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# Welcome

## *E Pluribus Unum – From Many, One*

– Motto of the United States of America

### **INS Welcome**

We are very pleased you are interested in applying for naturalization as a U.S. citizen. The United States is a nation of immigrants. Throughout our history, immigrants have come here seeking a better way of life and strengthening our nation in the process.

Deciding to become a U.S. citizen is one of the most important decisions in a person's life. If you decide to apply for naturalization, you will be showing your commitment to the United States. You will also be showing your loyalty to its Constitution and its people.

When you are naturalized, you agree to accept all of the responsibilities of being a citizen. In return, you are rewarded with all the rights and privileges that are part of citizenship. Again, we welcome your interest and hope you will read on to learn more about naturalization.

### **Definition of Naturalization**

Naturalization is the way immigrants become citizens of the United States. If you were not born a citizen, you must naturalize to become one.

### **About This *Guide***

This *Guide* is to help people understand the naturalization process. It is for people 18 years or older who want to naturalize. It is the result of the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) ongoing project to improve the naturalization process. The Immigration and Naturalization Service created this *Guide* to provide better and more consistent information to you, the future naturalization applicant.

We hope that if you have any suggestions about how to improve this *Guide* you will send them to us using the postcard provided in the back pocket. We also hope the information in this *Guide* will answer your questions about naturalization and make the process smooth for you.

# *The Benefits and Responsibilities of Citizenship*

## **Benefits**

The Constitution gives many rights to citizens and non-citizens living in the United States. However, there are some rights the Constitution gives only to citizens, like the right to vote. When you are naturalized, you will be given the right to vote.

Having a U.S. passport is another benefit of citizenship. A U.S. passport allows citizens the freedom to travel. In addition, citizens receive U.S. Government protection and assistance when abroad.

The above paragraphs do not include all the benefits of citizenship, but they do give you an idea of some of the most important ones.

## **Responsibilities**

The Oath of Allegiance includes several promises you must make when you become a U.S. citizen, including promises to:

- give up prior allegiances to other countries;
- support and defend the Constitution and the laws of the United States;

- swear allegiance to the United States; and
- serve the country when required.

Citizens have many responsibilities other than the ones mentioned in the oath. Citizens have a responsibility to participate in the political process by registering and voting in elections. Serving on a jury is another responsibility of citizenship. Finally, America becomes stronger when all its citizens respect the different opinions, cultures, ethnic groups, and religions found in this country. Tolerance for differences is also a responsibility of citizenship.

When you decide to become a U.S. citizen, you should be willing to fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship. We hope you will also honor and respect the freedoms and opportunities citizenship gives you. At the same time, we hope you become an active member of your community. For it is by participating in your community that you truly become an American.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Q 1. How can I become a United States citizen?

A person may become a U.S. citizen (1) by birth or (2) through naturalization.

## Q 2. Who is born a United States citizen?

Generally, people are born U.S. citizens if they are born in the United States or if they are born to U.S. citizens:

### (1) By being born in the United States

If you were born in the United States (including, in most cases, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands), you are an American citizen at birth (unless you were born to a foreign diplomat). Your birth certificate is proof of your citizenship.

### (2) Through birth abroad to TWO United States citizens

In most cases, you are a U.S. citizen if ALL of the following are true:

- Both your parents were U.S. citizens when you were born; and
- At least one of your parents lived in the United States at some point in their life.

Your record of birth abroad, if registered with a U.S. consulate or embassy, is proof of your citizenship. You may also apply for a passport to have your citizenship recognized. If you need additional proof of your citizenship, you may file an "Application for Certificate of Citizenship" (Form N-600) with INS to get a Certificate of Citizenship. Call the INS Forms Line at 1-800-870-3676 to request a Form N-600.

### (3) Through birth abroad to ONE United States citizen

In most cases, you are a U.S. citizen if ALL of the following are true:

- One of your parents was a U.S. citizen when you were born;
- Your citizen parent lived at least 5 years in the United States before you were born; and
- At least 2 of these 5 years in the United States were after your citizen parent's 14th birthday.<sup>1</sup>

Your record of birth abroad, if registered with a U.S. consulate or embassy, is proof of your citizenship. You may also apply for a passport to have your citizenship recognized. If you need additional proof of your citizenship, you may file an "Application for Certificate of Citizenship" (Form N-600) with INS to get a Certificate of Citizenship.

## Q 3. How do I become a naturalized citizen?

A If you are not a U.S. citizen by birth, you may be eligible to become a citizen through naturalization. People who are 18 years and older use the "Application for Naturalization" (Form N-400) to become naturalized. Children who are deriving citizenship from naturalized parents use the "Application for a Certificate of Citizenship" (Form N-600) to become naturalized. Call the INS Forms Line at 1-800-870-3676 to request a Form N-600.

## Q 4. What are the requirements for naturalization?

A Please see Section 4 "Who is Eligible For Naturalization" beginning on page 17 for more details on the eligibility requirements for naturalization.

