



Podcast Transcript

Preparing for the Reading Test: Instructional Tips on Interrogative Pronouns

Hello, I'm Dr. Michael Jones from the USCIS Office of Citizenship. Are you looking to improve student performance on the naturalization test? In this podcast, we'll discuss the reading portion of the naturalization test, in particular interrogative pronouns.

The naturalization test has two major sections—Civics and English. The English test has three components—reading, writing, and speaking. Test scoring guidelines can be found on the Citizenship Resource Center.

To pass the reading component, an applicant must read one sentence correctly. If an applicant reads the first sentence correctly, the applicant has passed the reading portion of the English test and the reading test is over. If, however, the applicant does not read the first sentence correctly, he or she has two more chances to read another sentence.

If the applicant cannot successfully read any of the three sentences according to the scoring guidelines, the applicant has failed the reading portion and will be scheduled for a retest within 90 days.

Content items for both the reading and writing portions of the English test are civics-based. These items focus on American history, government, geography, symbols, and federal holidays.

While the final test items are not available for public view, the vocabulary words used in each test item are posted on our website. You can download vocabulary lists for the reading and writing portion of the test along with vocabulary flash cards.

What makes the reading test unique is that most of the test items are interrogative sentences rather than declarative. They are questions beginning with an interrogative pronoun—a “wh” word—who, what, when, where, and why. There are also a few items that begin with “how,” which is technically an adverb.

When preparing your students for the reading test, devote some time to these question words. Often applicants are asked to read a “how” question, for example, “How many states are on the West Coast?” and they say, “Who many states?”

Those items that are not interrogative are imperative—a command, such as name this or name that. An example would be, “Name the President during the War of 1812.” Please note that these examples are not actual content items on the test.

To ensure that your students are able to produce the correct word, first print out a copy of the English Vocabulary Flash Cards from our website. Separate the reading cards with the question words—name, how, who, what, when, where, and why.

Ask your students to read each word aloud. If you are able to clearly understand each word as the students read the cards, move on to word combinations. If not, take more time to model the words and have the students repeat each until you can understand him or her. You may need to model mouth and tongue positions, breath, and throat vibrations. Make sure your students emphasize the first and last sounds of each word for clarity.

Once students are comfortable recognizing and producing each of the question words, begin combining them with other words they are commonly linked to. Practice with both test vocabulary words such as, “Where is the Senate?” and non-test words from daily life such as, “Where is the bank?” and “Where is the car?”

The point is to practice the common word combination “where is the.” Although applicants do not have to produce a response to the reading test questions—we are only measuring their ability to read given words on a page—ask your students to answer the questions to make the process more meaningful. In doing this, your students begin to recognize question and answer patterns that will assist them on the other components of the naturalization test.

For more instructional resources, be sure to check out the Teachers section of the Citizenship Resource Center. I’m Michael Jones and on behalf of USCIS, thanks for listening!