

How To Become A US Citizen: The Truth Without Nonsense

A Complete Plain-Language Guide for Immigrants

Published by Noah Sanders Advocacy

"We cut through the confusion so you can focus on what matters — becoming a citizen."

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Foreword: From Noah Sanders Advocacy

At Noah Sanders Advocacy, we start from a simple belief: every person who comes to this country seeking a better life deserves honest, clear information — not bureaucratic runaround, not legalese that takes a law degree to decipher, and certainly not the fear that keeps too many qualified people from ever picking up a form. We have seen firsthand what confusion costs people. It costs them time. It costs them money. It costs them peace of mind. And sometimes, it costs them opportunities they will never

get back. This booklet was written because we are tired of watching that happen. You deserve better than that. You deserve the truth, explained plainly, by people who actually care whether you succeed.

This guide covers the United States naturalization process from beginning to end — what it is, who qualifies, how to apply, what to expect, how to prepare for the tests, what happens after you succeed, and how to protect yourself from the myths and misinformation that circulate in immigrant communities every single day. We have written every word in plain language, on purpose, because the goal is not to impress you — the goal is to help you. It is important that you understand one thing clearly from the very first page: this booklet is not legal advice. It is accurate, carefully researched, plain-language information about how the U.S. naturalization system works. Your situation is your own, and only a licensed immigration attorney or BIA-accredited representative can give you advice tailored specifically to your circumstances. We will tell you when you should seek that help, and we will point you toward free and affordable resources to find it.

If you are reading this right now, you have already done something remarkable. You left somewhere familiar and built a life somewhere new. You learned a new language, navigated an unfamiliar system, and kept going even when it was hard. Becoming a U.S. citizen is the next chapter in that story — and it is one worth writing. This booklet will not sugarcoat the process. There are real steps, real requirements, real wait times, and real consequences for making mistakes. But there is also a path forward, and it is clearer than you might think. We wrote this guide so that you could walk that path with your eyes open. Let's get started.

— *The Team at Noah Sanders Advocacy*

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Chapter 1: Are You Already a Citizen Without Knowing It?

Before you do anything else — before you fill out a single form, gather a single document, or spend a single dollar — you need to answer one question: **Are you already a U.S. citizen?** This is not a trick question. It is a real one. Every year, thousands of people go through the entire naturalization process — the applications, the interviews, the fees, the waiting — without realizing they already had citizenship. The law creates citizenship automatically in several situations, and if any of those situations apply to you, you don't need to naturalize. You just need to prove what you already are.

Citizenship by Birth on U.S. Soil (Jus Soli)

The most straightforward way to be a U.S. citizen is to have been born on United States soil. This principle is called *jus soli* — Latin for "right of the soil" — and it is enshrined in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. If you were born in the United States or in a U.S. territory, you are a U.S. citizen by birth, regardless of your parents' immigration status. This is not a loophole. It is the law.

The territories that count for birthright citizenship include the fifty states and the District of Columbia, but also several U.S. territories that many people are not aware of. If you were born in **Puerto Rico**, you are a U.S. citizen by birth — Puerto Ricans have been granted citizenship by statute since 1917. If you were born in **Guam**, you are a U.S. citizen — this has been the case since 1950. If you were born in the **U.S. Virgin Islands**, you are a U.S. citizen — citizenship there was granted in 1927. And if you were born in the **Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands**, you are a U.S. citizen — the CNMI became part of the U.S. system in 1986. If you were born in **American Samoa**, your situation is different — American Samoans are U.S. nationals but not automatically citizens, though they can pursue naturalization.

If you were born in any of the above places, your birth certificate is proof of your citizenship. You do not need to naturalize. If you need a U.S. passport, you apply for one using your birth certificate. That is it.

Citizenship Acquired at Birth Through U.S. Citizen Parents (Jus Sanguinis)

The second way to be a U.S. citizen at birth is through *jus sanguinis* — "right of blood" — meaning citizenship that passes from a parent to a child at the moment of birth, even if the child was born outside the United States. This is one of the most misunderstood areas of citizenship law because the rules have changed significantly over the decades, and which rules apply to you depends entirely on when you were born.

The general principle is this: if you were born abroad and one or both of your parents were U.S. citizens at the time of your birth, you may have acquired U.S. citizenship automatically. But the specific rules — how long the parent had to have lived in the United States before your birth, whether one or two parents needed to be citizens, and what your parent's age was at the time — all changed with different laws passed in 1934, 1940, 1952, and later. The current general rule, for those born on or after November 14, 1986, requires that if only one parent was a U.S. citizen, that parent must have been physically present in the United States for at least five years before the child's birth, and at least two of those five years must have been after the parent turned 14 years old.

If both of your parents were U.S. citizens when you were born, and at least one of them had ever resided in the United States before your birth, then you acquired citizenship at birth — that rule is simpler and has been consistent across many years. If you were born before 1986, the rules that applied then were different and the calculation can get complicated. A USCIS attorney or immigration legal aid organization can help you work through the specific rules for your birth year. Do not assume you don't qualify just because the rules sound complex — and do not assume you do qualify without verifying it carefully.

To document this type of citizenship, you can apply for a U.S. passport using your parent's proof of citizenship and evidence of their U.S. residence, along with your birth certificate. You may also file **USCIS Form N-600, Application for Certificate of Citizenship**, to receive an official certificate documenting your citizen status.

Citizenship Derived Automatically Through a Parent Who Naturalized

The third category involves children who derived citizenship automatically when their parent naturalized — became a citizen — while the child was still a minor. This is governed primarily by the **Child Citizenship Act of 2000**, which took effect on February 27, 2001.

Under the Child Citizenship Act, a child born outside the United States automatically became a U.S. citizen when all of the following were true: the child had at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen (either by birth or by naturalization), the child was a lawful permanent resident (green card holder), and the child was under 18 years old and residing in the United States in the legal and physical custody of the citizen parent. If all three conditions were met on or after February 27, 2001, citizenship happened automatically — no application required at the time, though documentation was still needed afterward.

This means that if you came to the United States as a child on a green card, and your parent naturalized before you turned 18, and you were living with that parent, you may already be a citizen right now and simply not know it. Many people in this situation grew up in the United States, became adults, and went through the naturalization process years later without realizing citizenship had already been conferred on them automatically as children. It is worth checking your family history carefully.

How to Check Your Status: Form N-600

If you believe you may already be a U.S. citizen through any of the paths described above, the official way to document that citizenship is to file **USCIS Form N-600, Application for Certificate of Citizenship**. This form is available at uscis.gov and should be filed with supporting documentation proving your claim — your birth certificate, your parent's citizenship documents, immigration records, and any other relevant evidence. USCIS will review your application and, if approved, issue you an official Certificate of Citizenship. The filing fee for Form N-600 is currently \$1,170 for adults, though fee waivers may be available.

An easier first step is simply to consult with an immigration attorney or legal aid organization who can review your family history and tell you quickly whether you have a claim to citizenship you didn't know about. This initial review is often provided at low or no cost through legal clinics.

► The Straight Truth

Many immigrants have gone through the entire naturalization process — filling out Form N-400, paying the \$760 filing fee, attending the interview, taking the civics and English tests, and waiting months or even years for approval — without realizing they already qualified as citizens through a parent or by birth. Do not let that be you. Before you invest any time, money, or energy into the naturalization process, take an honest look at your own birth circumstances and your parents' immigration history. If there is any chance you already have citizenship, check it first. It could save you a year of your life and a significant amount of money.

Chapter 2: The Paths to Citizenship

One of the most common misconceptions about U.S. citizenship is that there is only one way to get it: apply, wait, and eventually attend a ceremony. The reality is more nuanced. There are several distinct pathways to citizenship, and which one applies to you — or which one is fastest and most favorable for your situation — depends on your individual circumstances. This chapter gives you the full map. Chapter 3 will give you the detailed checklist of requirements for the most common path.

Naturalization — The Most Common Path

Naturalization is the legal process by which a foreign national who is a lawful permanent resident (green card holder) voluntarily becomes a U.S. citizen. It is the path that the vast majority of immigrants take, and it is the one this booklet focuses on in the greatest detail. In very broad terms, naturalization requires that you have held a green card for a certain number of years, that you have lived in the United States continuously and been physically present for the required amount of time, that you are a person of good moral character, that you can speak, read, and write basic English (with exceptions for older applicants), and that you demonstrate a basic knowledge of U.S. history and government. If you meet all of those requirements, you file Form N-400, attend a USCIS interview, take the English and civics tests, and — if approved — take the Oath of Allegiance at a naturalization ceremony. From that moment, you are a U.S. citizen.

The standard path to naturalization requires five years as a lawful permanent resident. But there are important exceptions to that timeline, and understanding them could save you years of waiting.

Marriage to a U.S. Citizen — The Three-Year Rule

If you are married to a U.S. citizen and have been living with that spouse in a valid, bona fide marriage, you may be eligible to apply for naturalization after just three years as a lawful permanent resident, rather than the standard five years. This is one of the most significant — and most underused — shortcuts in the naturalization process, and it is entirely legitimate.

To qualify for the three-year rule, you must meet all of the following conditions at the time you file your Form N-400: you must have been a lawful permanent resident for at least three years; your spouse must have been a U.S. citizen for the entire three years you have been a permanent resident; and you must have been living in marital union with that same U.S. citizen spouse for all three of those years. "Living in marital union" means actually living together — USCIS is looking for a genuine, shared-household marriage, not just a legal marriage on paper.

The difference between the three-year path and the standard five-year path is significant. If you got your green card through marriage to a U.S. citizen and you remain in that marriage, you can apply for citizenship two years earlier than the standard timeline allows. The reduced physical presence requirement also applies — instead of 30 months of physical presence over five years, you need only 18 months of physical presence over three years. Everything else about the process — the interview, the tests, the oath — is the same.

If your marriage ends in divorce before you apply, or if your spouse passes away before you file, you generally lose the ability to use the three-year exception and must revert to the standard five-year requirement. There are some limited exceptions for surviving spouses and for victims of domestic violence under VAWA protections, so if your situation is complicated, speak with an attorney.

