

SSB SIMPLIFIED

A sure-shot formula for clearing the 5-day
interview by a former President of the SSB

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Published by
Renu Kaul Verma
Vitasta Publishing Pvt Ltd
4348/4C, Ansari Road, Daryaganj
New Delhi - 110 002
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ISBN: 978-81-19670-21-5

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First Edition 2024

MRP ₹295

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Edited by Reena Singh

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Cover Design by Somesh Kumar Mishra

Printed by Vikas Computer and Printers, New Delhi

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Preface

Why another book on SSB, when there are already so many out there to choose from? Is there something new in this book that should compel you to read it? I assure you there is, for this is new wine in a new bottle!

As a former president of a premier Services Selection Board (SSB), I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the entire SSB methods and systems. During my tenure, I conducted a comprehensive study of the processes used for selecting future leaders of our armed forces. To further improve the system, I developed a mathematical model of the selection process, identifying what needed enhancement and higher intervention.

The SSB process has been in place for almost 90 years. One can question whether it still suits modern society and whether it addresses the requirements of a new world order. My study revealed that while the system is fundamentally sound, it requires minor adjustments and definitely a change in the assessors' mindset. Some internal changes were implemented

during my tenure, and I believe that further improvements have been made in the years since my retirement.

Shedding my uniform after serving for 36 years in the IAF, I got reacquainted with the selection process all over again, this time training young boys and girls at one of the best Armed Forces Preparatory Institutes (AFPIs) in the country.

As SSB president, my role was to administer tests and select the most suitable candidates, without providing feedback or performance debriefs of any kind.

My tenure at AFPI, however, saw a shift in this role. I had to now guide and train candidates on how to successfully navigate the SSB interview process. This required focussing on four key areas:

- Academic preparation for the written exam
- Physical training
- Soft skills development
- SSB-specific training

Our goal was to ensure holistic development that included improving the aspirant's physical and mental endurance, written, and spoken language skills, general awareness, and military knowledge, and all this to be done in just two academic years. With a major chunk of the student's time spent in honing academic skills at school combined with the pressure to do well in their final years, we had only a few months of pure training available for personality development and honing of other skills.

My hands-on experience as Director Training at the National Defence Academy (NDA) came in handy in understanding how young men transform into officers with military bearing over four years. Long ago, I had been an NDA

cadet, myself, and later its training head. This, along with my roles at SSB and AFPI, I believe have given me a 360-degree perspective on grooming candidates for the armed forces.

It was my students who encouraged me to write this book in an easy-to-understand story format, combining my knowledge and experience. This book is unique in that it provides specific guidance without promoting shortcuts to success that training institutes seem to be doing. The insights here are applicable not only to NDA aspirants but to all candidates seeking entry into the armed forces through any of its entry schemes.

I leave you with ten golden tips for success at cracking the written exam which one has to pass to graduate onto the SSB interview. You will also find these tips amplified throughout this book. Revisit these tips as frequently as possible to maintain the right focus and tempo for your exams.

Ten tips for success in the written exam

1. **Have confidence in yourself and your preparation.**

When you get stressed at the thought of the exam and are unsure of some aspects of your studies, do not panic. Close your eyes and say 'relax, relax, relax' in your mind while clenching and unclenching your fists. This will surely make you relax. I have tried it myself, and it works! The exam will have questions from areas and subjects that you have studied for this long and you should not be unduly worried.

2. **Be consistent with your preparations.** Remember to continue to study till a day before the exam after which you should just go through the various formulae and concentrate on the short tricks of answering questions

that you have been taught. Don't cram on the last day, because it will only lead to confusion! Practice, practice and only practice helps, especially in the mathematics paper. Attempt as many mock tests as you can.

3. **Learn the art of relaxation between bouts of study.** Do not keep staring at your books and notes when you are mentally tired. Take a break and start afresh for better assimilation.
4. **Ensure that you travel to your centre, a day before your exam.** Unwind after your journey, sleep well, and wake up fresh for the gruelling tests. Avoid caffeine as far as possible.
5. **Be well prepared with the stationery.** Remember, smart watches, phones and electronic gadgets are not permitted at the centre. Carry an energy bar and something to eat between the two papers. Carry water and, of course, your mask, if needed!
6. **As you are seated for the exam waiting for the question paper, close your eyes and meditate.** Tell yourself to relax. Say to yourself that you are well prepared and that you are going to do your best. The heart will beat a little fast and you will be stressed, but any exercise such as telling yourself to relax and clenching and unclenching your fists to reduce anxiety helps. Remember, those around you are in the same predicament!
7. **Maxing the math paper.** You will be running against time for this. Attempt the sections you are most confident about, at first. When you initially read through the paper, write the formula to be used for certain questions so that you don't waste time thinking later. If the paper is hard or moderately hard, aim to get 50 to 60 correct answers to make it to the cut off in this paper; anything more is

bonus! Remember, the better you score, the better merit you get! Do not get flustered if you cannot answer a question; just go to the next one and return to this one later. And yes, most importantly, check and recheck if you are marking the answer on the Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) sheet correctly!

8. **The GAT paper is the easier one and you will be more relaxed for this.** Do not worry about what happened in the earlier paper as you answer this paper. Attempt the English section first, followed by General Science and General Knowledge sections. Skip to the next question if you are not sure of an answer and revisit this later after completing the paper.
9. **DO NOT attempt to answer by fluke.** Remember, there are negative marks for wrong answers. I have known several aspirants who have spoiled their chance by taking chances!
10. **Wishing you all success and may you crack the written exam with high marks!** After you pass, we shall prepare for the Services Selection Board interview.

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