

General Studies for **every stream**

A PYQ-based strategy for Prelims Paper I, made from all 720 GS questions asked from 2021 to 2026. For geologists, geophysicists, hydrogeologists and chemists. One source per subject, and the plan follows the VKC GS test series week by week.

The whole strategy in three lines

36%

of the GS paper is Physics, Chemistry and Biology at school level. Any science graduate can collect these marks first.

30%

is Environment and Physical Geography. The same ideas come back year after year, so learn the repeated list.

34%

is Polity, History, Economy and Current Affairs. Read only the narrow list given here, and attempt with elimination.

Prelims: 10 January 2027 (confirm the date on your admit card). That leaves about 11 weeks from 27 October 2026. Keep about 75% of your study time for your Paper II subject (300 marks) and about 25% for GS (100 marks).



01 Why GS marks matter for you

GS is a quarter of Prelims, but it is not just a qualifying paper. Each GS mark carries into your final rank.

120 Q

100 marks in 2 hours.
One question = 0.83 marks

-0.28

for a wrong answer
(one-third of 0.83)

10%

minimum in each paper
to be counted at all

1200

final total = Prelims 400
+ Mains 600 +
Interview 200

Example: Chemist stream cut-offs (General category)

Year	Stage I (out of 400)	Stage II (out of 1000)	Final (out of 1200)
2024	193	556	709
2025	167	530	791

The Stage II total (1000) is Prelims 400 plus Mains 600, and the final total (1200) adds the Interview. The same structure holds for every stream, so your GS score is counted at every stage. Sources: UPSC cut-off notice for CGSE 2024, and the published 2025 cut-offs.

Your target: 50+ in GS

A sound plan is to **attempt about 90 questions with about 75–80% accuracy**:

Attempted	Right	Wrong	Score
90	70	20	52.8
80	62	18	46.7
100	70	30	50.0

Note the last row: 10 extra attempts, all wrong, cost you 2.8 marks. Accuracy matters more than the number of attempts.

The guessing rule, as maths

Expected marks for one question when you guess among the options that are left:

Options you can cut	Expected marks	Decision
None (blind, 1 in 4)	0.00	Leave it
One (1 in 3)	+0.09	Only if a second clue fits
Two (1 in 2)	+0.28	Always attempt

A blind guess gains nothing on average and only adds risk. Cutting two options turns a guess into a third of a mark on average.

Time split. GS is 100 marks and your Paper II subject is 300. Keep GS to about **1.5–2 hours a day**, and never let it take your subject revision time. The plan on page 7 fits inside that.

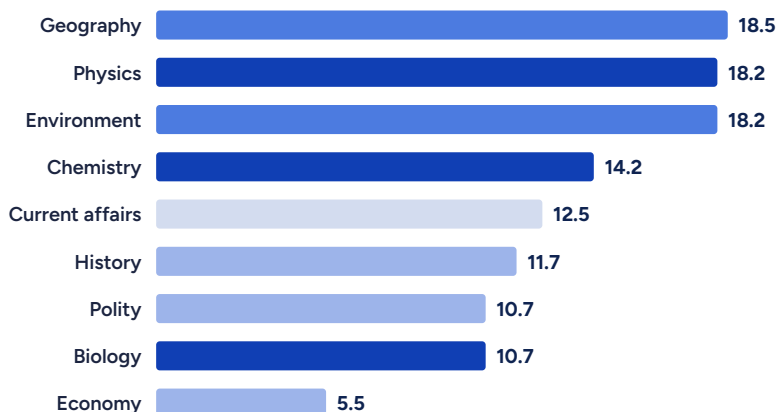


02 What the PYQs say: 720 questions sorted

Every question of Paper I from 2021 to 2026 was put under one subject (the solved papers are on vkcsience.com). Colours show the priority tiers on the next page.

Subject	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	6-yr total	Share
● Geography	21	24	19	18	16	13	111	15%
● Physics	10	18	19	21	21	20	109	15%
● Environment	15	18	20	19	21	16	109	15%
● Chemistry	10	16	16	15	13	15	85	12%
● Current affairs	15	10	10	12	15	13	75	10%
● History	16	11	11	11	10	11	70	10%
● Polity	12	11	7	11	11	12	64	9%
● Biology	12	8	12	11	11	10	64	9%
● Economy	9	4	6	2	2	10	33	5%
Total	120	120	120	120	120	120	720	100%

Average questions per paper



● Tier A: collect first ● Tier B: repeat zone ● Tier C: narrow reading ● Tier D: attempt smart

What the data shows

- **Physics doubled**, from 10 questions (2021) to about 20 (2022–26), and many are Class 11–12 numericals: Wheatstone bridge, moment of inertia, Bohr radius, circular motion.
- **Chemistry is steady** at 13–16 questions, at NCERT level, plus chemistry in everyday life.
- **Science and Environment together are half the paper**: 367 of 720 questions.