Military Service — An Expedited and Honored Path

The United States has long recognized that military service represents a profound commitment to this country, and the naturalization law reflects that. There are two main categories of military-based naturalization, and they carry meaningfully different rules.

The first category covers individuals who served honorably in the U.S. military for at least one year and who are still serving or have been discharged honorably. These individuals may apply for naturalization without meeting the standard continuous residence and physical presence requirements — in other words, the time spent serving overseas on military orders does not break your residence or count against your physical presence calculation. You still need to demonstrate good moral character, English ability, and civics knowledge, but the residency timeline is relaxed significantly.

The second category — and the more dramatic of the two — covers service during specifically designated periods of hostilities. Congress and the President have the authority to designate certain

periods as "periods of hostilities" for naturalization purposes. During these designated periods, any person serving on active duty in the U.S. armed forces, or who was honorably discharged, may apply for naturalization immediately — with no prior green card requirement and no continuous residence requirement. This means a non-citizen who enlists, serves honorably during a designated period of hostilities, and applies for naturalization can become a U.S. citizen without ever having held a green card. This pathway is extremely powerful, though it comes with its own documentation requirements. If you or a family member served in the U.S. military, do not assume you know all the citizenship benefits available — verify them.

Children of Citizens — Automatic Citizenship Under the Child Citizenship Act

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 automatically conferred citizenship on certain children of U.S. citizens who met its requirements on or after February 27, 2001. This is not a separate naturalization process — it is automatic by law. Children who qualify do not need to file Form N-400; they can instead apply for Form N-600 (Certificate of Citizenship) or simply apply for a U.S. passport to document their status. Parents who naturalize should always consider the citizenship status of their minor children as part of the same process.

Special Categories

Several additional special categories exist for specific populations. **Certain Hmong and other Laotian veterans** who assisted U.S. forces during the conflict in Southeast Asia have been the subject of specific legislative provisions easing their path to citizenship, recognizing their service and sacrifice. **Former U.S. nationals** — individuals who were nationals of the United States but not full citizens, such as certain former residents of the Philippines and other former U.S. territories — may have unique pathways depending on their history. **Private immigration bills** are a rare but real mechanism by which Congress can pass legislation granting citizenship or lawful status to a specific individual who does not fit any existing legal category. These are extremely uncommon but represent the law's acknowledgment that the standard categories cannot always account for every human situation.

If you believe you may fall into any special category, this is precisely the kind of situation where a consultation with an experienced immigration attorney is invaluable. These cases require individualized legal analysis that a booklet cannot replace.

► The Straight Truth

The path that's right for you depends entirely on your specific situation — your family history, your immigration history, your employment, and your timeline. This chapter gives you the map: naturalization through long-term residence, through marriage to a citizen, through military service, through your parents, or through a special legal category. Chapter 3 gives you the detailed checklist of what you actually need to qualify for the standard naturalization path. Read them both before you decide how to move forward.

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Chapter 3: Do You Qualify? The Eligibility Requirements

This is the chapter where we get specific. Naturalization has a clear list of legal requirements, and you need to meet all of them before you file. Reading through this chapter carefully — all of it — is one of the most important things you can do before you pick up a pen. Let's go through each requirement honestly and completely.

1. Age

You must be at least 18 years old to apply for naturalization on your own behalf. There are no exceptions to this rule for the standard naturalization process. However, children do not need to wait until age 18 if a parent naturalizes while they are still minors — as the Child Citizenship Act describes, citizenship can transfer automatically to qualifying children under 18. So if you have a child who is currently under 18 and you are about to naturalize, do not forget to think about their status at the same time as yours.

2. Lawful Permanent Resident Status

You must be a lawful permanent resident — commonly called a green card holder — to apply for naturalization through the standard process. A green card is the official document that proves your status as a permanent resident of the United States and gives you the right to live and work here indefinitely. It is formally known as a Permanent Resident Card, and the card itself has a ten-year expiration date — though the *status* itself does not expire when the card does.

There are two types of permanent resident status you should understand. **Conditional permanent residence** is the status given to individuals whose green card was based on a marriage of less than two years, or on investment. Conditional residents receive a two-year green card, and before it expires, they must file to remove the conditions on their residence (usually Form I-751 for marriage-based cases). You cannot apply for naturalization while your residence is still conditional — you must first remove the conditions and receive your permanent (ten-year) green card. **Permanent residence** (the standard ten-year card) is what you need before you can count your time toward the naturalization residency requirement.

You cannot apply for naturalization if your green card has been abandoned (which can happen if you stayed outside the United States for too long and did not take steps to preserve your status) or if it has been revoked by an immigration judge. If there is any question about whether your green card status is still valid, resolve that question before you file Form N-400. Filing for naturalization when your green card is not valid can create serious legal problems.

3. Continuous Residence

This requirement is one of the most misunderstood in all of naturalization law, and getting it wrong can mean your application is denied after months of waiting. So let's be very clear about what it means.

The standard rule is that you must have maintained continuous residence as a lawful permanent resident in the United States for at least **five years** immediately before the date you file your Form N-400. If you are applying through marriage to a U.S. citizen, the requirement is **three years** of continuous residence. The clock starts on the date you received your green card — not the date you first entered the country on a visa.

"Continuous" does not mean you can never leave the United States. It means you cannot break the continuity of your residence by being gone too long in a single trip. Here is how USCIS looks at it: if you

took a single trip outside the United States that lasted **more than six months but less than one year**, USCIS will presume that your continuous residence was interrupted. You can overcome this presumption with strong evidence that you maintained your ties to the U.S. during that absence — evidence like ongoing employment, a family home, bank accounts, a car registration, tax filings, and similar documentation showing you always intended to return. But you will need to prove it.

If you took a single trip that lasted **more than one year**, your continuous residence is almost certainly broken, and you will need to start the continuous residence clock over from when you returned. There are limited exceptions for people who obtained a re-entry permit before leaving or who were working abroad for the U.S. government or a qualifying American employer, but these exceptions require specific advance planning — you cannot apply them retroactively after the trip.

Multiple shorter trips, even if they total more than six months over the course of the five-year period, do not automatically break continuity — what matters is the length of any single unbroken absence. But frequent travel does affect the physical presence calculation, which is a separate requirement covered next.

4. Physical Presence

Physical presence is different from continuous residence, and it is important to understand how. While continuous residence is about whether you have maintained your home base in the United States without an extended break, physical presence is simply about how many total days you have actually been standing on U.S. soil during the relevant period.

For the standard five-year applicant, you must have been physically present in the United States for at least **30 months out of the 60 months** (five years) immediately before you file. That means you can have been outside the United States for up to 30 months in total across the entire five-year period — as long as no single trip exceeded six months — and still meet the physical presence requirement. For the three-year applicant (spouse of a U.S. citizen), you must have been physically present for at least **18 months out of the 36 months** immediately before filing.

To calculate your physical presence accurately, go through your passport and count the days you were outside the United States. The day you left and the day you returned both count as days in the United States for USCIS purposes. Build a travel log — a simple table listing each trip, the date you left, the date

you returned, and the total days abroad. This travel log will be essential when you fill out the travel history section of Form N-400, and having it prepared in advance will make the application process significantly easier and less stressful.

5. Residence in a USCIS District

You must have lived in the state or within the district of the USCIS field office where you plan to file your application for at least **three months** before you file Form N-400. This is a simple requirement to satisfy as long as you have been living in the same state for the past three months. If you recently moved across state lines, you may need to wait three months before filing in your new state. You can find the USCIS field office that covers your area by using the field office locator tool at uscis.gov.

6. Good Moral Character

This is the requirement that causes the most anxiety among applicants, and for understandable reasons. "Good moral character" sounds like a vague and subjective standard, but immigration law actually defines it with considerable specificity. Understanding what it means — and what it doesn't mean — is essential.

In plain terms, good moral character means you are an honest, law-abiding person who has not committed certain categories of crimes or engaged in certain behaviors that the law treats as disqualifying. USCIS evaluates your character primarily during the **statutory period** — the five years (or three years for spousal applicants) before you file — but it also reserves the right to consider conduct from your entire life if it is relevant.

Certain crimes result in a **permanent bar** to naturalization. These are the most serious offenses: murder and certain aggravated felonies as defined under immigration law are permanent bars, meaning no matter how much time has passed, no matter how much your life has changed, naturalization is not available to you if you have been convicted of these crimes. This is one of the harshest aspects of immigration law, and it applies even to people who served their criminal sentences decades ago.

Other crimes and conduct create a **conditional bar** for the statutory period. Crimes involving moral turpitude (a legal term roughly covering crimes of dishonesty, cruelty, or depravity), drug-related offenses (with a limited exception for a single offense involving possession of 30 grams or less of marijuana), multiple criminal convictions for which you were confined for 180 days or more in total,

giving false testimony to obtain immigration benefits, earning income primarily from illegal gambling, being a habitual drunkard, and certain drunk driving offenses can all prevent you from establishing good moral character during the statutory period.

It is also important to understand that USCIS considers the *immigration law* definition of "aggravated felony" — which is significantly broader than what most people understand that term to mean in the criminal courts. Offenses that were charged as misdemeanors in state court can sometimes qualify as aggravated felonies under immigration law. This is a technical legal area that genuinely requires an attorney to navigate safely.

► The Straight Truth

If you have any criminal history — even an arrest that did not result in a conviction, even a case that was expunged or sealed, even a traffic violation that resulted in a fine — talk to an immigration attorney before you file your N-400. This is not optional advice. It is essential. The consequences of filing with undisclosed criminal history or of discovering mid-process that a past offense is disqualifying can be severe. USCIS has access to FBI background check records, and they will know about arrests that you may have forgotten or assumed were gone. Filing your application with full knowledge of how your history will be evaluated is far better than being surprised at your interview or, worse, being referred for removal proceedings.

