

Storyboarding, decision trees, and contrast matrices

These three terms are actually tools for structuring thought. In the context of UPSC essay writing, they can help you move from vague ideas to a clear, layered, examiner-friendly piece of writing. Let me unpack them one by one:

1. Storyboarding

- **Meaning:** Borrowed from filmmaking, storyboarding means laying out the “scenes” of your essay before you start writing.
- **In UPSC essay:**
 - Instead of jumping in with random arguments, you first sketch the flow — intro → historical backdrop → present context → issues → way forward.
 - Each section becomes a “frame” in your storyboard.
 - Helps avoid repetition and keeps narrative engaging.

Example: For the essay topic “*Technology is a useful servant but a dangerous master*”:

- Scene 1: Quote/analogy in intro.
- Scene 2: Historical perspective (printing press, industrial revolution).
- Scene 3: Modern-day benefits (AI, healthcare, governance).
- Scene 4: Pitfalls (surveillance, bias, digital addiction).

- Scene 5: Ethical framework & policy solutions.
 - Scene 6: Poised conclusion.
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2. Decision Trees

- **Meaning:** A decision tree maps out choices and consequences. In essay writing, it is used to think through different “if-then” paths an argument may take.
- **In UPSC essay:**
 - Helps you explore multidimensional outcomes instead of one-line arguments.
 - Makes your essay more analytical and systems-oriented.

Example: Essay on “Is freedom of speech absolute?”

- Node 1: If absolute → protects dissent → fosters democracy.
- Node 2: If unchecked → hate speech, violence, instability.
- Node 3: Middle path → reasonable restrictions → examples from Indian Constitution.

This gives you natural sub-sections for the body.

3. Contrast Matrices

- **Meaning:** A simple table (mental or scribbled in rough work) where you compare/contrast two or more perspectives.
- **In UPSC essay:**
 - Ensures balance.
 - Forces you to weigh pros/cons, east/west, individual/state, past/future.
 - Prevents your essay from becoming one-sided.

Example: Essay on “Globalisation and its impact on Indian society”

Aspect	Positive	Negative
Economy	FDI, jobs, market access	Inequality, dependence
Culture	Diversity, openness	Homogenisation, loss of local art
Politics	Global cooperation	External pressure, sovereignty issues

This table can then be converted into flowing paragraphs.

✓ So in short:

- **Storyboarding** → flow of narrative (like a movie).
- **Decision Trees** → branching logic (like an algorithm).
- **Contrast Matrices** → balanced comparison (like a debate).

Together, they act like scaffolding: invisible in the final essay, but critical in shaping its strength and clarity.

Let's pick a **real UPSC essay topic** and I'll show you how to apply all three tools.

Suppose the topic is:

“Wisdom finds truth.” (UPSC CSE Essay Paper 2020)

Step 1. Storyboarding (the flow like a movie script)

- **Intro scene:** Start with a parable or quote (e.g., King Solomon, Buddha). Define “wisdom” vs. “truth.”
 - **Scene 2:** Philosophical roots (Indian tradition: Upanishads; Western: Socratic inquiry).
 - **Scene 3:** Historical lens (wisdom guiding leaders → Ashoka after Kalinga, Lincoln during civil war).
 - **Scene 4:** Contemporary relevance (wisdom in science, governance, climate change).
 - **Scene 5:** Counter-arguments (blind faith, pseudo-wisdom leading away from truth).
 - **Scene 6:** Synthesis → need for education, empathy, rationality.
 - **Final scene:** Poetic conclusion → “Truth is not found by intellect alone, but by wise living.”
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Step 2. Decision Tree (exploring branches of thought)

- **Branch 1:** If wisdom = practical knowledge → leads to experiential truth (e.g., Gandhian satyagraha).
- **Branch 2:** If wisdom = moral compass → reveals ethical truth (justice, equality).
- **Branch 3:** If wisdom absent → falsehoods thrive (propaganda, dogma, misinformation).
- **Branch 4:** If wisdom misapplied → dangerous outcomes (Hitler's cunning vs. real wisdom).

This branching gives you **analytical sub-sections**.

Step 3. Contrast Matrix (balancing perspectives)

Dimension	Wisdom leads to truth	Wisdom fails to lead to truth
Individual	Meditation → self-realisation	Bias, self-deception
Society	Inclusive policies → social justice	Majoritarianism → distorted truth
Science	Ethical science → vaccines, space	Reckless science → nuclear misuse
Governance	Wise leaders → harmony, growth	Shortsightedness → corruption, collapse

This table ensures balance and concrete examples.

Final Essay Shape (when you weave them together):

- **Intro:** Wisdom as lamp; truth as path.
- **Body Part 1:** Historical-philosophical grounding (storyboard scenes 1–2).
- **Body Part 2:** Application today (decision tree branches).
- **Body Part 3:** Balanced analysis (contrast matrix points).
- **Conclusion:** Integrative — “Wisdom doesn’t discover truth in isolation, but in dialogue with reason, empathy, and experience.”

👉 Notice how the three tools interact:

- **Storyboard** gives the *narrative arc*.
 - **Decision tree** injects *analysis & depth*.
 - **Matrix** ensures *balance & examiner satisfaction*.
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