately lead to a more productive, stress-free journey.

### **Bonus Tip:**

#### **Name Your Emotions**

Pause and identify what you're feeling. Naming your emotions reduces their intensity and helps you respond calmly.

05



# LACK OF A PROPER ROUTINE

**A WELL-STRUCTURED ROUTINE TURNS SMALL  
ACTIONS INTO LASTING SUCCESS.**

At the start of my preparation, I didn't have a structured routine. My mood determined everything, when I studied, when I ate, when I scrolled through my phone, and when I slept. There was no consistency.

As a result, my body never knew what to expect, and I constantly felt drained, unmotivated and exhausted.

In 2021, I decided to change that. I committed to waking up every day at 5 a.m. without fail. The first few days were tough. I had to force myself to get out of bed and push myself to go for a run. On day two, the struggle was still there. But by day three, the resistance was much less, and soon enough, I woke up naturally at 5 a.m. without an alarm.

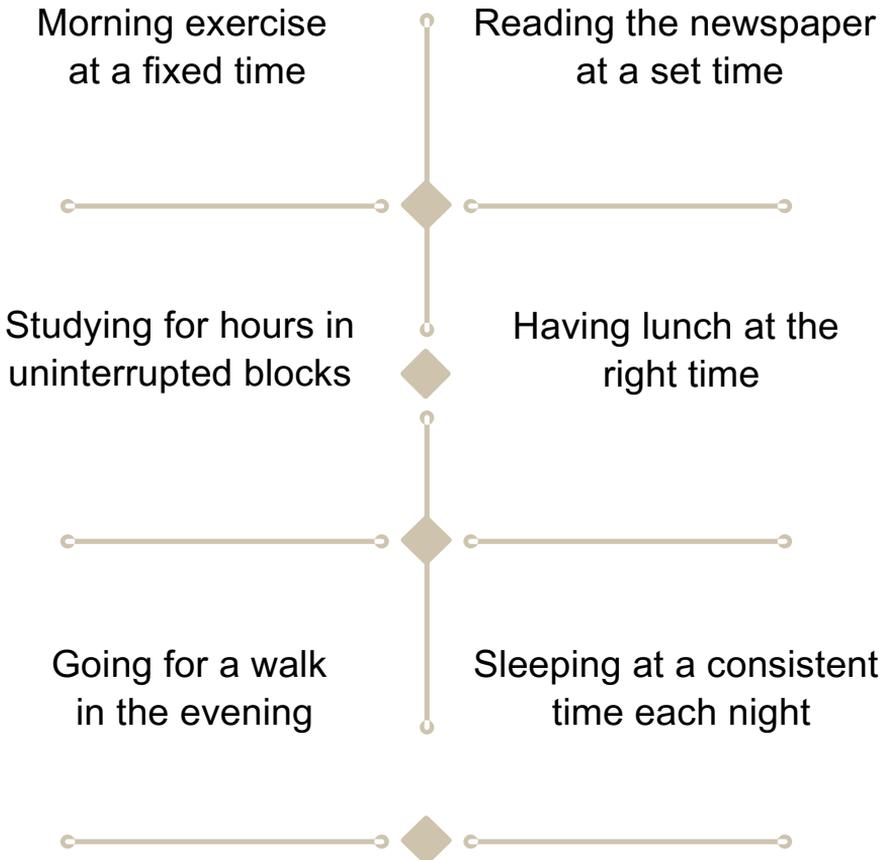
My body had adapted to the routine, and I was no longer relying on my mood to dictate my actions.

Waking up early felt great, it boosted my attention and energy levels for a few hours after exercise. But by midday, I would feel drained and struggle to stay focused while studying. Something still wasn't right.

After some trial and error, I realized the real problem was my sleep. Waking up early meant nothing if I was still sleeping late. So I set a fixed bedtime of 10 p.m. and stuck to it. That one change transformed everything. With proper rest, my energy and focus lasted much longer.

I realized that the key to developing any new habit lies in the initial struggle. Over time, the body adapts, and the habit becomes effortless.

**I applied this same principle to other areas of my life**



With time, these actions became part of my routine, resulting in:

- ✓ Increased energy levels
- ✓ Sharper focus and attention
- ✓ Improved memory and recall
- ✓ Better sleep quality
- ✓ Greater discipline and consistency
- ✓ Reduced procrastination
- ✓ Higher stress resilience
- ✓ A positive mindset

Lack of routine means not having fixed habits in place. You sleep whenever you feel like it, wake up at random times, and basically do things without any structure.

Without a routine, it's much easier to fall into the same mistakes we've discussed before. To avoid this, it's important to create consistent habits every day.

When you build a routine, your body adapts, and it becomes much easier to stay on track with your studies.

## **The lesson I learned is simple:**

The body learns from repetition. Without a structured routine, it becomes confused, leading to wasted energy and reduced productivity.

My initial mistake was not having a clear structure for my day. My mood controlled everything and as a result, I was often drained and unproductive.

With a routine, the brain knows what to expect and when to expect it. This allows the body to function optimally and over time, it becomes a source of power, rather than a struggle.

## **Bonus Tip:**

Start small, focus on building one habit at a time. Once it becomes second nature, gradually add more to your routine. Small, consistent steps lead to lasting change.

06



# CONCLUSION



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Creating and sharing this ebook is more than just a project for me. It's a way to help aspirants avoid the mistakes I made during my preparation journey.

I truly believe the insights and experiences in this ebook can guide those in the same path, helping them build better habits and avoid common pitfalls.

Every step you take towards a better routine, mindful choices and self-discipline will bring you closer to your goals. Remember, the journey is as important as the destination, and having the right tools and mindset can make all the difference.

If this ebook helps even one aspirant find clarity and improve their approach, it will have achieved its purpose.

Thank you for allowing me to be a small part of your preparation journey.

Got a feedback?

Feel free to reach out to me at: [support@examblueprint.in](mailto:support@examblueprint.in)  
I'd love to hear from you!

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