- **Geography is coming down** (24 in 2022, 13 in 2026), but climatology appears every single year.
- **Economy swings** between 2 and 10 questions, so keep it light. Polity and History sit near 11 each, every year.
- Current affairs (10–15) come at the end of the paper and cover the **12–15 months before the exam**.



03 The low-hanging fruit, tier by tier

Each tier is a different way of preparing. The marks plan at the bottom is how a science graduate of any stream can reach 50+ without trying to master GS.

Tier	Subjects (avg Q per paper)	What they ask	Your aim
A · COLLECT School science	Physics 18 · Chemistry 14 · Biology 11 ≈ 43 questions	NCERT-level facts and short numericals at Class 11–12 level. Revise them; do not skip them.	34 right ≈ 80% accuracy
B · REPEAT ZONE Concepts repeat	Environment 18 · Geography 18 ≈ 36 questions	Ecology terms (ecotone, niche, keystone), conventions, atmosphere and climate, monsoon, soils, rivers, places on the map.	20 right ≈ 55–60%
C · NARROW Read a fixed list	History 12 · Polity 11 · Economy 5 ≈ 28 questions	Polity articles and bodies; Ancient/Medieval from the Themes books; National Movement; poverty and money basics.	12 right ≈ 45%
D · ATTEMPT SMART Low return per hour	Current affairs 12–13	Summits, groupings, awards, schemes, space missions, places in news from the last 12–15 months.	4 right attempt only with elimination

Marks plan

$34 + 20 + 12 + 4 = 70$ right out of about 90 attempted.
 $70 \times 0.83 - 20 \times 0.28 = \approx 52.8 / 100$

Tier A alone gives you about 28 marks. That is why science revision for GS comes first in the plan, not last.

What to deliberately leave out

- World history and post-1947 history beyond a few events
- Deep art and culture (music, dance forms, painting schools), except Ajanta and temple styles
- Economy in depth: budget numbers, GDP data series, banking regulations
- Sports trivia, except the largest events (World Cups, Olympics, hosts)
- More than one current-affairs source
- Thick reference books read cover to cover; use only the chapters listed on page 6

Your stream gives you a head start. Geologists: geomorphology, rocks, earthquakes and soils come every year. Geophysicists: about 18 physics questions a paper. Chemists: about 14 chemistry questions. Collect your own subject first, then Tier A.

How the tagging was done: each question is counted once, under the subject it tests. Ecology goes under Environment; government schemes go under Economy unless they are recent news; places and events in the news go under Current affairs. Different tagging could move a question or two, but it does not change the pattern.



04 The repeat list: themes asked again and again

Each line here has come in two or more papers since 2021. Revise these before anything else in each subject.

Environment and ecology

Ozone: CFCs, ozone hole, Vienna and Montreal Protocol	2021 ×2, 24, 25, 26
Ecotone and edge effect	2021, 22, 24, 26
Niche, fundamental niche, Gause's competitive exclusion	2025 ×2, 26 ×2
Keystone, sentinel and endemic species	2025 ×2, 26
Nitrogen cycle; sedimentary cycles	2022, 24, 25, 26
Biomes, succession and phenology	2023 ×2, 24 ×2, 25, 26 ×2
Ramsar sites and wetlands, peat	2021, 22 ×2, 24, 25, 26
Mangroves and coral reefs	2021, 22, 24 ×2, 25

Geography

Atmosphere: composition, layers, inversion, UV	every year, 2021–26
Heat budget, albedo, greenhouse effect	2021 ×2, 22 ×3, 26
Monsoon and its breaks; mango showers	2021, 23, 26
Soils: types, horizons, transported soils	2021, 22, 23, 24, 25
Latitudes, tropics, date line, meridian	2022, 24, 25, 26
Local winds, jet streams, cyclones	2021, 25 ×2, 26
Indian rivers and Himalayan ranges	2023 ×4, 25

Economy

Poverty measurement: MPI, MPCE, poverty groups	2021 ×2, 23, 26 ×3
Money supply and CRR; schemes (NRLM, health)	2021, 23, 26 ×4