7. English Language Requirement

To become a U.S. citizen through naturalization, you must demonstrate that you can read, write, speak, and understand basic English. The word "basic" is doing real work in that sentence — USCIS is not looking for perfection. You do not need to have an accent-free voice or write literary prose. You need to be able to communicate in English at a functional level, understand questions asked to you in English, give answers in English, read simple English sentences, and write simple English sentences.

The English assessment happens during your naturalization interview. Your speaking ability is assessed throughout the entire conversation — from the moment the USCIS officer greets you to the moment the

interview ends. Your reading ability is tested with a short reading test, and your writing ability is tested with a short dictation. The specifics of these tests are covered in full in Chapter 7.

There are important exemptions to the English requirement. If you are **50 years old or older and have been a lawful permanent resident for 20 years or more**, you are exempt from the English requirement (this is called the "50/20 rule"). If you are **55 years old or older and have been a lawful permanent resident for 15 years or more**, you are also exempt (the "55/15 rule"). These individuals can take the civics test in their native language with an interpreter they bring themselves.

There is also a **medical disability exception** available for applicants who, because of a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment, are unable to comply with the English or civics requirements. To claim this exception, you must submit Form N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions, completed and signed by a licensed physician, osteopathic doctor, or clinical psychologist. This form must explain the nature of the disability and how it directly prevents you from learning or demonstrating English or civics knowledge. USCIS takes fraudulent N-648 submissions very seriously, so this exception should only be claimed when it is genuine and properly documented.

8. Civics Knowledge

You must demonstrate a basic knowledge of United States history and government — what is commonly called the civics test. USCIS developed this test to ensure that new citizens understand the basic principles and structure of the country they are joining.

As of October 20, 2025, USCIS began administering the **2025 naturalization civics test**. If you file your Form N-400 on or after October 20, 2025, you will take the 2025 test. This test is based on a list of **128 official civics questions** covering American government, history, geography, and national symbols. At your interview, the USCIS officer will ask you up to 20 questions from the list, stopping as soon as you have correctly answered 12. You must answer at least 12 out of 20 correctly to pass. If you file before October 20, 2025, you take the older 2008 test, which uses a list of 100 questions and requires you to correctly answer 6 out of 10. The 128-question list and all official study materials are available for free at uscis.gov.

If you do not pass the civics test at your interview, you will be scheduled for a second attempt within 60 to 90 days. If you do not pass on the second attempt, your application will be denied. The same age and

residence exemptions that apply to the English requirement also apply to the civics test (50/20 and 55/15 rules). Chapter 6 of this booklet walks you through the civics test in full, with study tips and commonly tested questions written out in plain language.

9. Attachment to the Constitution and Willingness to Take the Oath

The final requirement is that you must demonstrate an attachment to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and be willing to take the Oath of Allegiance. This means you must believe in and support the basic democratic principles of the United States — free speech, the rule of law, the separation of powers — and you must be willing to promise to defend and support the U.S. Constitution.

The Oath of Allegiance includes a commitment to bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law. For individuals whose sincere religious beliefs or deeply held moral convictions prevent them from bearing arms, there is a **conscientious objector accommodation**. You can take a modified version of the Oath that omits the commitment to bear arms, replacing it with a commitment to perform noncombatant service or civilian work of national importance, if your beliefs genuinely prohibit military combat. To qualify for this accommodation, your beliefs must be sincere and deeply held — not simply a preference to avoid military service, but a genuine religious or moral conviction. USCIS will evaluate the sincerity of this claim, and you may be asked to provide supporting evidence such as a letter from your religious organization.

Certain affiliations can also create problems with this requirement. Membership in or affiliation with the Communist Party, other totalitarian parties, or terrorist organizations can be a ground for denial, and these are topics covered explicitly on Form N-400. Answer those questions truthfully and carefully.

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Chapter 4: The 10 Steps of Naturalization — Explained Plainly

USCIS lays out the naturalization process in ten official steps. Here they are, explained in plain language — not what the government website says in formal bureaucratic terms, but what each step actually means for you as a real person going through this process for the first time.

Step 1 — Confirm You're Not Already a Citizen

This is exactly what Chapter 1 of this booklet covered. Before you begin the naturalization process, confirm that you do not already hold citizenship through birth, through your parents, or through the Child Citizenship Act. This step exists because USCIS itself acknowledges that many people who begin the naturalization process are already citizens. Skipping this check costs people time and money that they didn't need to spend.

Step 2 — Confirm You're Eligible

Review all the eligibility requirements in Chapter 3 of this booklet — age, green card status, continuous residence, physical presence, state residency, good moral character, English ability, and civics knowledge. USCIS also offers an online Eligibility Tool at uscis.gov that can help you identify which naturalization pathway applies to your situation and whether any special circumstances affect your case. Be honest with yourself during this step. If you have a criminal history, travel absences, tax issues, or anything else that could complicate your application, now is the time to address it — not at your interview.

Step 3 — Prepare Form N-400, Application for Naturalization

Form N-400 is the official application for naturalization. It is a substantial document — over 20 pages — that asks you to provide a comprehensive personal history covering the last five years and beyond. The form asks about your personal identifying information, your addresses and

employment over the past five years, your travel history, your family members, your criminal history, your memberships in organizations, your immigration history, your tax compliance, and your willingness to fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship.

Preparing this form carefully is one of the most important things you will do in this entire process. The form is available for free at uscis.gov and can be filled out online through your USCIS online account. You will need to gather supporting documents before you file — your green card, passport(s) showing your travel history, tax returns, employment records, and any other documents relevant to your situation.

The single most important instruction about Form N-400 is this: **be completely honest**. Misrepresentation or concealment of information on an immigration form is a federal crime. It can result in denial of your naturalization application, revocation of your green card, and removal from the United States. USCIS cross-references your answers against FBI records, prior immigration filings, travel records, and tax filings. If there is something in your history that you are nervous about disclosing, the answer is not to hide it — the answer is to consult with an attorney who can advise you on how to disclose it properly and what impact it is likely to have.

Step 4 — Submit Form N-400 and Pay the Fee

Once your form is complete and you have assembled your supporting documents, you submit it to USCIS along with the filing fee. As of this writing, the fee is **\$760 if filing by paper** and **\$710 if filing online**. Always verify the current fee at uscis.gov before you file, as USCIS fees change periodically. If you file online through your USCIS account, you can pay by credit card, debit card, or bank account transfer. If you file by mail, you pay by check or money order made out to "U.S. Department of Homeland Security."

If you genuinely cannot afford the filing fee, you may be eligible for a **fee waiver**. To request a fee waiver, you submit Form I-912, Request for Fee Waiver, along with documentation showing your financial situation — income records, benefit award letters, or evidence of financial

hardship. Fee waivers are not automatically granted; you need to demonstrate that paying the fee would create significant hardship. Note that if you are requesting a fee waiver, you must file by paper — you cannot file online with a fee waiver request. There is also a reduced fee of \$380 for applicants whose household income is between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty guidelines; this also requires paper filing.

After USCIS receives your application, they will mail you a **receipt notice** (Form I-797). Keep this notice — it contains your receipt number, which you will use to check the status of your case online at uscis.gov. Processing times vary significantly depending on the USCIS field office handling your case and current application volumes. Check the current processing times for your field office at uscis.gov/processing-times.

Step 5 — Go to Your Biometrics Appointment

After receiving your application, USCIS will mail you a biometrics appointment notice. This notice will tell you the date, time, and location of your appointment at an Application Support Center (ASC). At this appointment, a USCIS technician will collect your fingerprints and take your photograph. The purpose of biometrics collection is to conduct an FBI criminal background check. The appointment itself is quick — most people are in and out within 30 minutes.

Bring your appointment notice and your green card (or other valid immigration document) to the biometrics appointment. Do not miss this appointment without contacting USCIS to reschedule — missing it without notice can cause your application to be delayed or even abandoned. If you cannot attend on the scheduled date, contact USCIS immediately to request a reschedule. Some applicants who recently had biometrics taken for other USCIS applications may have their biometrics reused, meaning they do not need a new appointment, but you will be notified if this applies to you.

Step 6 — Complete the Interview

The naturalization interview is the moment many applicants feel the most nervous about, and that anxiety is understandable — but it is also, for most applicants, much less frightening in practice than it is in anticipation. The interview is conducted by a USCIS officer at a USCIS field office. You will receive a notice in the mail telling you the date, time, and location of your interview. Bring that notice and all of your original supporting documents — your green card, passport, tax returns, evidence of marriage (if applicable), any legal documents related to criminal history, and any other documents requested in your interview notice.

During the interview, the USCIS officer will ask you to swear or affirm to tell the truth, and then will review your Form N-400 with you question by question. The officer will ask you to confirm or clarify your answers and may ask follow-up questions. This is also when the English and civics tests are administered. The officer will assess your spoken English throughout the conversation, then administer the reading and writing tests, and then ask you the civics questions.

What to wear: dress neatly and professionally. You don't need a suit, but you should look like someone who takes this process seriously. What to bring: all original documents requested in your interview notice, plus organized copies. What to say: the truth. If you don't understand a question, it is perfectly acceptable to ask the officer to repeat it. Do not guess. Do not volunteer information beyond what is asked. Answer clearly and honestly.

At the end of the interview, the officer may tell you one of three things. **Approved** — you passed everything and your application is approved. **Continued** — the officer needs more time or more information, or you need to retake a failed test, and a second appointment will be scheduled.

Denied — your application has been denied, and you will receive a written notice explaining why and describing your appeal rights.

Step 7 — Receive a Decision

After your interview, USCIS will issue a formal written decision on your application. In the best case, you receive an approval notice at the interview itself or shortly thereafter by mail. If your case requires additional review — sometimes called "administrative processing" — there may be a delay of weeks or months before you receive a decision. This can be frustrating, but it is a normal part of the process for cases that require additional background check verification or for cases where the officer had questions that needed further review.

If your application is denied, you have the right to appeal. You must file Form N-336, Request for a Hearing on a Decision in Naturalization Proceedings, within 30 days of receiving your denial notice. This hearing is before a different USCIS officer who reviews the denial decision. If you disagree with the outcome of that hearing, you can further appeal to a federal district court. If your application is denied, you should strongly consider consulting with an immigration attorney before deciding how to proceed.

