

# Scoring Guidelines for the U.S. Naturalization Test

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

The naturalization test consists of two components:

- English language proficiency, which is determined by the applicant’s ability to read, write, speak and understand English; and
- Knowledge of U.S. history and government, which is determined by a civics test.

## ENGLISH

- **SPEAKING:** An applicant’s verbal skills are determined by the applicant’s answers to questions normally asked by an officer during the naturalization eligibility interview. During the naturalization eligibility interview, the officer will review the Form N-400, Application for Naturalization (Form N-400) for accuracy. Officers are required to repeat and rephrase questions until the officer is satisfied that the applicant either fully understands the question or does not understand English. If the applicant generally understands and responds to questions relevant to the determination of eligibility, then the applicant demonstrates the ability to speak English. The applicant may respond with simple words or phrases.
- **UNDERSTANDING:** If the applicant is responsive to questions, directions or prompts during the naturalization interview, then the applicant demonstrates the ability to understand English. USCIS Officers are required to repeat and rephrase questions until the officer is satisfied that the applicant either fully understands the question or does not understand English. The ability to understand English will not be based on being asked to provide a definition of a word or phrase found in the Form N-400.

<sup>1</sup> For information on exemptions and special consideration, please see <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-12-part-e-chapter-2>



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- **READING:** To sufficiently demonstrate the ability to read in English, applicants must correctly read out loud one sentence, out of three sentences. The three reading sentences are interrogatives. Once the applicant reads one of three sentences correctly, the officer will stop administering the reading test. Applicants shall not be failed because of their accent when speaking English. The applicant also does not need to provide a response to the interrogative sentence that they read out loud. A general description of how the reading test is scored follows:

## *Pass:*

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

## *Fail:*

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

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

## *Pass:*

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



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## *Fail:*

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

## **CIVICS:**

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

## *Pass:*

- Provides a correct answer. This includes answers that may not be listed on USCIS study material, but that can be easily verified by the officer through a web search or by referring to other tools provided to the officer
- Provides an alternative phrasing of the correct answer

## *Fail:*

- Provides an incorrect answer
- Fails to respond

If an applicant fails any portion of the English test, the civics test, or all tests during the initial naturalization examination, USCIS reschedules the applicant to appear for a second examination between 60 and 90 days after the initial examination. The officer will only retest the applicant in those areas that the applicant previously failed<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [8CFR § 312.5 Failure to meet educational and literacy requirements](#). (a) An applicant for naturalization who fails the English literacy or history and government test at the first examination will be afforded a second opportunity to pass the test(s) within 90 days after the first examination during the pendency of the application.