Polity

Fundamental Duties and the Preamble	2022 ×2, 23 ×2, 25, 26
President and Vice-President: election, impeachment	2022, 23, 25 ×2
Panchayati Raj and the State Election Commission	2021 ×2, 23 ×3
Election Commission (incl. SIR in 2026)	2021, 22, 25, 26
Parliament: Money Bill, questions, motions	2021, 24 ×3, 25
Emergency provisions; amendment and basic structure	2022, 26 ×3
Governor and Advocate-General	2021 ×3

History

Vijayanagara and the Deccan (Hampi, Krishnadeva Raya)	2023, 24, 25, 26
Bhakti and Sufi saints and their texts	2021, 24 ×2, 25 ×2
Foreign travellers in India	2021, 24, 26
Ashokan inscriptions, Prinsep, inscriptions	2021 ×2, 23, 26 ×2
Salt March and Civil Disobedience; Quit India	2021, 22, 25, 26 ×2
Gol Act 1935; Revolt of 1857	2021, 24, 25, 26

Physics · Chemistry · Biology

EM spectrum, X-rays, UV	2021 ×2, 23, 24, 25, 26
Resistances and Wheatstone bridge	2021, 23, 24, 25
Optics: refraction, dispersion, scattering	2021, 22 ×4, 25
Fluids: Bernoulli, buoyancy, pressure	2022 ×3, 23, 25, 26 ×2
Atomic structure: Cr/Cu configuration, Bohr	2021, 22 ×2, 23 ×3, 24, 25
Everyday chemistry: cement, alloys, soap, glass	2021, 22, 25, 26 ×3
Digestion (HCl), blood, cell organelles	2021 ×3, 25, 26 ×5



05 One source per subject, and only these chapters

The rule is one book per subject. Each source is picked to cover the repeat list on page 4. Do not add a second source until you have revised the first one twice.

Subject	The one source	Read only
Chemistry	NCERT Science Class 9–10 (chemistry chapters) + Class 11–12 basics	Acids, bases and salts; metals and non-metals; carbon compounds; soaps; cement, glass, alloys; hardness of water. One day is enough.
Physics	NCERT Physics Class 11–12, selected chapters	Motion and circular motion, rotation, gravitation, fluids, heat, waves and sound, ray optics, electrostatics, current electricity, magnetism, EM waves, atoms and nuclei, semiconductors. Solve the PYQ numericals.
Biology	NCERT Science Class 9–10 + Biology Class 11 (selected)	Cell and its organelles, tissues, plant anatomy, digestion, breathing, blood and circulation, reproduction, heredity, diseases and vaccines.
Environment	NCERT Biology Class 12, ecology unit + Shankar IAS <i>Environment</i> (selected)	NCERT: Organisms and Populations; Ecosystem; Biodiversity and Conservation. Shankar: ecology basics, biodiversity, protected areas and Ramsar sites, climate change, conventions and protocols.
Geography	NCERT Class 11 <i>Fundamentals of Physical Geography</i> + <i>India: Physical Environment</i> + one school atlas	Physical: interior of the Earth, rocks, weathering, atmosphere, heat budget, winds, cyclones, oceans. India: drainage, climate and monsoon, soils, natural vegetation. Atlas: mark every place asked in PYQs.
Polity	M. Laxmikanth, <i>Indian Polity</i> , selected chapters	Preamble, Fundamental Rights, DPSP, Fundamental Duties, amendment and basic structure, emergency, President, Vice-President, Governor, Parliament, Supreme Court, Panchayati Raj, Election Commission, CAG, Attorney-General.
History	NCERT <i>Themes in Indian History I and II</i> (Class 12) + Spectrum, <i>A Brief History of Modern India</i>	Themes I and II match the PYQs closely: Harappa, inscriptions and Ashoka, kinship (Mahabharata edition), travellers, Bhakti–Sufi, Vijayanagara. Spectrum: 1857, and 1905–1947 only.
Economy	NCERT Economics Class 9 + Class 12 <i>Introductory Macroeconomics</i>	Class 9: Poverty as a Challenge; People as Resource. Class 12: Money and Banking (money supply, CRR). Schemes come through the current-affairs source.
Current affairs	Any one monthly compilation, Nov 2025 to Dec 2026	Read only: international summits and groupings, environment news, science and space, major schemes, reports and indices, awards and persons. Skip the rest.