Step 8 — Receive Notice to Take the Oath

If your application is approved, USCIS will mail you a notice for your naturalization oath ceremony. This notice tells you when and where to appear for the ceremony. Some field offices schedule the oath ceremony on the same day as the interview — which means you can become a citizen the same day you pass your interview, a moment that many new citizens describe as one of the most profound of their lives. Other field offices hold separate ceremony dates, which can be anywhere from a few days to several weeks after your interview. Ceremonies are sometimes held at USCIS field offices, and often at courthouses, community centers, historical sites, or other civic locations. Some ceremonies are very small — just a handful of people — while others are large public events with hundreds of new citizens being sworn in at once.

Step 9 — Take the Oath of Allegiance

This is the moment. You are not legally a U.S. citizen until you take the Oath of Allegiance at the naturalization ceremony. When you arrive at the ceremony, check in with USCIS staff. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire on Form N-445, confirming that nothing significant has changed in your circumstances since your interview (no new arrests, no trips outside the country that would affect your eligibility, etc.). A USCIS officer will review your responses. You will then be asked to hand over your green card — you will not need it anymore. Then, together with all the other applicants at your ceremony, you will raise your right hand and take the Oath of Allegiance.

The Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America:

"I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God."

(The Oath may be modified for conscientious objectors to omit the clause about bearing arms.)

After the Oath, you will receive your **Certificate of Naturalization** — your official proof of U.S. citizenship. Before you leave the ceremony, review this certificate carefully. Check that your name is spelled correctly, your date of birth is correct, and all other information is accurate. If

there is an error, notify USCIS staff at the ceremony site immediately. Errors caught at the ceremony can be corrected on the spot. Errors discovered later require a separate correction process that takes additional time.

Step 10 — Life as a U.S. Citizen

You are now a United States citizen. The certificate in your hands is one of the most significant documents you will ever hold. Here is what comes next. **Apply for a U.S. passport** — as a new citizen, you are entitled to a U.S. passport, which is one of the most powerful travel documents in the world. You can apply at a local post office or passport acceptance facility using Form DS-11 along with your Certificate of Naturalization, a passport photo, and the current application fee.

Register to vote — you now have the right to vote in federal, state, and local elections.

Registration requirements vary by state; visit [vote.gov](https://www.vote.gov) to find your state's registration process and deadlines. **Update your Social Security record** — notify the Social Security Administration of your new citizenship status, which may affect your benefits and records. **Travel freely** — unlike a green card holder, a U.S. citizen can travel outside the country for as long as they wish without affecting their status. You no longer have to worry about breaking continuous residence.

Welcome home.

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Chapter 5: Form N-400 in Plain English

Form N-400 is the heart of the naturalization application. It is long, it is detailed, and it is sometimes confusing — but it is also entirely manageable once you understand what each section is actually asking.

This chapter breaks down the major parts of the form in plain language so that you can approach it with confidence rather than dread. The current version of the form has 18 numbered Parts. Here are the ones that matter most, and the common mistakes people make in each.

Part 1: Basis for Application

This is where you check the box that explains why you believe you are eligible for naturalization. The options include the standard five-year green card holder path, the three-year spousal path, qualifying military service, and a few other specific categories. Choosing the wrong basis can cause significant problems with your application, so make sure you understand which category you actually fit before you check a box. If you are unsure, re-read Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this booklet.

Part 2: Information About You

This section collects your basic identifying information — your current legal name, any other names you have ever used (including maiden names, nicknames, and names from prior marriages), your home address, your mailing address if different, your date of birth, your country of birth, your country of citizenship, your Social Security number, your Alien Registration Number (A-number, found on your green card), your USCIS online account number if applicable, and your contact information. A common mistake here is failing to list all prior names. USCIS uses these names to run background checks. If you have ever used a different name in any official capacity — on a tax return, a prior immigration filing, a criminal record — it must be listed here.

Parts 3 and 4: Residence and Employment History

These sections ask you to list every address where you have lived for the past five years and every employer you have worked for during the same period. This is where people most frequently make mistakes by forgetting addresses from several years ago or by not listing self-employment or informal work arrangements. Go through your memory carefully, cross-reference your tax returns, and make sure your list is complete and accurate. USCIS will verify this information against your records, and unexplained gaps can raise questions at your interview.

Parts 5 and 6: Your Parents and Your Marital History

Part 5 asks about your parents — specifically whether either of them was ever a U.S. citizen. This is relevant because it may indicate that you already have or previously had a claim to citizenship (see

Chapter 1). Part 6 asks about your marital history — your current marital status, the details of your current marriage if applicable, and the details of any prior marriages, including how they ended. All prior marriages must be listed, along with the date and manner in which each ended (divorce, death, annulment). Missing a prior marriage is one of the most common — and most serious — mistakes on Form N-400.

Part 7: Children

List all of your children, regardless of their age, citizenship status, or where they live. This includes biological children, adopted children, and stepchildren. Leaving a child off this list — even if they are grown adults or live in another country — is a misrepresentation that can jeopardize your application.

Parts 8, 9, and 10: Travel History

These sections ask you to list every trip you have taken outside the United States for the past five years (or three years, for spousal applicants). For each trip, you need to provide the destination, the date you left, the date you returned, and whether the trip was for work or personal reasons. This information is critical because it is how USCIS calculates your physical presence and evaluates your continuous residence. Do not try to fill out this section from memory alone — go through your passport page by page and check entry and exit stamps. If your passport has expired and you got a new one during the five-year period, you need to account for both passports. Inaccurate travel history is one of the leading causes of problems at naturalization interviews.

Parts 11 and 12: Memberships and Affiliations

Part 11 asks whether you have ever been a member of or associated with any organization, association, club, foundation, political party, or similar group — anywhere in the world, at any time in your life. This is a broad question, and it is meant to be. You need to list everything: community organizations, religious groups, trade unions, political parties in your home country, advocacy organizations, and anything else that counts as a formal membership. Do not assume that something is too minor to list. Part 12 focuses specifically on whether you have ever been associated with a terrorist organization, a totalitarian party, or a Nazi regime. Answer every question truthfully.

Parts 13 and 14: Good Moral Character Questions

This is the long section that many applicants find the most daunting — a series of yes/no questions covering criminal history, tax compliance, immigration violations, and other conduct relevant to good moral character. The questions ask about arrests, citations, convictions, probation, parole, crimes committed in the United States or abroad, failure to pay child support, failure to pay taxes, voting in elections before you were a citizen, polygamy, prostitution, illegal gambling, and many other topics.

Every single one of these questions must be answered truthfully. If the honest answer to any question is "Yes," do not answer "No" just because you are hoping it won't come up. USCIS conducts a thorough background check before your interview. If they discover a "Yes" answer that you marked as "No," your application will almost certainly be denied — not because of the underlying issue, which might have been explainable, but because of the misrepresentation. That is a federal crime and can have immigration consequences far beyond a denied naturalization application. When in doubt, answer "Yes" and attach an explanation. A "Yes" with a full, honest explanation is almost always better than a discovered lie.

Part 15: Oath Requirements

This final section asks you to confirm your willingness to take the Oath of Allegiance, your support for the U.S. Constitution, and your understanding of what the Oath means. It also asks specifically whether you are claiming a conscientious objector exception to the oath's military service clause. Answer these questions honestly and in accordance with your actual beliefs and intentions.

► The Straight Truth

Do not guess on Form N-400. Do not leave any section blank without a clear reason. Do not lie about anything, no matter how embarrassing or minor it seems. The form asks many of the same questions in slightly different ways, in different sections, on purpose — USCIS is checking whether your answers are internally consistent. Your answers on the N-400 are also cross-referenced against your prior immigration filings, your FBI background check results, your travel records from CBP, and your tax records from the IRS. If you marked "No" to a question and the background check says "Yes," that inconsistency becomes the focus of your interview — and

often the reason for a denial. The only safe approach is complete honesty, documented carefully, with explanations provided for anything that needs explaining.

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Chapter 6: Preparing for the Civics Test

The civics test is one of the parts of the naturalization process that people worry about most, and also one of the parts that is most manageable with proper preparation. Here is everything you need to know about what the test covers, how it is administered, and how to prepare effectively.

What the Test Covers

If you file Form N-400 on or after October 20, 2025, you will take the 2025 naturalization civics test. This test is based on a list of exactly **128 official questions** that USCIS publishes openly and freely. There are no surprises on this test — the list of possible questions is public, the correct answers are published alongside the questions, and you have access to all of them for free at uscis.gov before your interview. The 128 questions cover three broad areas: American Government, American History, and Integrated Civics. Let's look at each area.

American Government questions cover the principles of American democracy — what the Constitution is and what it does, the Bill of Rights, the three branches of government and how they work, how laws are made, how the President is elected, what the Supreme Court does, and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. These questions make up the bulk of the 128-question list and require you to understand not just facts but the basic structure and function of the U.S. government.

American History questions cover the colonial period and early independence, the causes and outcomes of the Civil War, the role of major historical figures like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt, the two World Wars, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights Movement. You do not need

a deep academic understanding of any of these topics — you need to know the key people, dates, and events at a basic level.

Integrated Civics questions cover geography (what are the two longest rivers in the United States, what ocean borders the West Coast, what states border Canada and Mexico), national symbols (what is the national anthem, what does the flag represent, who wrote the Star-Spangled Banner), and holidays (what is the Fourth of July, what is Memorial Day, when do we celebrate Thanksgiving).

How the Test Is Administered

At your interview, the USCIS officer will ask you civics questions verbally, one at a time, from the 128-question list. The officer can ask you up to 20 questions. You must correctly answer 12 before the officer reaches 20. The officer stops asking as soon as you have either answered 12 correctly (you pass) or gotten enough wrong that it is mathematically impossible to reach 12 correct answers (you fail). You answer the questions aloud — there is no written civics test, and there are no multiple-choice options. The officer asks, you answer, and they move to the next question.

