

# Optional Subject Selection Strategy – UPSC CSE Exam

By **IASGanga** – Align Your Optional with Strategy, Strength & Success

[IASGanga Optional Finder Quiz - LINKw](#)

# Why Optional Selection Deserves Top Attention?

## 500

**Total Marks**

In Optional Papers

## 250

**Marks Each**

In Paper I & II

## 100

**Top Rank**

Possible with strong optional

The **500 marks** in the Optional (**250 each in Paper I & II**) can either guarantee a **Top 100 Rank** or lead to repeat attempts. It is not just about "liking a subject" – it is about **scoring reliably, revising confidently, and staying sane under pressure.**

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# Two Categories of Aspirants – Two Different Paths

## Category A

Aspirants who should **stick to their graduation subject** if it's their strength

## Category B

Aspirants who should **change their optional from graduation subject** based on strategic considerations

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# Category A: Stick to Your Graduation Subject

## MBA Graduates

→ Management

## IITians

→ Mathematics

## Doctors

→ Medical Science

## CAs/B.Com




→ Commerce & Accountancy

## B.A./M.A. students

→ PSIR, History, Geography, Sociology

✓ "If you have natural command, don't switch for trends. Stick and scale."

## Why this works:

-  Saves learning curve time
-  You've already done 30–40% in college
-  Conceptual comfort = faster revision

## Example Toppers:

- AIR 107 (2021) Pankaj Yadav – Management
- AIR 78 (2023) Dr. Prashanth S – Medical Science
- AIR 1 (2018) Kanishak Kataria – Maths



# Category B: Changing Optional From Graduation Subject

🧠 "Switch if you're weak in your graduation subject or uninterested in it. But switch smartly."

## 1 Consider Multiple Factors

Evaluate strengths, **resources, and scoring** patterns.

## 2 Impact of Right Choice

Right optional can boost your rank, **wrong one can cause struggles.**

## 3 Strategic Evaluation

Carefully **assess options** to make this important decision.

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# Selection Criteria (Descending Priority Order)



Rank	Criteria	Notes & Examples
1	Scoring Consistency (270–320+ range possible)	E.g. <b>Anthropology, PSIR, Sociology, Philosophy</b>
2	Genuine Interest + Conceptual Clarity	You'll <b>revise 10+ times</b> —better if you enjoy it. <b>Literature</b> is great for avid readers.
3	Good Coaching + Notes Availability	E.g. Shubhra Ranjan ( <b>PSIR</b> ), Triumph IAS ( <b>Sociology</b> ), Vijetha IAS ( <b>Anthro</b> )
4	Time to Finish	<b>Anthro, Socio, Philosophy</b> take <b>3–3.5 months</b> ; <b>Geo/History</b> = <b>5+ months</b>
5	GS Overlap	<b>PSIR</b> (GS2 + IR), <b>Geo</b> (GS1 + Envi), <b>Socio</b> (GS1 + Ethics), <b>Anthro</b> (Essay + Ethics examples)
6	Essay & Ethics Synergy	<b>PSIR, Socio, Anthro, Philosophy</b> = frequent theme overlap
7	Prelims/Mains/Interview Relevance	Optional like <b>PSIR, Anthropology, Socio</b> = easy use in Essay, GS answers, personality test
8	Static Nature (Low Current Affairs Dependency)	Less newspaper stress. E.g. <b>Anthro, Sociology, Philosophy</b>
9	Time & Energy Cost Per Day	Pick one that fits your daily schedule if <b>working/college student</b>



