



November 13, 2020

PA-2020-20

## Policy Alert

SUBJECT: Civics Educational Requirement for Purposes of Naturalization

### Purpose

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is updating policy guidance in the [USCIS Policy Manual](#) regarding the educational requirements for naturalization on the knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of the history, and of the principles and form of government, of the United States (civics) under section 312 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

### Background

In general, applicants for naturalization must demonstrate a basic understanding of the English language and a knowledge and understanding of civics.<sup>1</sup> Applicants have two opportunities to pass the related English and civics tests.<sup>2</sup> USCIS has revised the tests periodically over the years, to include the last revision implemented in 2008. USCIS is now implementing a redesigned civics test to ensure the content remains relevant, more meaningful, and comprehensive.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the revised test will improve USCIS' ability to assess applicants' knowledge and understanding of U.S. history and civics as required by the INA. The new test questions were piloted in July/August of 2020.

To ensure that applicants and community-based organizations engaged in test preparation will have sufficient time to prepare for the revised test, this update, contained in Volume 12 of the Policy Manual, becomes effective December 1, 2020, and applies prospectively to naturalization applications filed on or after that date. USCIS will adjudicate applications filed before the effective date based on the previous policy. The guidance contained in the Policy Manual is controlling and supersedes any prior guidance on the topic.

### Policy Highlights

- Increases the general bank of civics test questions from 100 to 128, the number of test questions for the exam to 20 (from 10), and accordingly, the number of correct answers needed

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<sup>1</sup> See [INA 312\(a\)](#). An applicant may be eligible for an exception to the educational requirements based on age and time as a lawful permanent resident. See [INA 312\(b\)\(2\)](#). An applicant who has a physical or developmental disability or mental impairment may be eligible for a medical exception. See [INA 312\(b\)\(1\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> This includes the initial examination and re-examination (if needed). See [8 CFR 312.5\(a\)](#) and [8 CFR 335.3\(b\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> See USCIS News Release, [USCIS Announces Plan to Improve the Naturalization Test](#) (July 19, 2019).

to pass the civics test to 12 (from 6). The test score required to pass (60 percent correct) will not change.

- Confirms that USCIS will continue to administer 10 test questions (with required 6 correct answers) to applicants who qualify for special consideration because they are age 65 or older and have been lawful permanent residents for at least 20 years.
- Provides that officers will ask all 20 test items (or 10 to special consideration applicants), even if the applicant achieves a passing score.

### **Citation**

Volume 12: Citizenship and Naturalization, Part E, English and Civics Testing and Exceptions, Chapter 2, English and Civics Testing [[12 USCIS-PM E.2](#)].

**This policy is effective on December 1, 2020 and will be incorporated into the Policy Manual accordingly.**

USCIS Policy Manual, Volume 12: Citizenship and Naturalization  
[Part E, English and Civics Testing and Exceptions](#)

## **Chapter 2. English and Civics Testing**

### **A. Educational Requirements**

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### **B. Exceptions**

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### **C. Meeting Requirements under IRCA 1986**

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### **D. English Portion of the Test**

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### **E. Civics Portion of the Test**

#### **1. Civics Test**

*Applicable Test for Applications Filed Prior to December 1, 2020*

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*Applicable Test for Applications Filed On or After December 1, 2020*

To sufficiently demonstrate knowledge of civics, the applicant must answer correctly at least 12 of 20 questions (also called test items) from the standardized civics test form administered by an officer. A USCIS system randomly selects the test questions and an officer administers the test orally. The officer does not stop the test when the applicant provides 12 correct responses (or 9 incorrect responses); the officer asks all 20 questions of the civics test. This allows USCIS to gather data on test items to aid in future updates to the civics test.

*Passing the Civics Test*

An applicant passes the civics test if he or she provides a correct answer or provides an alternative phrasing of the correct answer for at least 12 of the 20 questions.

#### *Failing the Civics Test*

An applicant fails the civics test if he or she provides an incorrect answer or fails to respond to 9 out of the 20 questions from the standardized test form.

## 2. Special Consideration

### *Applicable Test for Applications Filed Prior to December 1, 2020*

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### *Applicable Test for Applications Filed On or After December 1, 2020*

An applicant who meets the criteria for special consideration and filed the naturalization application on or after December 1, 2020, passes the civics test if he or she provides a correct answer (or alternative phrasing) for at least six of the ten items. The officer does not stop the test when the applicant provides six correct responses (or five incorrect responses); the officer asks all ten questions of the civics test. This allows USCIS to gather data on test questions to aid in future updates to the civics test.

## 3. Due Consideration

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