Some questions on the list have multiple acceptable answers — for example, the question "Name one branch or part of the government" can be answered with "Congress," "legislative," "President," "executive," "the courts," or "judicial." Any one correct answer is sufficient. The USCIS website publishes the complete list of acceptable answers alongside each question, so you know exactly what answers will be accepted before you walk into the interview.

If you do not pass the civics test at your first interview, you will be scheduled for a second attempt within 60 to 90 days. If you fail on the second attempt, your application will be denied and you will need to reapply.

Study Resources

USCIS provides a wealth of free study materials. The complete list of 128 questions and their answers is available at uscis.gov/citizenship. USCIS also offers a free smartphone app — the *Civics Practice Test* app — that lets you quiz yourself on all 128 questions in a flashcard format. A free audio recording of the questions and answers is available for those who learn better by listening. The *One Nation, One People* study booklet is a free illustrated guide designed specifically for new applicants.

The most effective study strategy most people find is to work through the questions in thematic groups rather than memorizing all 128 in order. Start with the government structure questions (the branches of government, how a bill becomes a law, who the elected officials are), then move to history, then to geography and symbols. Once you have a handle on each group, practice doing mixed sets of 20 questions timed, to simulate the actual interview experience.

30 Commonly Tested Questions and Answers

Question	Answer(s)
What is the supreme law of the land?	The Constitution
What does the Constitution do?	Sets up the government; defines the government; protects basic rights of Americans
How many amendments does the Constitution have?	Twenty-seven (27)
What are the three branches of government?	Legislative, Executive, and Judicial
Who makes federal laws?	Congress; Senate and House (of Representatives); (U.S. or national) legislature
What are the two parts of the U.S. Congress?	The Senate and House (of Representatives)
How many U.S. Senators are there?	One hundred (100)
We elect a U.S. Senator for how many years?	Six (6)
How many U.S. Representatives are there?	Four hundred thirty-five (435)
We elect a U.S. Representative for how many years?	Two (2)
Who is in charge of the executive branch?	The President
How many years is a presidential term?	Four (4)

Question	Answer(s)
What is the highest court in the United States?	The Supreme Court
How many justices are on the Supreme Court?	Nine (9)
What is freedom of religion?	You can practice any religion, or not practice a religion
What is the Bill of Rights?	The first ten amendments to the Constitution
What are two rights in the Declaration of Independence?	Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (any two)
What war did the United States fight in the 1860s?	The Civil War
What did the Emancipation Proclamation do?	Freed the slaves; freed slaves in the Confederacy; freed slaves in Confederate states
What did Martin Luther King Jr. do?	Fought for civil rights; worked for equality for all Americans
Name one war fought by the United States in the 1900s.	World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, or the Gulf War
Who was the first President?	George Washington
Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?	Thomas Jefferson
What ocean is on the West Coast of the United States?	Pacific Ocean
What ocean is on the East Coast of the United States?	Atlantic Ocean
Name one state that borders Canada.	Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Alaska (any one)
Why does the flag have 13 stripes?	Because there were 13 original colonies
Why does the flag have 50 stars?	Because there is one star for each state
What is the name of the national anthem?	The Star-Spangled Banner
When is Independence Day?	July 4th

Study Tips That Actually Work

The most effective approach to preparing for the civics test is daily review — even just 10 to 15 minutes a day of studying the questions is enough if you do it consistently over several weeks. Flashcards work exceptionally well for this test, whether physical cards you write by hand or digital cards on the USCIS app. Practice with a family member who can read you the questions — having another person quiz you out loud closely simulates the actual interview format and helps you practice speaking your answers clearly. Focus extra attention on questions where there are many possible correct answers (like listing rights, listing amendments, naming battles) versus questions with a single specific answer. For the single-answer questions, precision matters. For the multiple-answer questions, you just need to know at least one valid response.

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Chapter 7: Preparing for the English Test

The English test is the other component of the naturalization interview, and it is the one that creates the most anxiety for applicants who are still developing their English skills. Let's cut through the worry and get specific about what the test actually involves.

The Speaking Test

Your English speaking ability is not a separate, formal component of the interview with its own start and stop — it is assessed throughout the entire naturalization interview from start to finish. From the moment the USCIS officer greets you and asks you to raise your right hand to swear to tell the truth, through every question about your N-400 application, through the civics questions, to the end of the interview — the officer is observing how well you understand English and how effectively you communicate in English.

What the officer is looking for is functional communication. Can you understand the questions being asked? Can you provide relevant, coherent answers? Do you demonstrate a working ability to engage in a basic conversation in English? You do not need to speak English perfectly. You are allowed to ask the officer to repeat or rephrase a question. You are allowed to take a moment to think before answering. What you cannot do is require the officer to switch to another language or rely on a separate interpreter to understand basic questions. If you can explain yourself to a stranger in English — even imperfectly — you are at the level this test is looking for.

The Reading Test

The reading portion of the English test is formal and distinct. The USCIS officer will show you a sentence written in English and ask you to read it aloud. You must correctly read one sentence out of up to three tries. A "correct" reading does not mean perfect pronunciation — it means the officer can understand that you have read the sentence as written. The content of the reading sentences focuses on civics and history topics, meaning many of the words will be familiar from your civics test preparation. USCIS publishes a complete *Reading Test Vocabulary List* — a list of all the words that may appear in reading test sentences — at uscis.gov. There are approximately 96 words on the list. Study them all.

The Writing Test

The writing portion asks you to write one sentence that the officer dictates to you. You must write one sentence correctly out of up to three tries. "Correctly" means that the officer can understand what you have written — minor spelling errors that do not change the meaning of the sentence are generally acceptable, but errors that make the sentence unreadable or meaningless are not. As with the reading test, the writing sentences focus on civics topics, and USCIS publishes a complete *Writing Test Vocabulary List* of the words that may appear. There are approximately 107 words on this list. Familiarize yourself with all of them, paying particular attention to spelling.

How to Practice

Practice the reading test by printing out the USCIS vocabulary list, forming sentences from the words on the list, and reading them aloud to yourself or to a family member. Record yourself reading the sentences and listen back to see whether you can understand yourself clearly. Practice the writing test by having a family member or friend dictate simple civics sentences to you, and then check your written

spelling against the original. Even 10 minutes of daily practice over a few weeks will make a significant difference.

If you are looking for more comprehensive English preparation, free ESL (English as a Second Language) classes are available through community colleges, public libraries, adult education centers, and many nonprofit organizations. In many communities, these classes are specifically designed for people preparing for the naturalization interview and will help you with both the English test and the civics test simultaneously. Ask at your local library about free citizenship preparation classes in your area.

► The Straight Truth

The English test is not as hard as most people fear. If you can have a basic conversation with a stranger in English, you can pass the speaking test. The reading and writing portions are based on a published list of words and sentence structures — study those lists, and there will be no surprises. USCIS publishes the complete vocabulary lists for both the reading and writing tests at uscis.gov at no cost. The sentences used in the actual test come directly from that published vocabulary. If you study the vocabulary list thoroughly, you will be prepared. Most applicants who take the time to prepare pass the English test on their first attempt.

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Chapter 8: Exemptions and Special Accommodations

The naturalization process is not designed to be a one-size-fits-all experience. Congress and USCIS have built in a range of exemptions and accommodations for applicants who, due to age, length of residence, or physical or developmental disability, cannot meet all of the standard requirements. If you or someone you are helping might qualify for any of these accommodations, this chapter is essential reading.

The English Language Exemption

As introduced in Chapter 3, two age and residency combinations exempt an applicant from the English language requirement entirely.

The **50/20 rule**: If you are 50 years old or older at the time you file your Form N-400, and you have been a lawful permanent resident of the United States for at least 20 years, you are exempt from the English language requirement. You may take the civics test in your native language.

The **55/15 rule**: If you are 55 years old or older at the time you file your Form N-400, and you have been a lawful permanent resident for at least 15 years, you are also exempt from the English language requirement. Again, you may take the civics test in your native language.

Under both of these exemptions, you are responsible for bringing a qualified interpreter to your interview — someone who is fluent in both your native language and English and who can accurately translate between you and the USCIS officer. The interpreter cannot be your attorney, cannot be a witness in your case, and ideally should be someone other than an immediate family member, though USCIS does not prohibit family interpreters. Make sure your interpreter knows the date, time, and location of your interview and arrives with you. USCIS does not provide interpreters under these exemptions.

The Civics Exemption

The same age and residency combinations that exempt you from the English requirement also provide a modified civics exemption. Applicants who qualify under the 50/20 or 55/15 rules are not completely exempt from the civics test, but they are given significant additional consideration. USCIS officers are instructed to take into account an applicant's age and length of U.S. residence when evaluating their civics answers — in other words, the standard applied to a 70-year-old who has lived in the United States for 30 years is not the same as the standard applied to a 35-year-old recent green card holder. Additionally, the complete medical disability exception, described below, can exempt an applicant from the civics test entirely if the qualifying conditions are met.

The Medical Disability Exception (Form N-648)

This is the most significant accommodation available under naturalization law, and it is also one of the most frequently misunderstood. The medical disability exception is available to applicants who, due to a

physical or developmental disability or mental impairment, are unable to comply with the English language or civics requirements. This is not a vague or informal request — it requires a formal medical certification submitted on **USCIS Form N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions**.

Form N-648 must be completed and signed by a licensed medical professional — specifically, a licensed physician (M.D.), osteopathic doctor (D.O.), or clinical psychologist who is qualified to evaluate the condition described. The medical professional must explain: the specific diagnosis, how that diagnosis constitutes a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment, and — critically — how that impairment prevents the applicant from learning or demonstrating English and/or civics knowledge. The connection between the disability and the inability to learn the required content must be direct and clearly documented. USCIS may request additional evidence or schedule a USCIS medical officer to evaluate the application.

