



U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

SCORING GUIDELINES FOR THE U.S. NATURALIZATION TEST

Section 312 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) provides that most applicants for naturalization demonstrate an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write, and speak words in ordinary usage in the English language, as well as a knowledge of U.S. government and history (civics)¹. This document provides a general description of how the U.S. Naturalization Test is evaluated and scored by Officers of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

SPEAKING: An applicant's verbal skills are determined by the applicant's answers to questions normally asked by USCIS Officers during the naturalization eligibility interview. USCIS Officers are required to repeat and rephrase questions until the Officer is satisfied that the applicant either fully understands the question or does not understand English. If the applicant generally understands and can respond meaningfully to questions relevant to the determination of eligibility, the applicant has demonstrated the ability to speak English.

READING: To sufficiently demonstrate the ability to read in English, applicants must read one sentence, out of three sentences, in a manner suggesting to the USCIS Officer that the applicant appears to understand the meaning of the sentence. Once the applicant reads one of three sentences correctly, USCIS procedures require that the USCIS Officer will stop administering the reading test. Applicants shall not be failed because of their accent when speaking English. A general description of how the reading test is scored follows:

Pass:

- Reads one sentence without extended pauses
- Reads all content words but may omit short words that do not interfere with meaning
- May make pronunciation or intonation errors that do not interfere with meaning

Fail:

- Does not read the sentence
- Omits a content word or substitutes another word for a content word
- Pauses for extended periods of time while reading the sentence
- Makes pronunciation or intonation errors that interfere with meaning

¹ The English language requirement may be waived for an applicant, who on the date of filing the Application for Naturalization, Form N-400, was over 50 years old and has been a permanent resident for at least 20 years, or was over 55 years old and has been a permanent resident for at least 15 years. If either exemption applies, the applicant is not tested in English and may take the civics examination in the applicant's language of choice. An applicant, who on the date of filing the application, was over 65 years old and has been a permanent resident for 20 years, is not tested in English and qualifies to take a simpler version of the civics test in the applicant's language of choice. Also, both the English language and civics requirements for naturalization are waived for applicants who are unable to comply with these requirements because of a medical or physical impairment. To achieve a passing score on the civics test, applicants are required to answer 6 out of 10 questions correctly.

WRITING: To sufficiently demonstrate the ability to write in English, the applicant must write one sentence, out of three sentences, in a manner that would be understandable as written to the USCIS Officer. Once the applicant writes one of three sentences correctly, USCIS procedures require that the USCIS Officer will stop administering the writing test. An applicant shall not be failed because of spelling, capitalization, or punctuation errors unless the errors would prevent understanding the meaning of the sentence. A general description of how the writing portion is scored follows:

Pass:

- Has the same general meaning as the dictated sentence
- May contain some grammatical, spelling, punctuation, or capitalization errors that do not interfere with meaning
- May omit short words that do not interfere with meaning
- Numbers may be spelled out or written as digits

Fail:

- Writes nothing or only one or two isolated words
- Is completely illegible
- Writes a different sentence or words
- Written sentence does not communicate the meaning of the dictated sentence

CIVICS: To sufficiently demonstrate knowledge of U.S. government and history (civics), the applicant must answer six of ten questions correctly. The civics test will be an oral examination. Once the applicant answers six questions correctly, USCIS procedures require that the USCIS Officer will stop administering the civics test. A general description of how the civics portion is scored follows:

Pass:

- Provides a correct answer
- Provides an alternative phrasing of the correct answer

Fail:

- Provides an incorrect answer
- Fails to respond

According to regulation, applicants who fail the English literacy and/or civics test during their first examination will be rescheduled to appear for a second opportunity to take the test (8 CFR 312.5).