
Chapter Five

The Citizenship Test

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to the mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move.

Nothing will be impossible for you.

—Matthew 17:20

In this Chapter:

- The New Citizenship Test
- The English Language Requirement
- The History and Government Requirement
- Preparing for the Test
- Test Preparation Study Guide



Most citizenship applicants must pass an English and United States history and government test.

This chapter contains study suggestions, 13 units on the history and government of the United States, practice tests, and discussion questions.

THE NEW CITIZENSHIP TEST

USCIS will begin using a new citizenship test on October 1, 2008. The new test was announced in September 2007, and information about it is available on the USCIS website. **This chapter has been updated to reflect the new citizenship test.**

All applicants who file their citizenship application *on or after* October 1, 2008 will be required to take the new test. Applicants who file *before* October 1, 2008 but have their interview between October 1, 2008 and September 30, 2009 will have a choice of whether to take the old test or the new test. Then, beginning on October 1, 2009, all applicants will take the new test, no matter when they filed their application.

What Does the Old Citizenship Test Look Like?

For the old test on English reading and writing, the sentences are usually based on a list of sample sentences that are available for applicants to study. Some of the sentences are about U.S. history and government, and some are about everyday life, such as “I have three children.” The applicant is given up to three sentences to read and up to three sentences to write. The applicant must be able to read at least one sentence correctly and write at least one sentence correctly in order to pass. On English speaking, the old test is the same as the new test.

For the old test on history and civics, the applicant studies the “old” list of 96 questions on U.S. history and government. The applicant is given 10 sentences and must answer at least six correctly in order to pass.

Which Test Should I Take?

If you have a choice, you should take the test you feel most comfortable with. For example, if a family member took the old test and is helping you study, maybe it would be best for you to take the old test. Also, if it is easier for you to learn sentences instead of vocabulary words for the English writing test, then you may want to take the old test. If you are taking a class, be sure to find out if the teacher is preparing you for the old or new test, or both.

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE REQUIREMENT

According to the law you must demonstrate “an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language.”

English Understanding and Speaking

See Chapter 6 for more information about the interview.

USCIS tests your ability to speak and understand English throughout the interview. Your English is being tested from the moment you first meet the officer and every time the officer speaks to you and waits for your response or action.

USCIS Officer: How are you today?

You: Fine, thank you.

USCIS Officer: Is it still raining outside?

You: Yes, it’s raining a lot!

USCIS Officer: Are you here to become a U.S. citizen?

You: Yes, I want to be a citizen.

USCIS Officer: Please raise your right hand.

Most of the questions are taken from the citizenship application (N-400) to confirm the truth of your answers. When preparing for the English test, it is very important to study a copy of the N-400 that you submitted and learn all the terms and vocabulary on it so that you can answer questions about your application. Be sure to study the questions found in Part 10 of the N-400.

USCIS Officer: Have you ever registered to vote in any Federal, state or local election in the United States?

You: No.

USCIS Officer: Have you ever failed to file tax returns?

You: No, I’ve filed my tax returns every year.

What to Do If You Don't Understand

You can ask the officer to repeat the question, speak louder or slower, or use simpler words. USCIS officers are required to repeat and rephrase questions until they are satisfied that you either understand the questions or you do not understand English.

USCIS Officer: Are you willing to bear arms on behalf of the United States?

You: Can you say that again slowly with simple words?

USCIS Officer: Are you willing to serve in the U.S. military if the government calls you?

You: Yes, I am.



English Reading

USCIS will ask you to read up to three sentences. The sentences will all be questions related to United States history and government, and will be based on a vocabulary list found on the USCIS website at: http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/reading_vocab.pdf. The reading sentences are paired with the dictation (writing) sentences. There is no list of sample reading sentences to study before the test, only a list of vocabulary words that will be used in the sentences.

See Attachment A for a copy of the reading vocabulary list.

How Your Reading is Evaluated

You must be able to read at least one sentence correctly in order to pass the reading test. This means reading a sentence without long pauses and reading most of the words in the sentence. USCIS will not fail you because of your accent when reading. You may make pronunciation errors or leave out short words and still pass the test if the meaning of the sentence is clear.

English Writing

USCIS tests your writing ability by asking you to write up to three spoken (dictation) sentences. The sentences will all be related to United States history and government, and will be the answers to the questions you are asked to read for the English reading test. They will be taken from a writing vocabulary list found on the USCIS website at: http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/writing_vocab.pdf. There is no list of sample sentences for you to study before the test, only a vocabulary list of words that will be used in the sentences.

