

JEE Main 2026 session 1: Toppers share preparation mantras

HIGHLIGHT HOW DISCIPLINED ROUTINES, MOCK-TEST ANALYSIS, AND STEADY FOCUS SHAPED THEIR PERFORMANCE

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The National Testing Agency (NTA) recently announced the results of JEE Main 2026 Session 1, with several candidates securing above the 99 percentile, underscoring the intense competition for admission to premier engineering institutions across the country. Among the high achievers, Shreyas Pai secured 99.23 percentile, Bharath Madhusudhan Gudi scored 99.87 percentile, and Sugghosh Joshi achieved 99.776 percentile. The results mark a significant milestone for thousands of aspirants who appeared for the first session of one of India's most competitive entrance examinations.

Structured preparation key to success

For Shreyas Pai (99.23 percentile), disciplined daily study routines played a decisive role. Balancing college hours from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., he dedicated four to five hours each day to focused preparation. His strategy revolved around practising module questions and extensively solving Previous Year Questions (PYQs). "I followed a question-wise analysis after every mock test," Shreyas said. He maintained an "error book" where he documented mistakes and revised incorrect answers to avoid repeating them. Addressing his biggest weakness — exam nervousness — he relied on repeated practice to build confidence. On exam day, his mantra was simple: remain calm and focus solely on attempting questions without worrying about the outcome. To prevent burnout, Shreyas divided his workload into manageable daily targets, ensuring he did not leave large portions



Bharath Madhusudhan Gudi

for the last moment. He focused on rigorous practice during the initial months, reserving the final phase for revision and repetition. Leisure time, including playing cricket with friends, helped him maintain balance.

Learning from mistakes

Bharath Madhusudhan Gudi (99.87 percentile) attributed his success to consistency and discipline in his daily study plan. "I ensured that no backlog spilled over to the next day," he said. Conceptual clarity came from attentive classroom learning and thorough revision of notes, but he emphasised that practice was indispensable. Weekly tests served as checkpoints to track progress.



Shreyas Pai

Bharath described his error book as a powerful self-reflection tool. "Realising your mistakes gives the greatest confidence," he said, adding that poor performances in some tests did not deter him emotionally but instead became learning opportunities. He identified agitation, overthinking, and exam-day anxiety as personal weaknesses. With conscious effort, guidance from parents and teachers, and cultivating contentment with his preparation, he overcame these challenges. On the day of the exam, Bharath ensured sufficient sleep and mental relaxation. He followed a structured CPM order — allocating 45 minutes to Chemistry, one hour to Physics, and the remaining time



Sugghosh Joshi

to Mathematics. Prioritising accuracy over speed, he maintained composure even when faced with difficult questions. To manage stress, he maintained a balanced routine combining reading and problem-solving. Time spent with friends and supportive teachers further eased the pressure. Sugghosh Joshi (99.776 percentile) followed a rigorous schedule stretching from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. In the initial phase, classroom sessions focused on building conceptual foundations, followed by self-study to bridge gaps and gradually increase the level of problem difficulty. In the final month, intensive mock tests boosted his

confidence. Sugghosh analysed every mock test on the same day, using an error log to identify weak areas. This systematic revision helped him avoid repeating mistakes in the final examination. He acknowledged speed and patience as early weaknesses. Timed practice improved his speed, while tackling challenging, multi-directional questions strengthened his persistence and conceptual depth. With his exam scheduled in the afternoon session, Sugghosh consciously avoided last-minute revision on the day of the test. Treating the examination like any other mock test helped reduce anxiety. "Being in the present and focusing on the current question was crucial," he noted. Stress management, he emphasised, was a continuous process supported by parents, teachers, healthy peer competition, sufficient sleep, and daily relaxation time.

Gateway to premier institutes

JEE Main serves as the qualifying examination for admission to National Institutes of Technology (NITs), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs), and other centrally funded technical institutions, besides acting as a gateway to JEE Advanced. With Session 1 results now declared, aspirants are gearing up for Session 2, determined to improve their scores and secure seats in leading engineering institutions. The journeys of these 99-percentilers underscore that structured preparation, self-analysis, and emotional resilience remain the cornerstones of success in one of India's toughest academic challenges.

