



Podcast Transcript Building Vocabulary for the Naturalization Test

This is Rachael Shaw from the USCIS Office of Citizenship. In this podcast, we'll discuss ways to build vocabulary for the naturalization test.

The naturalization test has two sections—English and civics. The English test has three components: reading, writing, and speaking. The civics test encompasses 100 possible questions across three civics content areas. These three content areas are: American History, American Government, and Integrated Civics. Integrated Civics includes content related to geography, symbols, and holidays.

Both the English and civics sections of the naturalization test require a solid foundation of conceptual knowledge. This is particularly important for the civics section and speaking component of the English test. For the civics test, most applicants must learn the content from the 100 civics questions and answers. The speaking component of the English test is the naturalization interview with a USCIS officer. This involves listening to and understanding the information discussed during the naturalization interview.

However, conceptual knowledge is not enough for the applicant to be able to communicate effectively with the USCIS officer during the naturalization interview, especially during review of the multi-page Form N-400, Application for Naturalization. While an applicant can learn the concepts needed in his or her own language, to be able to communicate those concepts during the interview—which is normally conducted in English—he or she needs to build a comprehensive bank of English vocabulary words. Few English as a Second Language teachers would question the need for students to build vocabulary; however, the approach they take is similar to the old spelling primers used in elementary schools consisting of lists of words to memorize. This more traditional method is usually referred to as the direct approach.

There are benefits to the direct approach when preparing students for the naturalization test; however, it is best to limit the number of vocabulary words taught to about ten items. To enhance learning these new vocabulary words, make sure the words are relevant and tied together in a theme. For example, you could teach ten geography words, ten words about the U.S. Constitution, or ten command words—some examples are sit, stand, print, write—that are likely to come up during the naturalization interview.

Learning new vocabulary words requires frequent practice and repetition. Simply learning the definition of terms like “rights” or “responsibilities” is not all there is to acquiring the words. To do this, the teacher needs to build lessons that integrate the written word with the spoken pronunciation and with the comprehensive meaning—both the definition, and the nuance. This requires constructing activities that allow students to use the surrounding context to discover for themselves the meaning.

To help move new vocabulary words from short term to long term memory, and from inactive to active use, utilize visuals such as the ones that appear on the USCIS Civics Flash Cards, the Reading and

Writing Vocabulary Flash Cards, or in our lessons plans for beginning and intermediate level students. These educational resources can be accessed for free through the Citizenship Resource Center at www.uscis.gov/citizenship.

Once you introduce new words to your students, it is important to reinforce what they have learned. Ask students to find words related to the words they have learned. Ask them to identify in what situations these words might apply and how. For example, when teaching the word, “responsibility,” ask students in what everyday situations are people responsible for others. Some possible answers students might offer include: parents’ responsibilities to their children, teachers’ responsibilities to their students, or a politician’s responsibilities to those he or she serves.

These are just a few ways to help your students build their vocabulary for the naturalization test. For additional instructional resources, be sure to check out the Teachers section of the Citizenship Resource Center. I’m Rachael Shaw and on behalf of USCIS, thanks for listening!