See Attachment B for a copy of the writing vocabulary list.

Examples of English Reading and Writing Test:

USCIS Officer (pointing): Please read this sentence.

You: Who was the first President?

USCIS Officer: Please write the sentence, "Washington was the first President."

You: Washington was the first President.

USCIS Officer (pointing): Please read this sentence.

You: Where is the White House?

USCIS Officer: Please write the sentence, "The White House is in Washington, D.C."

You: The White House is in Washington, D.C.



How Your Writing is Evaluated

If you do not know every word in the sentence, write as much as you can. You will be given up to three chances to write an acceptable sentence. You must be able to write at least one acceptable sentence in order to pass the writing test. USCIS will use scoring guidelines to determine whether your sentence is acceptable. USCIS will accept some small errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation as long as the meaning of the sentence is still clear. In addition, USCIS will accept a sentence that is missing short words if the meaning of the sentence is still clear. Numbers can be spelled out or written as digits.

See Attachment C for a copy of the USCIS scoring guidelines for the English test.

An example of a sentence with spelling errors:

The American flag is red, wite and blu.

A sentence with capitalization errors:

the american flag is red, white and blue.

A sentence with punctuation errors:

The American flag is red white and blue

A sentence missing short words:

American flag is red, white, blue.

A correctly written sentence:

The American flag is red, white and blue.



THE HISTORY AND GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENT

According to the law, you must demonstrate “a knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of the history, and of the principles and form of government, of the United States.”

Sources of Information for the Test

The test is based on a list of 100 study questions and answers which is found on the USCIS website at: <http://www.uscis.gov/files/natedocuments/100q.pdf>. The questions are divided into nine subject areas:

- Principles of American Democracy
- System of Government
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Colonial Period and Independence
- 1800s
- Recent American History and Other Important Historical Information
- Geography
- Symbols
- Holidays

See Attachment D for the list of 100 history and government study questions.

Many of the questions have several correct answers listed, but you only need to give one of them. For example:

13. Name one branch or part of the government.

- *Congress*
- *legislative*
- *President*
- *executive*
- *the courts*
- *judicial*

Other questions require you to give two or more answers. For example:

9. What are two rights in the Declaration of Independence?

- *life*
- *liberty*
- *pursuit of happiness*

In addition, USCIS recognizes that some of the questions are more open-ended, and may have correct answers that are not given on the list. USCIS is training officers on how to handle the open-ended questions, so as not to fail applicants who give a correct answer that is not listed.

Phrasing of Questions

The questions will be asked exactly as they are shown on the study list. However, the officer may choose to re-phrase a question to help you understand it. For example:

Name the U.S. war between the North and the South.

What do we call the war between the North and the South?

The war between the North and the South is called what?

How USCIS Gives the Test

The United States history and government test is an oral (spoken) test, so the USCIS officer will ask the questions out loud and you will give spoken answers. You are not required to read the questions or write your answers.

How the History and Government Test is Evaluated

You will be given 10 questions. You must answer at least six questions correctly to pass.



A Side-by-Side Comparison of the Old and New Tests

	Old Test	New Test
English reading	The applicant is given up to three sentences and must be able to read at least one sentence. The English reading sentences are usually drawn from a list of sample sentences available on the USCIS website at http://www.uscis.gov . Click on "Services and Benefits" then "Citizenship" then "Naturalization Information" then "Sample Sentences for Written English Testing."	The applicant is given up to three sentences and must be able to read at least one sentence. The English reading sentences are all history/civics related sentences based on a new vocabulary list available at http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/reading_vocab.pdf .
English writing	The applicant is given up to three sentences and must be able to write at least one sentence. The English writing sentences are usually drawn from a list of sample sentences available on the USCIS website at http://www.uscis.gov . Click on "Services and Benefits" then "Citizenship" then "Naturalization Information" then "Sample Sentences for Written English Testing."	The applicant is given up to three sentences and must be able to write at least one sentence. The English writing sentences are all history/civics related sentences based on a new vocabulary list available at http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/writing_vocab.pdf .
English speaking	The applicant must be able to answer questions about the citizenship application and follow directions during the interview.	The applicant must be able to answer questions about the citizenship application (N-400) and follow directions during the interview. USCIS officers have received training with suggestions for re-wording difficult questions on the N-400.
U.S. history & civics	The applicant is given 10 questions from a list of 96 and must answer at least 6 questions correctly. An oral test. The history/civics questions are drawn from a list of 96 study questions available at http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/Flashcard_questions.pdf .	The applicant is given 10 questions from a list of 100 and must answer at least 6 questions correctly. An oral test. The history/civics questions are drawn from a new list of 100 study questions available at http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/100q.pdf .