Employer survey signals rise in skills-focused fresher hiring

Hiring sentiment for entry-level talent has strengthened for the first half of 2026, with 73 per cent of employers indicating plans to recruit freshers, according to the latest Career Outlook Report HY1 2026 released by TeamLease EdTech. The figure marks a three-percentage-point increase over the previous half-year, pointing to renewed employer confidence alongside a sharper focus on applied skills. The report is based on responses from 1,051 employers surveyed across India between November 2025 and January 2026. It highlights sustained demand for early-career professionals while underscoring a gradual shift from degree-based screening to skills-driven hiring practices.

Retail, start-ups and manufacturing lead demand

Sector-wise, Retail recorded the highest hiring intent at 91 per cent, followed by E-commerce and Technology Start-ups at 90 per cent, and Manufacturing at 85 per cent. Retail employers are seeking roles such as dark store assistants and inventory management assistants. Start-ups are recruiting digital sales associates and junior web developers, while manufacturing firms are hiring inventory and logistics coordinators and battery assembly technicians. The survey also points to a sharp surge



in select sectors compared to the same period last year. Retail hiring intent rose from 41 per cent in HY1 2025 to 91 per cent in HY1 2026, a 50-percentage-point increase. Travel recorded a 51-point rise to 77 per cent, while Power and Energy climbed 50 points to 72 per cent, indicating recovery momentum and expanding opportunities for young professionals.

Applied skills gain priority

Commenting on the findings, Shantanu Rooj, Founder and CEO of TeamLease EdTech, described the trend as a "structural reset" in how early-career talent integrates into the workforce. He noted that while opportunities are in-

creasing, hiring is becoming more selective. The report identifies a widening gap between candidates who possess demonstrable skills and those who rely solely on academic qualifications. Employers are increasingly favouring applicants with internships, live projects and work portfolios. Freshers able to showcase hands-on experience are moving more quickly into career tracks, while degree-only candidates face longer job search cycles. Overall, the survey suggests that although the hiring landscape is expanding, success for first-time job seekers will depend significantly on their ability to demonstrate practical, job-ready competencies in a competitive market.

How to stay calm and focused during exam

Examinations can be stressful, often bringing anxiety and self-doubt even for students who have prepared thoroughly. However, success in an exam depends not only on knowledge but also on the ability to remain calm and focused under pressure. Managing emotions inside the examination hall plays a crucial role in clear thinking and effective time use. With simple strategies such as controlled breathing, structured planning, and positive self-talk, students can improve concentration and perform at their best.

Practise controlled breathing

One of the simplest and most effective techniques is controlled breathing. Before the question paper is distributed, take slow, deep breaths—inhalation for four seconds, hold for four seconds, and exhale for four seconds. Repeating this process for a minute helps slow the heart rate and relax the mind, reducing immediate stress. If anxiety returns during the exam, pause briefly, place both feet firmly on the floor, and repeat the breathing cycle. Even a short reset can restore concentration.

