CDS Exam Pattern 2026 Explained with Marks Distribution

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The **Combined Defence Services (CDS) Examination 2026**, conducted by **UPSC**, is a crucial step for candidates aiming to join the **Indian Armed Forces** as commissioned officers. Understanding the **CDS exam pattern 2026** and **marks distribution** is essential for effective preparation and smart time management.

This article explains the **latest CDS 2026 exam pattern**, subject-wise marks, duration, negative marking, and academy-wise differences in a clear and comprehensive manner.

□□ CDS Exam Pattern 2026 – Overview

The CDS examination consists of **two main stages**:

1. **Written Examination (UPSC)**
2. **SSB Interview & Personality Test**

The **written exam pattern varies** depending on the academy applied for:

- **IMA (Indian Military Academy)**
- **INA (Indian Naval Academy)**
- **AFA (Air Force Academy)**
- **OTA (Officers' Training Academy)**

□□ CDS 2026 Written Examination – Mode & Structure

- **Mode of Exam:** Offline (Pen & Paper)
- **Type of Questions:** Objective (MCQs)
- **Medium:** English & Hindi (except English paper)
- **Negative Marking:** Yes (⅓ marks deducted for each wrong answer)

□□ CDS Exam Pattern 2026 for IMA, INA & AFA

Candidates applying for **IMA, INA, and AFA** have to appear for **three papers**.

Subject-Wise Marks Distribution

Subject	Duration	Maximum Marks
English	2 Hours	100
General Knowledge	2 Hours	100
Elementary Mathematics	2 Hours	100
Total	**6 Hours**	**300 Marks**

Key Points

- All papers are of **equal weightage**
- Mathematics is **mandatory** for IMA, INA & AFA
- Questions are of **10+2 standard**

□□ CDS Exam Pattern 2026 for OTA (Men & Women)

Candidates applying for **OTA** have to appear for **two papers only**.

Subject-Wise Marks Distribution

Subject	Duration	Maximum Marks
English	2 Hours	100
General Knowledge	2 Hours	100
Total	**4 Hours**	**200 Marks**

Important Note

- **No Mathematics paper** for OTA
- English and GK play a **decisive role** in selection

□□ Detailed CDS 2026 Subject-Wise Exam Pattern

1. English Paper (100 Marks)

Purpose: Test understanding of English language and grammar.

Topics Include:

- Reading Comprehension
- Grammar & Usage
- Synonyms & Antonyms
- Sentence Improvement
- Vocabulary

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- Spotting Errors

Difficulty Level: Moderate
Standard: Graduation level

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2. General Knowledge Paper (100 Marks)

Purpose: Assess general awareness and current affairs knowledge.

Topics Include:

- History
- Geography
- Polity
- Economics
- General Science
- Defence & Security
- Current Affairs

Difficulty Level: Moderate
Standard: Graduation level

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3. Elementary Mathematics Paper (100 Marks)

(For IMA, INA & AFA only)

Purpose: Test numerical ability and logical thinking.

Topics Include:

- Arithmetic
- Algebra
- Trigonometry
- Geometry
- Mensuration
- Statistics

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Difficulty Level: 10+2 level
Speed & accuracy are crucial

⚠ Negative Marking in CDS 2026

- **⅓ mark is deducted** for every incorrect answer
- No marks deducted for unattempted questions
- Smart guessing is essential to avoid loss of marks

CDS 2026 SSB Interview – Marks Distribution

Candidates clearing the written exam are called for **SSB Interview**.

Academy	SSB Marks
IMA / INA / AFA	300
OTA	200

Total Marks (Written + SSB)

Academy	Total Marks
IMA / INA / AFA	600
OTA	400

CDS Exam Pattern 2026 – Key Highlights

✔ Objective type questions
✔ Equal weightage to all subjects
✔ Separate cut-offs for each paper
✔ Merit list based on **written + SSB marks**
✔ Medical fitness is mandatory for final selection

Preparation Strategy Based on Exam Pattern

- Allocate **equal time** to all subjects
- Strengthen **English & GK** for OTA
- Focus on **Maths accuracy** for IMA/INA/AFA
- Practice **previous year question papers**
- Avoid excessive guessing due to negative marking

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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Q1. What is the CDS exam pattern for 2026?

CDS 2026 includes a **written exam** followed by an **SSB interview**, with subject-wise papers depending on the academy.

Q2. Is Mathematics compulsory for CDS 2026?

Mathematics is compulsory for **IMA, INA, and AFA**, but **not required for OTA**.

Q3. What is the total marks for CDS written exam?

- IMA/INA/AFA: **300 marks**
- OTA: **200 marks**

Q4. Is there negative marking in CDS exam?

Yes, **⅓ mark is deducted** for every wrong answer.

Q5. What is the duration of CDS exam?

Each paper is of **2 hours duration**.

Q6. What is the level of CDS Mathematics paper?

The Mathematics paper is of **Class 10+2 level**.

Q7. How is the final merit list prepared?

The final merit list is based on **written exam marks + SSB interview marks**, subject to medical fitness.

□□ Conclusion

Understanding the **CDS Exam Pattern 2026 and marks distribution** is the foundation of smart and focused preparation. With clear knowledge of subject weightage, negative marking, and academy-wise differences, candidates can plan their strategy effectively and maximize their chances of success.

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