

THE ABC OF INDIAN BUREAUCRACY

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A for Authorisation

Dictionary definition:
A document giving official permission.

Bureaucrat Speak:
A letter which establishes one's status in the bureaucracy.

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B for Babu

Dictionary definition:
An honorific title bestowed upon native civil servants, particularly the clerical staff, under the British Raj.

Bureaucrat Speak:
A mid-level officer who performs administrative tasks. Considered to be a lifeline of government offices.

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C for Circular

Dictionary definition:
A printed notice, order or advertisement given or sent to many people at the same time.

Bureaucrat Speak:
An all-important document containing instructions or orders for the bureaucrat to follow.

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D for Deadline

Dictionary definition:
A date or time before which something must be done.

Bureaucrat Speak:
A date or time before which something must be submitted to higher authorities. Often not followed strictly.

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E for Evaluation

Dictionary definition:
The making of a judgement about the amount, number, or value of something; assessment.

Bureaucrat Speak:
An activity conducted to assess something, but is often treated lightly.

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F for Funds

Dictionary definition:
A sum of money saved or made available for a particular purpose.

Bureaucrat Speak:
A sum of money made available for an official purpose; has a peculiar tendency to reach late or partially compared to the demand.

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G for Grievance

Dictionary definition:
An official statement of a complaint over something believed to be wrong or unfair.

Bureaucrat Speak:
An official statement of a complaint that is submitted and mostly stuck in the bureaucratic pipeline.

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H for Headquarters

Dictionary definition:
The main offices of an organisation such as the army, the police, or a business company.

Bureaucrat Speak:
Main offices of government departments where senior most government officials of different branches connected to respective departments work.

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I for Inspection

Dictionary definition:
The act of looking at something carefully, or an official visit to a building or organisation to check that everything is correct and legal.

Bureaucrat Speak:
Official visit usually made by a senior officer to a government institution; often used as a tactic to get officials to speed up or complete their work.

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J for Junior

Dictionary definition:
An official or employee holding a low-ranking position in an organisation or profession.

Bureaucrat Speak:
A low-ranking official who is often held responsible by senior-ranking officials for being the main reason behind poor public service delivery.

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K for Knowledge

Dictionary definition:
Facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education.

Bureaucrat Speak:
Facts and information transmitted through official trainings, guidelines but is usually modified and retained through experience.

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L for Letter

Dictionary definition:
A written message from one person to another, usually put in an envelope and sent by post.

Bureaucrat Speak:
Important written messages carrying anything from orders to grievances. If it's not on paper the matter does not exist for the average bureaucrat.

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M for Meeting

Dictionary definition:
A planned occasion when people come together to discuss something.

Bureaucrat Speak:
An important routine activity where discussion is less prominent compared to communicating orders, reviewing work, and establishing hierarchy between senior and junior officials.

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N for Non-compliant

Dictionary definition:
Failing to act in accordance with a wish or command.

Bureaucrat Speak:
Failing to act in accordance with an official order which may or may not result in penalty.

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O for Order

Dictionary definition:
A verbal or written command or instruction for something to be done.

Bureaucrat Speak:
Mostly a written command instructing bureaucrats to get something done, usually on a priority basis. Bureaucrats tend to receive two or more 'high priority' orders at a time.

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P for Process

Dictionary definition:
A series of actions that you take in order to achieve a result.

Bureaucrat Speak:
A series of actions that bureaucrats take even if they know this will not yield desired results. Primarily done to ensure rule-compliance and avoid attracting attention to one's work.

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Q for Query

Dictionary definition:
A question, especially one expressing doubt or requesting information.

Bureaucrat Speak:
A question usually posed to request information and usually accompanied with the prefix 'RTI'; considered a time-consuming activity in the bureaucracy.

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R for Report

Dictionary definition:
A spoken or written account of something that one has observed, heard, done, or investigated.

Bureaucrat Speak:
The final, most important document that is the culmination of any investigation, assessment, review or work in the bureaucracy. The last two pages of said report are often responsible for sealing the fate of concerned officials, referred to as ACR or annual confidential report.

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S for Show Cause Notice

Dictionary definition:

Court order that requires a party to appear before the court and explain why a certain course of action should not be taken against it.

Bureaucrat Speak:

Instrument of fear considered to be a big motivator for slacking officials in the bureaucracy. Aptitude at avoiding this notice is a skill learnt over time within the bureaucratic system.

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T for Training

Dictionary definition:

The act of teaching (a person or animal) a particular skill or type of behaviour through sustained practice and instruction.

Bureaucrat Speak:

An event, often in the form of a workshop or seminar designed to teach particular skills/provide information/acquaint bureaucrats with the know-how regarding new government policies and programmes.

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U for Upload

Dictionary definition:

To transfer (data) from one computer to another, typically to one that is larger or remote from the user or functioning as a server.

Bureaucrat Speak:

A status attained by a circular or official order which turns it from being just another sheet of paper to an order with substantial amount of power. The legitimacy of an order is directly proportional to the speed with which it is uploaded on the department website.

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V for Vacancy

Dictionary definition:

An unoccupied position or job

Bureaucrat Speak:

A permanent fixture of any bureaucratic office, some of which can never be completely filled no matter the number of applicants for said job. Is most often cited as the primary reason by bureaucrats for all inefficiencies in the system.

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W for Willpower

Dictionary definition:

Control exerted to do something or restrain impulses.

Bureaucrat Speak:

That infinite and abstract source of power which must be mustered by officials in the face of lack of resources, constraints of time, space and energy in order to complete assigned tasks. Often touted by the government as the solution to problems faced by the bureaucracy.

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X for Xerox

Dictionary definition:

Photocopy; copy (a document) by the Xerox process

Bureaucrat Speak:

A reminder of a bygone era that the bureaucracy clings to by ensuring that every soft copy or uploaded document in an office is replicated in paper. Habitually autographed by officials with a date, time and 'received' stamp.

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Y for Yes, Sir jee!

Dictionary definition:

Yes, Minister (!)

Bureaucrat Speak:

A salutation in bureaucratic conversations, particularly between a senior and junior official, or minister and bureaucrat. Considered essential to bureaucratic convention. Accompanied by vigorous nodding of the head at every pause.

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Z for Zone

Dictionary definition:

An area or stretch of land having a particular characteristic, purpose, or use, or subject to particular restrictions.

Bureaucrat Speak:

First block of bureaucratic demarcation based on which responsibility of an area is attached to respective officials.