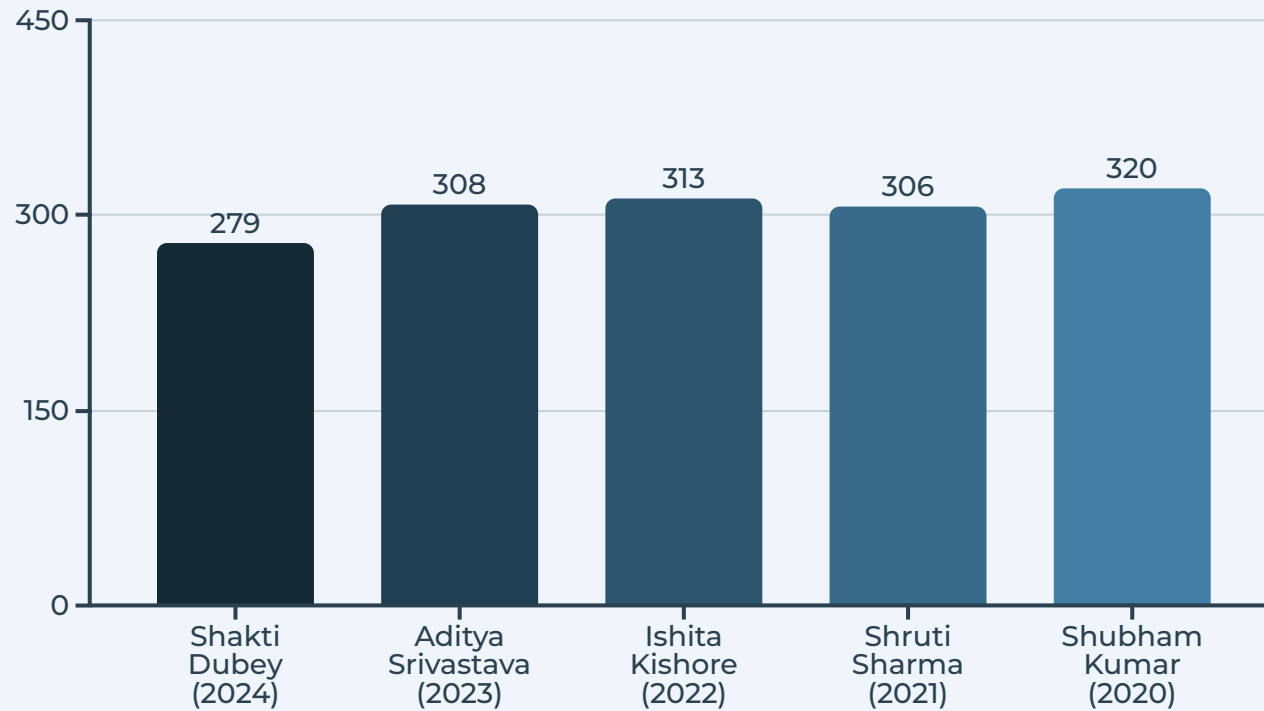


# Popular Optionals – SWOT Snapshot

Optional	Pros	Caution Points
PSIR	GS2 + IR overlap, good essay & interview use	Slightly dynamic; takes 4–5 months
Sociology	Easy to grasp, helps GS 1, Ethics & Essay	Needs diverse examples; abstract topics
Anthropology	Scoring, diagrams, fast to finish	Bio/tribal part needs visual memory
Philosophy	Short, static, Ethics + Essay booster	May feel difficult to science grads
Geography	Maps + environment link + GS1 benefit	Syllabus-heavy, uncertain marks esp in hindi medium
History	Covers GS1 + Essay + Interviews	Huge content, difficult to revise fully, unpredictable qs
Maths	Objectivity, high scoring if mastered	Time consuming, Only for engineering confident students
Medical Sci	Natural choice for doctors, scoring	No GS overlap, factual content
Literature	Static, predictable, great for readers	Needs strong writing; no GS benefit
Management	Good for MBA grads; structured & logical	Less coaching availability



# Real Trends Analysis from Rank 1 Holders



Rank	Name	Year	Optional	Score
AIR 1	Shakti Dubey	2024	PSIR	279
AIR 1	Aditya Srivastava	2023	Electrical Engineering	308
AIR 1	Ishita Kishore	2022	PSIR	313
AIR 1	Shruti Sharma	2021	History	306
AIR 1	Shubham Kumar	2020	Anthro	320





# Final 5-Point Checklist Before Freezing Optional






If **YES to at least 4 out of 5** → You've found your optimal optional ✓

# IASGanga Takeaway

"Your optional is not just about love or logic. It's about **leverage**—on score, time, GS, and your own energy system."

## Take a 7-day Test Drive

-  Read 1 chapter
-  Watch 1 lecture
-  Solve 1 PYQ

## Evaluate Your Experience

Assess your comfort level, understanding, and interest after the test drive

## Make Your Decision

Use **interest + scoring + support system** as your 3-legged decision stool

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