Start with familiar questions

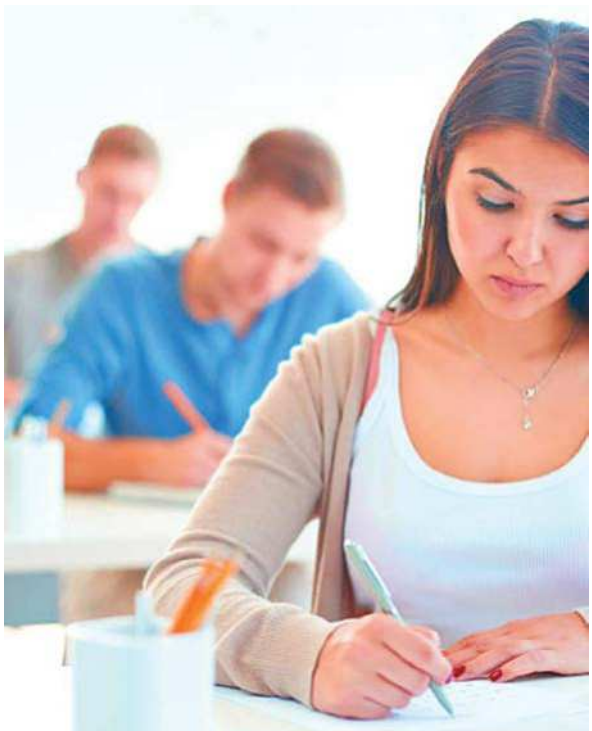
Confidence also plays a major role in maintaining calmness. Instead of worrying about difficult questions, remind yourself that you have prepared consistently and are capable of solving the paper step by step. Begin by answering questions you find familiar or easier. Early success builds momentum and boosts confidence, making it easier to approach more challenging sections later. Avoid comparing your progress with others in the hall; each student works at a different pace.

Plan your time wisely

Another important strategy is staying mentally organised. Spend the first few minutes reading the entire paper carefully and planning how much time to allocate to each section. A clear plan reduces panic and ensures that no question is left unanswered due to poor time distribution. If you encounter a question you cannot solve immediately, mark it and move forward instead of losing valuable minutes worrying about it.

Use positive self-talk

Positive self-talk is equally helpful. Replace thoughts such as "I may forget every-



thing" with "I will attempt each question calmly." This small shift in mindset improves emotional stability and prevents unnecessary stress. Keeping your posture relaxed, stretching your fingers occasionally, and sipping water when allowed can also help maintain physical comfort and focus.

Finally, remember that an examination is only one step

in a longer academic journey. Viewing it as an opportunity to demonstrate learning rather than a moment of fear helps reduce pressure. By practising breathing techniques, planning answers wisely, and maintaining steady confidence, students can remain calm, focused, and perform to the best of their abilities during the examination.

Youth innovation takes the lead, turning ideas into action

10th edition of SolveCon 2026 sees 1,700 youth changemakers collaborate, build, and commit to real-world solutions

The 10th edition of SolveCon '26 brought youth innovation to the forefront, with nearly 1,700 young changemakers gathering at PES University, Bengaluru, to collaborate on practical solutions to real-world challenges. Hosted by Reap Benefit, the event also saw participation from representatives of 88 organisations spanning civic engagement, education, climate action, mental wellbeing, and the arts. Throughout the day-long event, participants worked in teams to map local climate risks, design mental health awareness campaigns, debate public policy issues, and initiate cross-city



collaborations. The format encouraged hands-on problem-solving and peer learning rather than passive participation.

Organisations such as Giving Tuesday India, Science Gallery Bengaluru, TinkerHub, Teach For India, Azim Premji Uni-



versity, NIMHANS and SELCO Foundation were among those that engaged with participants. The event was supported by

partners including Rohini Nilekani Philanthropies, Rainmatter Foundation, NetApp and the MacArthur Foundation. The

gathering featured interactive sessions with leaders from diverse fields. Among them were Kailash Nadh, Chief Technology Officer at Zerodha and board member at Rainmatter Foundation; Priyanka Francis, IAS, Director of the National Gallery of Modern Art; Ashwini Hiremath, Founder of Wild Wild Women; and Deepak Dhananjaya, Founder of the Prabhava Institute of Inclusive Mental Health. Instead of traditional keynote speeches, speakers engaged in open dialogue with students. Kailash Nadh highlighted the importance of human skills in a technology-driven world, noting that curiosity, clarity of thought, and articulation re-

main essential even as artificial intelligence tools become widely accessible. Kuldeep Dantewadia, Co-founder and CEO of Reap Benefit, said the national edition reflects a broader shift in youth engagement. He emphasised that the platform enables young people to question, experiment, and translate ideas into action when given the space and trust to do so. Organisers observed strong interest in continuing engagement through follow-up programmes, indicating that the event functioned not merely as a one-day gathering but as a catalyst for sustained, youth-led innovation and collaboration.