

The Citizenship Application Process

Check out our [Basic Requirements for United States Citizenship](#) article.

Application Process

You will [pay a fee](#) to apply for citizenship. Some people can get a fee waiver, meaning they do not have to pay. Learn more about fee waivers in the “Exceptions and Waivers” section below.

You will also fill out a 20-page form which requires a lot of personal information to complete, including:

- Where you have worked for the past five years and the dates that you worked at each place
- Where you have lived for the past five years and the dates that you lived at each address
- The names and addresses of all of your children, and information about your parents, and
- The travel dates for every trip that lasted over 24 hours that you have taken outside of the United States within the past five years

Many of the questions you will be asked can seem pretty insulting, but these questions are meant to detect any reasons that the United States will not give someone citizenship. For example, Immigration will ask if you are a prostitute, if you drink too much alcohol, and if you have sexually assaulted someone. The immigration officer has to ask you these questions. It does not mean that the officer thinks that you are any of these things.

During your citizenship interview, the officer might pick out specific words on your application and ask you if you know what they mean. The reason is that you are swearing to these things under oath and if you swear under oath, you have to know what you are saying. They want to be sure that you fully understand what you are

promising to uphold. Check out this [vocabulary list](#) to better understand the words on the citizenship application.

Special Case

Children who were born outside the United States but now live in the United States will acquire citizenship from a parent when all of the following conditions have been met on or after Feb. 27, 2001:

- The child has at least one parent, including an adoptive parent, who is a U.S. citizen by birth or through naturalization;
- The child is under 18 years of age;
- The child is a lawful permanent resident (green card holder); and
- The child is residing in the United States in the legal and physical custody of the U.S. citizen parent.

Wait Until You Are Ready

Practice Enough English

You really should wait to fill out the citizenship application until you are ready to take the citizenship test, or until your doctor has given you a form saying that you do not have to take it. You might be able to memorize 100 civics and history questions, but you will need more time to learn English. Remember, without waivers, both the citizenship test and interview are done entirely in English.

What to Expect

Mailing in Your Application

After you mail in your application, Immigration will process it. First, they will process your fee, or fee waiver, and send you a receipt notice. This notice will have a number on it that you can use to check the progress of your application [online](#).

After you receive your fee receipt, you will get something called a biometrics notice. This will direct you to the correct immigration office you need to visit. For more information, read our Biometrics Appointment article.

Citizenship Interview

Next you will receive a notice to come to your citizenship interview. Just like your biometrics appointment, if there is a reason you cannot go, you must inform Immigration in writing that you need a different appointment and why you need to reschedule. You should mail this letter at the post office using a service called return receipt requested so you can prove that you mailed in the letter. Also, you should make a copy of your appointment notice to keep for your records, but you must mail the original with your letter to Immigration.

What You Should Bring:

- State Identification or Driver's License
- Your Green Card
- All of Your Passports
- Any Travel Permits
- Original Documents*

*For example, if you sent in copies of certified dispositions with your application, such as birth or marriage certificates, you should take the originals with you to your interview.

Only your attorney or interpreter can come with:

The only people who are allowed to attend your citizenship interview are your attorney and, if you are authorized to have one, an interpreter. Absolutely no one else can come with you, including family, friends, or any personal tutors.

Appointment details:

After you check in, you will wait for an officer to call you into the interview. The officer gives you an oath as soon as you walk in and before you sit down. The officer will ask if you promise to tell the truth during the interview. Then the officer will have you sit down and they will ask for your passports and green card. If you have an interpreter, the interpreter will sit next to you. If you have a lawyer, he or she will sit behind you.

Some officers will give you the citizenship test first and others will go through your application first. But either way, each officer will go through your entire citizenship application to make sure that all the information is correct. The officer will update anything such as new addresses, phone numbers or jobs. If there are corrections, the officer will ask you to authorize those changes.

Citizenship Test

If you do not pass, do not panic. You get two chances to take the test with each application. If your application is missing something, the officer might ask for more information when you take the test. **It is really important to remember that the English portion of the citizenship test requires doing the whole citizenship interview in English.**

Testing Procedure

The officer usually asks the civics and history questions first. The officer will ask the question and wait for you to answer. The officer will not help you answer any questions and will not give you any hints. Then the officer will ask you to read a sentence and to write a sentence. If you pass, the officer will give you a sheet of paper saying that you passed. If you did not pass, the officer will give you a sheet of paper saying you did not pass, and which part of the test that you did not pass. For example, you can pass the civics portion but not the English portion.

The officer might tell you that you have been recommended for approval or that a decision cannot be made on your case right now.

If you asked not to take the test because of a medical problem:

The officer will decide if you do or do not have to take the test at the interview. **No one will decide before you go to the interview.** That is why it is really, really important to make sure that this form is filled out correctly before you go to your interview.

Receiving a Decision

You should receive a notification in the mail within 60-90 days. If Immigration approves your citizenship application, you will get a notice to come to your swearing in ceremony.

