



September 27, 2007

FAQs



USCIS ANNOUNCES NEW NATURALIZATION TEST

Q1. Will applicants receive a sample of the test before it is changed?

USCIS has posted on our website a complete list of the new civics and U.S. history questions and answers; these are free to download. USCIS will also distribute study materials corresponding with the revised test beginning in early 2008.

Q2. How will applicants know which test they are expected to take? Will there be a cutoff date?

USCIS will begin administering the new test on October 1, 2008; one-year after the new test is announced to the public.

If an applicant:

- Applies BEFORE October 1, 2008 and is scheduled for his or her naturalization interview BEFORE October 1, 2008, he or she will take the current test.
- Applies BEFORE October 1, 2008 and is scheduled for his or her naturalization interview AFTER October 1, 2008, he or she can choose to take the current test or the redesigned version.
- Applies AFTER October 1, 2008, he or she will take the redesigned version.
- Is scheduled for his or her naturalization interview AFTER October 1, 2009, regardless of when he or she applied, he or she will take the redesigned version.

Q3. Will USCIS provide translations of the sample civics questions for elderly applicants? Is a translation available?

The questions have been identified in English and USCIS will soon make available the sample civics questions in other languages.

Q4. How were the new question/answer items determined?

Before USCIS included a question/answer item on the final test, it was analyzed for its cognitive and linguistic characteristics, and to see if it met one or more of the following criteria:

1. Does the item involve critical thinking about government or history?
2. Does the item offer an inferred or implicit concept of government, history, or other areas?
3. Does the item provide a geographical context for a historical or current event?
4. Does the item help the applicant better utilize the system? Is it useful in their daily lives?
5. Does the item help the applicant better understand and relate to our shared history?

Experts analyzed each question to determine its linguistic properties. For example, they examined whether or not the vocabulary and sentence structure of the question and answer were appropriate for someone at the high-beginning level. If not, they looked at how to revise the question/answer to make it easier without losing the necessary content.

Q5. Did stakeholder feedback change whether a question and answer was eliminated from the final version of the test? Can you provide an example?

Yes, question and answer items were either revised or deleted as a result of feedback from stakeholders and after a thorough review by a technical advisory group affiliated with *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages* (TESOL). Before the pilot began, both the TESOL panel and many other stakeholders reviewed the test items, provided comments, and after review, many of the items were changed. For example, USCIS originally included a question about the minimum wage because it felt it was important for employees to protect their rights as wage earners. The question was deleted before the pilot began because stakeholders thought applicants might be confused by state minimum wages.

During the pilot, the TESOL panel continued to advise USCIS on which questions to keep, eliminate, revise, or re-pilot. After several questions were re-piloted, the TESOL panel recommended additional changes. For example, the question, “*How is each state’s number of representatives decided?*” was revised to, “*Why do some states have more representatives than other states?*” making it more understandable for the applicant.

Q6. What feedback did pilot participants provide to USCIS about their experiences with the pilot test? How were those comments used in selecting the final questions?

Decisions to keep, reject, or change items were based on both quantitative and qualitative data. Much of the qualitative data came from applicants and adjudicators. USCIS also re-piloted several questions during a follow-on secondary study in 64 civics and citizenship classroom sites across the country. USCIS shared all comments and feedback on specific test items with the TESOL panel. An example of the feedback and subsequent change is:

“*Name one of the things that Abraham Lincoln did.*” Some students said that this question could elicit a wide range of responses about more mundane aspects of Lincoln’s life (his birth and marriage) not directly connected with his presidency. They suggested we add the word *important*. The revised question became, “*What was one important thing that Abraham Lincoln did?*”

Q7. When will USCIS release study materials for the redesigned test?

USCIS will provide updated versions of its study materials, including the Civics Flash Cards and *Learn About the United States: Quick Civics Lessons*, to correspond with the new test. These study materials will be available in early 2008. The current versions of both the Civics Flash Cards and *Learn About the United States: Quick Civics Lessons* will remain available as long as the current test is administered. Additional study materials will also be introduced throughout the course of the one full year.

Q8. Will USCIS delay using the new test to allow civics teachers, ESL staff, and applicants to prepare for the new questions on the test?

USCIS promised stakeholders and applicants that they would have at least one full year to prepare before administration of the new test begins on October 1, 2008. This transition will allow applicants to study for the old or new test, depending on when they apply for citizenship. USCIS will continue to provide information on the current test through the end of Fiscal Year 2008.

Q9. How is USCIS informing the public about the new test questions?