It is important to emphasize that Form N-648 is meant for genuine medical situations. USCIS takes fraudulent N-648 submissions very seriously — medical professionals who certify false or unsupported claims face potential licensing consequences, and applicants who submit fraudulent forms face potential denial of their application and additional immigration consequences. If you have a genuine disability that affects your ability to learn or demonstrate English or civics, this exception was created for you and you should use it. If you do not, attempting to use it would be dishonest and counterproductive.

Interview Accommodations

Beyond the formal test exemptions, USCIS offers a range of accommodations to help applicants with disabilities participate in the naturalization interview process. Sign language interpreters can be arranged for applicants who are deaf or hard of hearing. USCIS field offices are required to be physically accessible under the Americans with Disabilities Act, including wheelchair access. For applicants who are so severely ill or disabled that they genuinely cannot travel to a USCIS field office, USCIS has the ability to schedule interviews at the applicant's home, at a hospital, or at a nursing care facility. These accommodation requests must be made in advance — you cannot wait until the day of the interview to inform USCIS that you need special accommodations.

► The Straight Truth

USCIS will not automatically offer you accommodations. They do not know about your disability, your age, your language needs, or your medical situation unless you tell them. Request accommodations when you file your Form N-400 — there is a section on the form specifically for this purpose. If you realize after filing that you need accommodations, contact USCIS as soon as possible to make the request in advance of your interview. Waiting until you arrive at the interview to request accommodations may result in the accommodation not being available, and your interview will proceed without them. The system is designed to be flexible — but you have to ask for that flexibility.

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Chapter 9: Common Myths — The Truth Without Nonsense

This chapter is the signature of this booklet. Misinformation about U.S. citizenship and the naturalization process circulates constantly in immigrant communities — passed along by well-meaning neighbors, misread social media posts, outdated information from people who went through the process years ago, and sometimes by people who deliberately spread fear to take advantage of others. Here is the truth, plainly stated, about the most common myths we encounter at Noah Sanders Advocacy.

MYTH: You have to be fluent in English to become a citizen.

TRUTH: The law requires basic English, not fluency. USCIS evaluates whether you can communicate at a functional level during the interview — understanding questions and giving relevant answers — and whether you can read one simple sentence and write one simple sentence. Accent, grammar imperfections, and limited vocabulary do not disqualify you, as long as you can communicate meaningfully in English. Furthermore, if you are 50 or older with 20

years of permanent residence, or 55 or older with 15 years of permanent residence, you are completely exempt from the English requirement altogether. Hundreds of thousands of people who are not fluent in English become U.S. citizens every year.

MYTH: If you have a criminal record, you can never become a citizen.

TRUTH: This is far too broad to be accurate. The truth is more nuanced: certain specific crimes — particularly murder and certain aggravated felonies as defined under immigration law — do create a permanent bar to naturalization. But many other criminal offenses do not permanently bar you from citizenship. They may affect your ability to demonstrate good moral character during the five-year statutory period, meaning you may need to wait additional time after the offense before you qualify. Minor offenses, offenses for which you received no confinement, and offenses that fall outside the categories listed in the law may not bar you at all. The right thing to do if you have any criminal history is to consult with an immigration attorney before filing — not to assume you are permanently disqualified without getting an informed legal opinion.

MYTH: Getting a divorce will hurt your citizenship application if you applied through marriage.

TRUTH: If you applied under the three-year spousal rule and your marriage ends before you are approved, you will likely need to wait until you meet the standard five-year requirement. But divorce does not, by itself, disqualify you from eventually becoming a citizen — it simply changes which rule you apply under. The five-year clock was already ticking from when you received your green card. A divorce might delay your citizenship timeline, but it does not erase the time you have already accrued as a permanent resident, and it does not make you ineligible for citizenship through the standard five-year path once you meet it. If you received your green card through

marriage and the marriage ends, consult with an attorney about whether there are any additional consequences for your underlying immigration status.

MYTH: You can lose your green card and citizenship application if you receive government benefits.

TRUTH: The rules around public benefits and immigration status are complex and have evolved in recent years, but the general principle is this: receiving many types of government benefits does not automatically make you ineligible for naturalization or cause you to lose your green card. The "public charge" rules in U.S. immigration law are primarily relevant to the original application for a visa or green card — not to the naturalization process. The naturalization eligibility requirements do not include a test of whether you have received government benefits. However, this area of law has seen significant regulatory changes in recent years, and the specific benefits involved matter greatly. If you are uncertain about how any benefits you have received might affect your immigration status, speak with an immigration attorney or accredited representative.

MYTH: The naturalization process only takes a few months.

TRUTH: The time it takes to complete the naturalization process varies enormously depending on the USCIS field office processing your application, the current volume of applications nationwide, and whether your individual case requires additional review. USCIS publishes current processing time estimates at uscis.gov/processing-times, but these are averages — your actual wait could be shorter or significantly longer. Many applicants wait anywhere from 8 months to over 2 years from the date they file Form N-400 to the date they take the Oath. Planning ahead and filing as soon as you are eligible is the best way to minimize unnecessary delays. Do not assume the

process will be quick, and do not make major life decisions that depend on having citizenship by a specific date without carefully checking current processing times first.

MYTH: You have to give up your original citizenship to become a U.S. citizen.

TRUTH: The United States does not require you to renounce your original citizenship as a condition of naturalization, and the U.S. government does not take steps to revoke your original citizenship on your behalf. The Oath of Allegiance does contain language about renouncing allegiance to foreign states, but whether your original country also allows dual citizenship depends entirely on that country's laws — not U.S. law. Many countries allow their citizens to hold U.S. citizenship simultaneously, meaning you can be both a citizen of your birth country and a U.S. citizen at the same time. Some countries do not permit dual citizenship and may automatically revoke your original citizenship if you naturalize elsewhere. Before you naturalize, check the dual citizenship rules of your home country if preserving that citizenship is important to you.

MYTH: If you were undocumented at some point, you can never become a citizen.

TRUTH: Past undocumented status does not automatically and permanently bar you from ever becoming a citizen. Many people who were once undocumented have since obtained lawful status — through asylum, marriage to a U.S. citizen, special programs, or other pathways — and have gone on to become U.S. citizens. The relevant question is not what your status was at some point in the past, but whether you currently hold lawful permanent resident status, whether you have met the required continuous residence period with that status, and whether any issues from your undocumented period — such as prior removal orders, unlawful presence bars, misrepresentation to immigration officials, or other legal complications — affect your current

eligibility. This is a highly fact-specific question that genuinely requires individual legal analysis. Do not assume either way without getting a professional evaluation of your history.

MYTH: Your U.S.-born child automatically became a citizen, so you don't need to do anything.

TRUTH: It is true that children born on U.S. soil are U.S. citizens by birth under the Fourteenth Amendment. However, "you don't need to do anything" is not quite right. A U.S.-born child is a citizen, but they will need documentation to prove it — primarily a birth certificate. As the child grows up and needs a passport, applies for federal benefits, or faces any situation where their citizenship needs to be verified, that birth certificate is their proof. Make sure your U.S.-born child's birth was properly registered and that you have obtained and safely stored their birth certificate. If the birth was not properly registered for any reason, contact the vital records office in the state where the child was born to correct the record. Having a citizen child does not automatically affect your own immigration status — it does not give you a green card or citizenship by itself.

MYTH: Hiring an immigration lawyer is always necessary and always expensive.

TRUTH: Neither part of this myth is accurate. Many applicants with straightforward immigration histories successfully complete the naturalization process on their own without ever hiring an attorney. The forms are available for free, the instructions are published online, and this booklet (among many other free resources) walks you through the process in plain language. For uncomplicated cases, self-filing is a reasonable and widely practiced option. However, if your case has any complexity — criminal history, prior immigration violations, long absences from the U.S., conditional residence, or other complications — having professional help is strongly advisable. As for cost: immigration attorneys vary widely in their fees, and many nonprofit legal aid organizations offer free or low-cost help. BIA-accredited representatives can provide many of

the same services as attorneys at lower cost. There is no good reason to go without help if you need it, because affordable help is available.

MYTH: USCIS interviews are like court trials where you can be arrested.

TRUTH: A USCIS naturalization interview is not a court proceeding. It takes place in a USCIS office, conducted by a USCIS officer. The officer is there to evaluate your application and administer the English and civics tests — not to interrogate you or find reasons to arrest you. You are not before a judge. There is no opposing counsel. The atmosphere is typically professional and civil. That said, USCIS interviews are not casual either — you are giving sworn testimony, and what you say matters. If there are serious issues with your application — such as a prior removal order, a criminal issue, or evidence of fraud — those issues can result in referral to other agencies or to immigration court. This is why it is so important to be honest on your application and to consult with an attorney if you have any concerns before your interview. If your application is straightforward, the interview is simply a conversation about your background and a brief test. Most applicants leave feeling that it was less scary than they anticipated.

MYTH: If you vote before you become a citizen, you are permanently barred from citizenship.

TRUTH: Voting in a federal election as a non-citizen is a federal crime and a very serious immigration issue, but the consequences and their permanence depend on the specific circumstances. Unlawful voting can affect your good moral character determination and can, in certain circumstances, result in removal proceedings. However, whether it permanently bars you from citizenship depends on the specifics — including whether you reasonably believed you were a citizen at the time you voted (for example, if a government official told you incorrectly that you were eligible). This is not something to navigate alone. If you voted before you were a citizen, speak with an immigration attorney before filing any application. Do not volunteer this

information on Form N-400 without first understanding the legal implications of disclosure and non-disclosure in your specific situation. This is exactly the kind of situation where professional legal advice is essential.

MYTH: Taking the Oath means you have to serve in the military.

TRUTH: Taking the Oath of Allegiance does not mean you are immediately enlisted in the military. The Oath includes language about being willing to bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law — but that language refers to the legal obligation that all citizens have to respond if called upon by a legal military draft, which has not been active in the United States since 1973. Male citizens between certain ages are required to register with the Selective Service System (a registration system, not active service), but registration does not mean you will be called to serve. As a practical matter, the active U.S. military is an all-volunteer force, and no one is compelled to serve in it. If your sincere religious or moral beliefs prevent you from bearing arms, you can request a modified Oath that replaces the arms-bearing language with a commitment to perform noncombatant or civilian service — the process for this is described in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this booklet.