PREPARING FOR THE TEST

It is never too early to study for the test. The most common reason people are denied citizenship is for failing to pass the test. There are many ways you can study.

Classes

Many adult schools and community centers offer citizenship test preparation classes. Studying with a teacher and other students is helpful to many people.

Some things to consider when choosing a citizenship class:

- Will the class prepare me for the new citizenship test, or the old test? Does the teacher know the difference?
- Do you know anyone who went to the school? Did they like the class? Why or why not?
- What is the class schedule? How many weeks long is the class? How many hours per week?
- Does the class content include English and history/government or only history/government?
- How many levels or kinds of classes are offered? Does the school have a quick review class you can take right before your interview? Are there classes that meet your needs?
- Do the students in each class have a similar English level or are there many levels in one class?
- Does the teacher speak your native language? Are there other people in the class who speak your language?
- Where does the class meet? Is there adequate public transportation or parking?
- Does the class provide you with materials you can take home and study?
- Is the teacher a paid professional or a volunteer? How much experience does the teacher have?
- Is there a fee for the class? How much?

Tutoring

Some organizations provide tutors to help you study. Tutors are usually volunteers who have been trained. You may be tutored alone or in a small group.

Some things to consider when choosing a tutor:

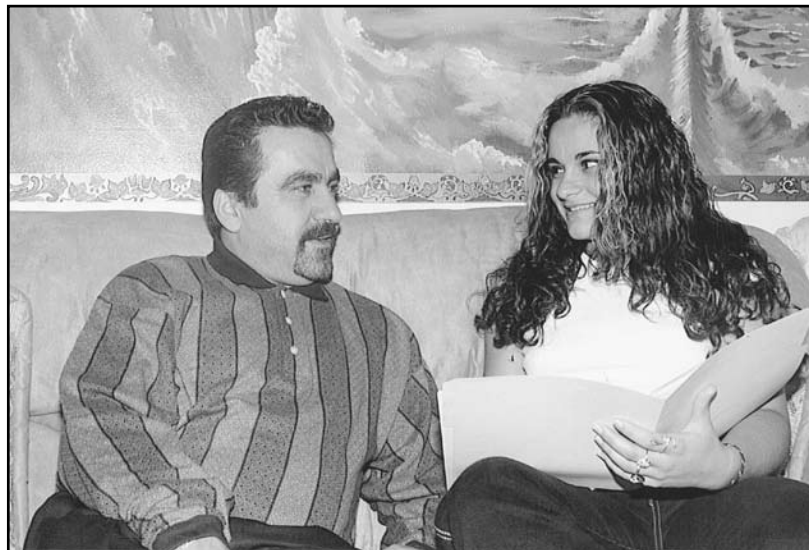
- Is the tutor knowledgeable about citizenship and the test requirements?
- Can the tutor give you enough tutoring time so you will be prepared for the test?
- Can you get a new tutor if you don't do well with the one assigned to you?
- Does the tutor speak your language?

Self-Study

Many people choose to study by themselves. Even if you do take a class or work with a tutor, you will need to do some studying by yourself.

Some things to consider in studying by yourself:

- Do you have the discipline to study regularly?
- Have you set aside a special time to study?
- Do you have a place you can concentrate without distractions like TV, people, or other noise?
- Do you need someone you can ask questions to or discuss topics with?
- Do you have someone who can quiz you?



Tips for Studying

- Practice answering questions out loud.
- Post written questions and answers around your house in places you are likely to see them such as your refrigerator or the bathroom mirror.
- Use memory techniques. For example, make up a song or a poem with important information.
- Have family and friends help you. Have them give you dictations, quiz you on the 100 questions or go through a sample interview from beginning to end. Make sure they phrase the questions in many different ways. For example: Have you filed your income tax every year? Have you ever failed to file your income tax? Do you pay your taxes? Did you fail to pay your taxes any year?
- Use index cards. On one side write a question and on the other side write an answer. Or, on one side write a vocabulary word and on the other side its meaning.
- Make a cassette tape. You can make a tape of the dictation sentences or the questions that may be asked in the interview.
- Underline or highlight key words on the N-400. Study those words so that you can recognize the question when you hear those words.