The PYQs are the most important source. All six GS papers are solved on vkcsience.com, with an answer and a short explanation for every question. Do them **subject-wise**, not year-wise: after a chapter, solve all the PYQs from that subject.

Make a one-page sheet per subject. You already make notes for your subject this way. The sheet should hold only the repeat list, the facts PYQs asked, and the mistakes you make in tests.



06 11-week plan, in step with the VKC test series

Each week ends with the matching GS sectional test (G1–G8) and the full GS mocks come near the end. The order follows the tiers: science first, then the repeat zone, then the narrow reading.

Week	Dates	GS work (about 1.5–2 h a day)	Test that week
Week 1	27 Oct – 2 Nov	Take GS Mock 1 (free) cold, as a baseline. Then GS chemistry and biology, with their PYQs.	GS Mock 1 → G7
Week 2	3 – 9 Nov	Physics: theory and all PYQ numericals. Every year about 18 questions.	G6
Week 3	10 – 16 Nov	Environment I: NCERT ecology unit, the ecology terms on the repeat list.	—
Week 4	17 – 23 Nov	Environment II: biodiversity, protected areas, Ramsar sites, conventions, climate change.	G5
Week 5	24 – 30 Nov	Physical geography: rocks, weathering, atmosphere, heat budget, winds, oceans.	—
Week 6	1 – 7 Dec	Indian and world geography with the atlas: rivers, monsoon, soils, vegetation, places.	G2
Week 7	8 – 14 Dec	Polity: the Laxmikanth chapter list and all polity PYQs.	G1
Week 8	15 – 21 Dec	History: Themes I and II, then Spectrum for 1857 and 1905–47.	G4
Week 9	22 – 28 Dec	Economy and schemes. Start current affairs: two months of the compilation each day.	G3 · GS Mock 2
Week 10	29 Dec – 4 Jan	Finish current affairs. Revise the Tier A sheets.	G8 · GS Mock 3
Last days	5 – 9 Jan	Only revision: the repeat list, your one-page sheets and your test mistakes. Nothing new.	GS Mock 4

If a sectional test is not open yet in your week, solve that subject's PYQs from vkcsience.com instead and take the test when it opens. Each test stays open until the exam.

A GS day (1.5–2 hours)

- 60 min: the week's subject from its one source
- 30 min: PYQs of that subject on vkcsience.com
- 15 min: add to the one-page sheet
- From Week 9: 20 min of current affairs

After every test

- Read the solution of every wrong *and* every guessed question
- Check your guessing: did "two options cut" answers come right?
- Write each mistake on the sheet of that subject

Your Paper II subject comes first. Geology, Geophysics or Chemistry is 300 marks; your plan for it stays as it is. GS fits around it, never the other way round. In a heavy subject week, it is fine to cut GS to one hour a day.



07 In the exam hall

The GS paper is taken in the morning and your subject paper after lunch. A calm GS morning protects your afternoon.

Three rounds in 120 minutes

- **Round 1 (≈ 50 min):** answer what you know at once. Science blocks first if you like; the paper is in subject blocks.
- **Round 2 (≈ 40 min):** come back to the marked ones and use elimination. Two options cut means attempt.
- **Round 3 (≈ 20 min):** fill the OMR carefully, then stop. Do not change answers without a clear reason.
- Keep 10 minutes in hand.

Elimination tricks that work in GS

- Words like "only", "always", "all" make a statement usually wrong.
- In "how many statements are correct", settle the one you are surest about first; it often removes two options.
- Numericals: check units and the order of magnitude before you calculate in full.
- Match-the-following: one sure pair can remove most options.

Four rules to remember

1. Science first: Tier A is about 28 marks on its own.
2. One source per subject. Use the PYQs as your second source.
3. Never guess blind. Two options cut means attempt.
4. Your Paper II subject keeps 75% of your time. GS gets 25%.

Everything you need, in one place



GS PYQs 2021–2026, solved
vkcsience.com → Geo-Scientist
→ Prelims GS



GS test series, all streams
GS pass ₹399: G1–G8 and GS
Mocks 2–4
GS Mock 1 free for everyone



Telegram channel
t.me/upsc_chemistry_vkc
Doubts: the VKC discussion group

Cut-off figures: UPSC cut-off notice, CGSE 2024 (upsc.gov.in), and the published 2025 Chemist cut-offs (shown as an example).
Exam pattern: UPSC Combined Geo-Scientist notice. Question counts: VKC analysis of the 2021–2026 Paper I papers.