The ceremonies are often at our federal courthouse. Your letter will give you the address and what time to be there. Additionally, there will be a form included which **you must fill out and bring to the ceremony**. This last form is just looking to update all the information. **You must bring your green card and any passport to the ceremony**. When you leave, you will get your certificate of naturalization. Immigration will keep your naturalization certificate in their office and your green card, since you are no longer a lawful permanent resident. And, congratulations! You are finally a United States citizen!

If Immigration denies your application, they will send a letter saying why. You can appeal a denial by filling out a form and paying a fee.

You must appeal within 30 days, or 33 if the denial is mailed to you. You should keep in mind that the appeal is almost as expensive as the application for citizenship and takes as long, or longer, to process.

If the citizenship denial is your fault, don't appeal. For example, if you received a request for more information but just never got around to responding, or if you got your interview notice but did not go to your interview without asking for another interview date, there is no point in appealing. You might be better off just filling out a new application and starting all over again.

Exceptions and Waivers

Waiver to Paying the Application Fee

Citizenship is expensive, but not having money should never stand between you and becoming a United States Citizen. Some people can get their citizenship without paying the application fee. Immigration divides people who do not have to pay into three categories. You may qualify for a waiver if you are:

- Getting a public benefit:
 - If you or your spouse is getting a public benefit such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, Badgercare or food stamps, you should be

able to get your citizenship without paying any fee.

- Living at or below 150% of the federal poverty guidelines:
 - Each year the United States government decides how much money someone has to earn to live. The government publishes a chart which shows how much a household would have to earn based on its number of members. If you and your family are at or below 150% on that chart, you can ask to get your United States citizenship without paying the \$725.00 fee. View the 2019 chart [here](#).
 - To receive the fee waiver, you will need to prove that you are low income. You can use a letter from social security disability, your federal income taxes or your food stamp letter.
- Going through real financial hardship:
 - Perhaps you lost your job or are buried in medical bills. If you can show some real hardship, you can become a citizen without paying the \$725.00 fee. You will need to show proof, and mail it in with your application.

You can apply under every category that you think you might fall under; you don't have to choose just one. Most people who ask for a fee waiver use a form called an **I-912**. Please note, this form is challenging to complete.

Waiver to the English Requirement

You can take the citizenship test in your native language, if:

- You are at least 50 years old and have been a lawful permanent resident for at least 20 years, or
- You are at least 55 years old and have been a lawful permanent resident for at least 15 years

You still have to take the civics and history test, but you can bring an interpreter to your citizenship interview and take the test in your native language. You will not have to read or write a sentence in English. The citizenship questions are available in many languages at [USCIS.gov](https://uscis.gov).

- If you are 65 years or older, and have been a lawful permanent resident for at least 20 years, not only can you take the test in your native language, but you also have fewer questions to learn.

People who are 65 years old and have been a lawful permanent resident for 20 years only have to learn questions which have an asterisk next to it at [USCIS.gov](https://uscis.gov). If you look at the list, you will see that some questions have an asterisk. These are the only questions that you need to learn.

Waiver to Taking the Citizenship Test

Some people cannot learn the information on the citizenship test because of an illness or disability. You do not have to take the test if your medical doctor or your clinical psychologist fills out a form telling Immigration exactly what your illness is, and why it stops you from being able to learn what you need to learn to take the citizenship test. **But it must be an illness. It cannot just be that learning the information is really hard or that you lack formal schooling.**

Example: If your psychologist or medical doctor says that you have severe depression, post traumatic stress disorder, or memory loss, then you might not have to take the civics test.

On the other hand, if your psychologist or medical doctor writes that you are 90 years old or never had any schooling, you will still have to take the test.

If your medical doctor or psychologist note is accepted, you will still have to appear at a citizenship interview, but you do not have to take the test. However, you still must meet all the other citizenship requirements such as good moral character and physical presence. You should have your doctor's note reviewed by your immigration attorney to make sure the form has been properly completed.

Frequently Asked Questions

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Can I be a dual citizen?

The United States makes dual citizenship complicated. However, the United States can only control your status as a U.S. citizen. The United States cannot make your home country take away your citizenship back home. However, to make your life easier, when you travel back to the United States, use your U.S. passport.

NOTE: If you get U.S. citizenship, some countries will take away your citizenship of birth. This does not mean that you should not get U.S. citizenship, but know that it is a possibility, and research whether or not your home country will support your dual citizenship with the United States.

If my green card is expired, can I still apply for citizenship?

Yes. Immigration does not require that your green card be current to apply for citizenship. However, you should always have a valid green card; try not to let it expire. Learn more in our [Renewing Your Green Card](#) article.

Is it possible to lose citizenship?

Yes. It is important that you tell the truth on your citizenship application. If Immigration finds out that you lied or committed fraud on your form, they can rescind your citizenship and deport you.

[Citizenship Options for Status, Visas, Permits & Papers Immigration](#)

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