How To Become A US Citizen: The Truth Without Nonsense | Noah Sanders Advocacy

Chapter 10: After Citizenship — Your New Rights and Responsibilities

The moment the oath is over and the certificate is in your hand, your life as a U.S. citizen begins. This chapter covers everything that changes — and a few things that don't — now that you have made this country your legal and civic home.

Your Rights as a U.S. Citizen

U.S. citizenship comes with a set of rights that are broader and more secure than what you had as a permanent resident. The most significant is the **right to vote**. As a citizen, you may vote in federal elections — for president, for members of Congress — and also in state and local elections. Voting is how citizens shape the laws and policies of the country. It is one of the most direct expressions of the rights you have earned, and we strongly encourage every new citizen to exercise it.

As a citizen, you may also **run for most public offices**. The only offices explicitly reserved for natural-born citizens under the Constitution are President and Vice President of the United States. All other offices — members of Congress, state legislators, mayors, judges, school board members, and countless others — are open to naturalized citizens. The civic life of this country is open to you.

You now have the right to **obtain a U.S. passport**, one of the most powerful travel documents in the world. With a U.S. passport, you can travel to over 185 countries with little or no advance visa processing. You can also re-enter the United States as a returning citizen — not as a visitor, not as a permanent resident who can be turned away at the border, but as someone who has an unconditional right to be here.

You can **bring family members to the United States more easily** as a citizen than as a permanent resident. Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens — spouses, unmarried children under 21, and parents — are immediately eligible for immigrant visas without waiting in the preference visa quota lines that can take years for permanent residents' family members. Other relatives fall into preference categories, but those categories are also more advantageous for citizens than for residents.

You have access to **all federal jobs and security clearances**. Many federal government positions are available only to U.S. citizens. Certain security clearances required for sensitive positions in government or government contracting are available only to citizens. If a federal career has been something you wanted but couldn't pursue, that door is now open.

And perhaps most importantly to many people: **you can no longer be deported**. As a lawful permanent resident, your status — however secure it felt — could theoretically be revoked through criminal convictions or violations of immigration law, leading to removal proceedings. As a U.S. citizen, there is no deportation. Your right to be in this country is not contingent on any condition. You belong here, permanently and unconditionally.

Your Responsibilities as a U.S. Citizen

Citizenship is not only rights — it is also responsibilities. These responsibilities are not new ideas; they are the obligations that come with full membership in a self-governing democracy.

Jury duty is one of the most fundamental civic obligations of citizenship. As a citizen, you may be called upon to serve on a jury — to hear evidence in a civil or criminal case and render a verdict alongside your fellow citizens. Jury service is how the constitutional guarantee of trial by jury is maintained. If you receive a jury summons, respond to it. Failing to do so can result in legal consequences, and beyond the legal issue, jury service is a genuine contribution to the justice system.

Selective Service registration is required for male citizens between the ages of 18 and 25. If you are a male who naturalizes before the age of 26, you are required to register with the Selective Service System within 30 days of your naturalization. You can register at sss.gov. Failure to register can affect your eligibility for certain federal benefits, student loans, and government jobs, and can in theory result in criminal prosecution — though prosecutions for failure to register are extremely rare in practice. Register promptly and keep the record of your registration.

Paying taxes remains your obligation as a citizen, as it was as a permanent resident. U.S. citizens are subject to federal income tax on worldwide income, regardless of where in the world they live. This is different from many other countries' tax systems and is something to be aware of if you plan to spend significant time living abroad after naturalization.

Upholding the Constitution and the laws of the United States is more than a symbolic commitment — it is the foundation of the Oath you took. Participating in democracy, staying informed, and contributing to your community are the ongoing expressions of the commitment you made on the day of your ceremony.

Getting Your U.S. Passport

Applying for your first U.S. passport is one of the most exciting steps you will take after naturalization. To apply, you need Form DS-11, Application for a U.S. Passport. You must apply in person for your first passport at a passport acceptance facility — most U.S. post offices serve as acceptance facilities, as do many courthouses and public libraries. Bring your Certificate of Naturalization as proof of citizenship, a government-issued photo ID, two passport photos that meet the official specifications (available at most pharmacies and print shops), and the application fee. As of recent years, the fee for a passport book for adults is approximately \$130 for the application plus a \$35 execution fee at the acceptance facility. Processing times vary; expedited processing is available for a higher fee if you need a passport quickly. Always check the current fees and processing times at travel.state.gov before you apply.

Registering to Vote

Registering to vote varies by state, but the federal government provides a central resource at **vote.gov** where you can find your state's registration process, deadlines, and requirements. Many states now offer online voter registration. Some states allow same-day registration at the polls; others require registration weeks in advance of an election. Do not wait until the week before an election to try to register — find out your state's deadline and register as soon as you can after your naturalization ceremony. Some naturalization ceremonies include on-site voter registration assistance from nonpartisan organizations; ask whether this will be available at your ceremony.

Updating Your Social Security Record

Visit your local Social Security Administration office to inform them of your change in immigration status from permanent resident to citizen. This update ensures that your Social Security records accurately reflect your citizenship and may affect your eligibility for certain benefits. You will need to bring your Certificate of Naturalization. If you do not have a Social Security number yet — which would be unusual at this stage but possible — you can also apply for one at the SSA office.

Petitioning for Family Members

As a new citizen, one of the most impactful things you can do is begin the process of petitioning for eligible family members who wish to come to or remain in the United States. Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens — spouses, unmarried children under 21, and parents — are immediately eligible for immigrant visas, and their cases can move relatively quickly once a petition is approved. Other family relationships fall into preference categories with their own priority dates and waiting periods. The process starts with

filing **Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative**, with USCIS. An immigration attorney can help you understand the timeline and the specific options available for your family members' situations.

► The Straight Truth

Citizenship is permanent. Unlike your green card — which had an expiration date and could theoretically be revoked — U.S. citizenship does not expire and cannot be taken away under normal circumstances. There is no citizenship renewal. There is no test you have to pass every few years to keep it. It is yours. The only circumstances under which citizenship can be involuntarily revoked are extremely narrow: fraud or willful misrepresentation during the naturalization application process, and certain specific acts like treason or serving in a foreign armed force against the United States. This is another reason why honesty on your N-400 is so critical. A citizenship built on deception is not secure. A citizenship earned honestly is yours forever.

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Chapter 11: Frequently Asked Questions

Here are the questions we hear most often at Noah Sanders Advocacy, answered plainly and completely.

Q: How long does the naturalization process take from start to finish?

The honest answer is: it depends, and you should plan for it to take longer than you expect. USCIS publishes current processing times by field office at uscis.gov/processing-times. These times reflect how long it takes from the date USCIS receives your Form N-400 to the date they make a decision on your case. In recent years, processing times have ranged from approximately 8 months to over 24 months

depending on the field office and application volume. Beyond the processing time, add the time it takes you to prepare and file the application (which you control), the time between your interview and the oath ceremony if they are not on the same day, and any additional time needed if your case is continued for further review. All told, many applicants spend 12 to 18 months going through the process from first filing to ceremony. File as soon as you are eligible and be patient.

Q: Can I apply for citizenship if I have been outside the U.S. for extended periods?

It depends on the length and frequency of those absences and whether they broke your continuous residence or put you short on physical presence. If any single trip lasted more than six months, you may have a continuous residence issue that needs to be addressed. If your total time outside the U.S. over the five-year period exceeded 30 months (or 18 months for spousal applicants), you may not meet the physical presence requirement. If you are unsure, calculate your physical presence carefully by reviewing your travel history and comparing it to the requirements in Chapter 3. If you had a trip over six months, gather the documentation described in that chapter to show you maintained ties to the United States. Consulting with an attorney is advisable if your travel history is extensive.

Q: What happens if I fail the civics or English test at my interview?

If you do not pass the civics or English test on your first attempt, USCIS will schedule you for a second attempt at a separate appointment, typically within 60 to 90 days of your original interview. You will only be retested on the portion you failed — if you passed the English test but failed the civics test, you only need to retake the civics test. If you fail on the second attempt, your application for naturalization will be denied. You can appeal the denial or reapply — but reapplying means starting the process over, including paying the filing fee again. The best strategy is to study thoroughly before your first interview so that you don't need a second chance. Use the USCIS study materials described in Chapters 6 and 7, and do not go to your interview until you feel genuinely prepared.

Q: What if I cannot afford the filing fee?

If you cannot afford the \$760 filing fee, you have two options. First, you can apply for a full fee waiver by submitting Form I-912, Request for Fee Waiver, with documentation showing your income, expenses, and financial situation. If approved, you pay nothing. Second, if your household income is between 150% and 200% of the federal poverty guidelines, you may qualify for a reduced fee of \$380 instead of the full amount. Both of these options require filing by paper rather than online. Fee waivers are not

automatically approved — you need to document genuine financial hardship. Income below 150% of the federal poverty guideline, receipt of certain means-tested benefits, and documentation of other financial hardship are all factors USCIS considers. Be honest and thorough in documenting your situation.

Q: Can I still apply if my green card is expired?

Yes. A green card with an expired date on the face of the card does not mean your lawful permanent resident status has expired — it means the card itself (the physical document) needs to be renewed. Your status as a permanent resident continues indefinitely as long as you have not abandoned it or had it revoked. You can apply for naturalization even if your green card has passed its printed expiration date. However, you will need to bring valid proof of your permanent resident status to your naturalization interview — either your expired green card along with your receipt for a renewal application, your renewed green card if you have it, or another official document proving your status. If there is any question about the validity of your status, address it before filing for naturalization.

Q: What is the difference between a green card and citizenship?

A green card — formally, Permanent Resident Card — gives you the right to live and work permanently in the United States. But it is not citizenship. Green card holders cannot vote in federal elections. They cannot hold most federal government jobs. They can, in certain circumstances, be deported if they commit certain crimes. Their green card must be renewed every ten years. And if they live outside the United States for too long, they can lose their resident status. Citizenship eliminates all of these limitations. Citizens cannot be deported. Citizens can vote. Citizens can hold any elected office except President and Vice President. A U.S. passport — available only to citizens — enables travel to most countries with far fewer restrictions than any other document. And citizenship never expires. It is permanent in a way that a green card, by its nature, cannot be.