We will inform the public using the following approaches:

- Website information,
- Public speaking engagements,
- Promotional materials,
- Articles in professional journals,
- Regional training conferences, and
- Media outreach.

Q10. USCIS said a goal was to make the test more “meaningful”. What does that mean?

USCIS is taking a systemic approach to making the test more meaningful, one that follows a basic U.S. history and civics curriculum. The testing process goes well beyond a set of test questions; it includes a variety of study materials and opportunities for immigrants to expand their knowledge in the areas covered on the test and civics content beyond the test itself. We approached the goal of making the test more meaningful by making it more useful or important to those about to become a new citizen. We know the basic ability to speak, read, and write in English is important and useful to help new citizens integrate. We also know that infusing the test with more opportunities to learn about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship is important. Many items added to the test either directly or indirectly help applicants learn more about their rights and responsibilities.

In addition, the new naturalization test covers more content by reducing redundancy and expanding the content areas from 23 to 40. The reading and writing portion of the test are now more civic-focused as well.

Q11. Why are there questions about geography? What does geography have to do with civics?

Many teachers requested that we add geography questions to encourage applicants to learn something about the land where they live. History cannot be studied in isolation; history and geography are interrelated. The geography questions provide a context essential to understanding past history and current events. For example, the question on the Missouri/Mississippi Rivers helps students understand the question involving the Louisiana Purchase.

Q12. Doesn't this new test measure an individual's ability to memorize information for a test, rather than measure their understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship?

Because we are not just designing a new test, but educational materials and teacher training tools as well, we expect that the studying process will result in new knowledge. In the process of learning, there is some memorization, but this test does a much better job of helping applicants understand the rights and responsibilities of citizenship by following a well-structured curriculum. Through educational materials and instruction accompanying the test, we anticipate that by studying information such as the Federalist Papers, new citizens will have a better understanding of important documents such as the U.S. Constitution.

Q13. How does the naturalization process, including the naturalization test, measure the allegiance of an individual to the United States?

No test can do that. The naturalization process looks closely at the moral character of individuals applying for citizenship. While successfully passing the citizenship test cannot measure a person's loyalty to the nation, it can demonstrate an understanding of our basic civic principles. We believe, through study, that the applicants will understand and attach themselves to those principles.

Q14. When will USCIS train District Adjudication Officers (DAOs) on how to administer the new test? How will USCIS ensure DAOs are adequately trained to administer the new test?

DAO training opportunities include:

- Train-the-trainer activities at USCIS District Offices beginning in early 2008,
- On-site district training seminars beginning summer 2008, and
- Continued adjudicator training as part of the standard curriculum for all adjudicators.

Q15. How many community-based and national immigrant organizations were included in the test redesign process? Why were those groups included and not others?

About 150 organizations were represented in the stakeholder groups working with USCIS on the test redesign and pilot process. The stakeholder groups USCIS consulted with from the onset of this project were very broad. They consisted of English as a Second Language (ESL) experts, adult educators, historians, legal educators, ethnic organizations, current and potential applicants, students, and many other community-based organizations. USCIS welcomed and captured feedback throughout the entire pilot process. Information shared and information sought took place at a variety of venues, including conferences, meetings, and focus groups across the country. Below is a partial list of national organizations that participated regularly in stakeholder meetings to discuss the naturalization test redesign project:

- Catholic Legal Immigration Network
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
- Asian American Justice Center
- National Council of La Raza
- National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials
- Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
- Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition

Scholars and Experts

- Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)
- National Academy of Sciences
- American Institutes for Research
- Heritage Foundation (There was no contractual relationship)
- Hudson Institute
- Kenan Institute for Ethics, Duke University (There was no contractual relationship)
- Manhattan Institute
- National Endowment for the Humanities

This is a sample of the many ESL programs that the naturalization test redesign project staff met with during the development of the revised citizenship test.

- Arlington, Va. County Public Schools
- Baltimore County (MD) Community College (Montgomery County)
- Carlos Rosario School, Washington
- Los Angeles Unified School District
- Miami-Dade County Public Schools
- State ESL Educator conferences in Florida, Kansas, Ohio

Community Meetings and Focus Groups (not all included)

- Chicago
- Davenport, Iowa
- Detroit
- Fort Smith, Ark.
- Indianapolis
- Marshalltown, Iowa
- Orange County, Calif.
- Sacramento, Calif.
- San Francisco, Calif.
- Santa Clara, Calif.
- St. Paul, Minn.
- Washington

DAO Focus Groups

- Dallas
- Denver
- El Paso, Texas
- Los Angeles
- New York
- Newark, N.J.
- Sacramento, Calif.
- Salt Lake City
- San Francisco