Q: Can my children become citizens automatically if I naturalize?

If your children are under 18, are lawful permanent residents, and are residing in the United States in your legal and physical custody at the time you naturalize, then yes — under the Child Citizenship Act of 2000, they automatically derive citizenship at the moment you take the Oath of Allegiance. You do not need to file a separate application for them, though you should apply for Form N-600 (Certificate of Citizenship) or a U.S. passport to document their status. Children who are over 18 when you naturalize

do not automatically become citizens through your naturalization and must apply on their own. Children who are not lawful permanent residents at the time you naturalize also do not automatically derive citizenship — only those who already have a green card qualify.

Q: What if my application is denied?

If USCIS denies your naturalization application, you will receive a written denial notice explaining the specific reasons for the denial. You have 30 days from receiving that notice to file Form N-336, Request for a Hearing on a Decision in Naturalization Proceedings, to appeal the decision before a different USCIS officer. If you do not appeal within 30 days, or if your appeal is also denied, you can seek review in federal district court, or you can reapply for naturalization if you believe the reason for denial can be resolved. Common reasons for denial include failing to establish good moral character, failing the English or civics test on both attempts, failure to meet the residency requirements, and filing-related issues. Review the denial notice carefully and consider consulting with an immigration attorney about your options before deciding how to proceed.

Q: Can USCIS deny my application without an interview?

In limited circumstances, yes. USCIS can deny an application without scheduling an interview if the application is clearly ineligible on its face — for example, if the applicant does not meet the age or residence requirements. However, for most applications that are complete and facially eligible, USCIS will schedule an interview before making a final decision. If you receive a denial without having been interviewed and you believe the denial was in error, you have the right to appeal as described above.

Q: What should I bring to my naturalization interview?

Bring your USCIS interview notice, your green card (Permanent Resident Card), your passport(s) — all passports you have used during the past five years — your state-issued ID or driver's license, and any other documents you were instructed to bring in your interview notice. If your application was based on marriage to a U.S. citizen, bring documents proving your ongoing marriage — joint bank account statements, lease or mortgage documents, utility bills in both names, and evidence of your spouse's citizenship. If you have any criminal history, bring court documents related to those matters. If you have children, bring their birth certificates. Bring organized copies of everything, but also bring the originals for the officer to review. Arriving organized and prepared sends a signal that you take this process seriously, and it makes the officer's job easier.

Q: Can I apply online?

Yes, USCIS allows most applicants to file Form N-400 online through their myUSCIS online account at my.uscis.gov. Online filing is slightly cheaper (\$710 vs. \$760 for paper filing), allows you to check your case status online easily, and generally facilitates faster receipt confirmation. However, you cannot file online if you are requesting a fee waiver or a reduced fee — those must be paper filed. You also cannot file online if you have certain special circumstances that require additional documentation that cannot be submitted digitally. For most straightforward cases, online filing is the recommended approach.

Q: What happens if I move after filing?

If you move to a new address after filing your Form N-400 but before your case is completed, you must notify USCIS of your address change immediately. You can update your address online through your myUSCIS account or by filing Form AR-11, Alien's Change of Address Card, at uscis.gov. Failing to update your address means you may miss important notices — including your biometrics appointment notice, your interview notice, or your oath ceremony notice — which can result in your application being considered abandoned. If you move to a different state, you may also need to request a transfer of your case to the USCIS field office in your new location. Moving is manageable as long as you notify USCIS promptly.

Q: Do I need a lawyer to apply for citizenship?

No, you do not need a lawyer, and many people successfully complete the naturalization process without one. The form is available free online, instructions are published in detail, and resources like this booklet exist to help you understand the process. However, whether you would benefit from professional help depends on your individual situation. If you have a straightforward immigration history, no criminal record, met all the residency requirements, and feel confident filling out a detailed form, you may well be able to handle this yourself. If you have any complexity in your background — criminal history, prior immigration violations, complicated travel history, prior immigration court proceedings, conditional residence, or anything else that gives you pause — professional help is worth it. An hour with an experienced immigration attorney or a free consultation at a legal aid clinic can tell you clearly whether your case is straightforward or complicated and what you should do.

Chapter 12: Resources and Where to Get Help

You do not have to navigate this process alone. The following resources are available to help you — many of them at no cost whatsoever. Use them.

USCIS Official Website — uscis.gov

This is your primary official source for everything related to the naturalization process. At uscis.gov you can download Form N-400 and all other required forms, read the full instructions, check current processing times by field office, check the status of your individual case after filing, access the complete list of 128 civics test questions and their answers, download the official reading and writing vocabulary lists, find your local field office or Application Support Center, and access study materials for the civics and English tests. Always verify information here, because immigration law and fees change, and this booklet — like any printed resource — reflects the rules at the time of its publication.

USCIS Contact Center — 1-800-375-5283

The USCIS Contact Center is available to answer questions about your case, help you reschedule appointments, report that you have not received expected notices, and assist with other case-related issues. Wait times can be significant, but a live USCIS representative can access information about your specific case that no website can provide. For case status checks, the online case status tool at uscis.gov is generally faster, but for questions that require a human answer, the Contact Center is the right resource. Have your receipt number ready before you call.

USCIS Free Civics Study Resources

USCIS provides a full range of free civics study materials at uscis.gov/citizenship/find-study-materials-and-resources. These include the complete list of 128 questions and answers, audio recordings of the questions being read aloud in English, flashcard sets, study booklets in multiple languages, and the

official USCIS Civics Practice Test mobile app. All of these are genuinely free, produced by the government agency that administers your interview, and reflect exactly what you will be tested on. Use them.

FindLaw and Nolo — General Immigration Legal Information

FindLaw (findlaw.com) and Nolo (nolo.com) are two of the most respected sources of general legal information for the public. Both publish extensive, plain-language articles about immigration law, naturalization, and related topics. They are excellent resources for understanding the legal landscape. Remember that neither site provides legal advice specific to your case — they provide general information. For case-specific guidance, you still need a professional.

Local Legal Aid Organizations and Immigration Clinics

In most U.S. cities and many smaller communities, there are nonprofit organizations that provide free or low-cost immigration legal assistance. These include legal aid societies, immigrant advocacy organizations, university law school immigration clinics, and community-based organizations. To find organizations near you, you can search the CLINIC (Catholic Legal Immigration Network) provider directory at cliniclegal.org, the immigration legal services finder at immigrationadvocates.org (maintained by the National Immigration Legal Services Center), or simply search "[your city] free immigration legal help" and look for nonprofit organizations. Many of these clinics hold regular workshops specifically for naturalization applicants.

BIA-Accredited Representatives

A BIA-accredited representative is a non-attorney who has been formally authorized by the Board of Immigration Appeals to provide immigration legal services. They work under the supervision of recognized nonprofit organizations and typically charge significantly lower fees than private immigration attorneys. Accredited representatives can prepare and file immigration applications, represent clients before USCIS and immigration courts, and provide many of the same services as a licensed attorney. To verify that someone is a BIA-accredited representative, their organization must appear on USCIS's

publicly available list of recognized organizations and accredited representatives. If someone claims to be a BIA-accredited representative and their organization is not on that list, do not work with them.

Protect Yourself From Notario Fraud

In many Latin American and other countries, a "notario" or "notary" is a highly trained legal professional with authority to handle significant legal matters. In the United States, a notary public is simply someone authorized to certify signatures on documents — not a legal professional, and not someone qualified to give immigration advice. Fraudulent operators exploit the language difference and cultural expectation by calling themselves "notarios" or immigration consultants and charging significant fees for immigration "help" that amounts to filling out forms incorrectly, providing wrong advice, or in some cases stealing money and vanishing. This fraud is devastatingly common in immigrant communities and has destroyed many people's immigration cases. The rule is simple: only a licensed immigration attorney or a formally accredited BIA representative is qualified to give you immigration legal advice. If someone is advertising immigration help and is not one of those two things, do not give them your money or your documents.

Noah Sanders Advocacy

Noah Sanders Advocacy is here to help you navigate the confusion. We provide plain-language information, referrals to qualified legal resources, and direct assistance in understanding the naturalization process and your individual situation. We are not a law firm and we do not provide legal advice, but we can help you understand your options, identify the right resources, and feel less alone in a process that can feel overwhelming. Reach out to Noah Sanders Advocacy directly if you need help figuring out where to start or what to do next. We published this booklet because we believe you deserve honest, clear information — and we stand behind every word of it.

A Final Word

From Noah Sanders Advocacy

You came to this country carrying something that most people who were born here will never fully understand — the knowledge of what it costs to build a life in a place that did not begin as yours. You navigated systems in a language you may have had to learn from scratch. You filled out forms in bureaucratic English while managing jobs, families, and communities. You did it anyway, because you believed in the future you were building.

Citizenship is not the end of that journey. It is one of its greatest chapters. It is the moment when the country you have already been pouring yourself into for years — paying taxes, raising children, building neighborhoods, contributing to workplaces and faith communities and schools — formally and legally acknowledges that you are one of its own.

Not a guest. Not a visitor. Not a conditional presence. A citizen, with all the rights, responsibilities, and permanence that word carries.

We know this process can feel enormous. We know the paperwork is overwhelming, the wait is frustrating, and the fear of making a mistake can be paralyzing. We wrote this booklet for exactly those moments — so that you could pick it up, find the chapter that answers your question, and keep moving forward with a little more confidence than you had before. You are not alone in this. You have never been alone in this.

Study hard. File honestly. Ask for help when you need it. Show up to your interview prepared. And when the officer asks you to raise your right hand and take the Oath, raise it high.

"This country is better because you are in it. Now go claim your place in it."

Noah Sanders Advocacy

Plain Language. Honest Information. Real Help.

This booklet is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice.

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