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<sup>1</sup>If you were born before November 14, 1986, you are a citizen if your U.S. citizen parent lived in the United States for at least 10 years and 5 of those years in the United States were after your citizen parent's 14th birthday.



**Q 6. What form do I use to file for naturalization?**

**A** You should use an “Application for Naturalization” (Form N-400). Call the INS Forms Line at 1-800-870-3676 to request a Form N-400. You may also download the form from the internet at the following address: <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/forms/download/n-400.htm>.

**Q 7. If I have been convicted of a crime but my record has been expunged, do I need to indicate that on my application or tell an INS officer?**



**Important**

**A** Yes. You should always be honest with INS regarding all:

- arrests;
- convictions (even if they have been expunged); and
- crimes you have committed for which you were not arrested or convicted.

Even if you have committed a minor crime, INS may deny your application if you do not tell the INS officer about the incident.

**Q 8. Where do I file my naturalization application?**

**A** You should send your completed “Application for Naturalization” (Form N-400) to the appropriate INS Service Center. For information about the Service Center that serves your area, see page 35 or the single page called “Your Local INS Office” in the back pocket of this *Guide*. Remember to make a copy of your application. **DO NOT** send original documents with your application unless the checklist on page 34 states that an original is required.

**Q 9. Will INS provide special accommodations for me if I am disabled?**

**A** Some people with disabilities need special consideration during the naturalization process. INS will make every effort to make reasonable accommodations in these cases. For example, if you use a wheelchair, we will make sure your fingerprint location is wheelchair accessible. If you are hearing impaired and wish to bring a sign language interpreter to your interview, you may do so.

**Q 10. Where is my local INS office?**

**A** For information about the INS office that serves your area, see the single page titled “Your Local INS Office” in the back pocket of this *Guide*.

**Q 11. What is the fee for processing an application?**

**A** The current fee for processing a naturalization application can be found on the single page titled “Current Naturalization Fees” in the back pocket of this *Guide*.

**Q 12. How can I pay my application fee?**

**A** You must pay your application fee with a check or money order drawn on a U.S. bank in U.S. dollars payable to the “Immigration and Naturalization Service.”

Residents of Guam should make the fee payable to “Treasurer, Guam.”

Residents of the Virgin Islands should make the fee payable to “Commissioner of Finance of the Virgin Islands.”

You must send your fee with your application. Remember that your application fee is not refundable even if you withdraw your application or INS denies your case.





**Q 13. How long will it take to become naturalized?**

**A** The time it takes to be naturalized varies from one local office to another. In 1997, in many places, it took over 2 years to process an application. INS is currently modernizing and improving the naturalization process. Within the next 2 years, INS would like to decrease the time it takes to become naturalized to 6 months.

**Q 14. Where can I be fingerprinted?**

**A** After INS has received your application, we will notify you of the location where you should get fingerprinted. For more information about fingerprinting, see page 36.

**Q 15. How do I determine the status of my naturalization application?**

**A** You may call the Service Center where you sent your application. See the one-page insert titled “Your Local INS Office” in the back pocket of this *Guide* to find the telephone number to call for information. INS is working hard to create a toll-free number that applicants may call to check the status of their application.

**Q 16. What if I cannot make it to my scheduled interview?**

**A** It is very important not to miss your interview. If you have to miss your interview, you should notify the office where your interview is scheduled by mail as soon as possible. In your letter, you should ask to have your interview rescheduled. Rescheduling an interview may add several months to the naturalization process, so try not to change your original interview date. If you miss your scheduled interview without notifying INS, we will “administratively close” your case. Unless you contact INS

to schedule a new interview within 1 year after INS closes your case, we will deny your application. INS will not notify you if we close your case because you missed your interview.

## **Q** 17. What do I do if my address has changed?

**A** If your address changes, you should call the INS Forms Line (1-800-870-3676) and request an “Alien’s Change of Address Card” (Form AR-11). Complete this form and send it back to INS. This form is pre-printed with our address on it.

It is important to make sure INS has your latest address. If INS does not have a current address for you, you may not receive important information. For example, INS may not be able to notify you of your interview date and time. We also may not be able to tell you if you need to send or bring additional documents to your interview. Eventually, we hope you will be able to change your address through the INS Telephone Center.

## **Q** 18. If INS grants me naturalization, when will I become a citizen?

**A** You become a citizen as soon as you take the Oath of Allegiance to the United States. In some places, you can choose to take the Oath the same day as your interview. If that option is not available or if you prefer a ceremony at a later date, INS will notify you of the ceremony date with a “Notice of Naturalization Oath Ceremony” (Form N-445).

## **Q** 19. What should I do if I cannot go to my oath ceremony?

**A** If you cannot go to the oath ceremony, you should return the “Notice of Naturalization Oath Ceremony” (Form N-445) that INS sent to you. You should send the N-445 back to your local office. Include a letter

saying why you cannot go to the ceremony. Make a copy of the notice and your letter before you send them to INS. Your local office will reschedule you and send you a new “Notice of Naturalization Oath Ceremony” (Form N-445) to tell you when your ceremony will be.

## **Q 20. What can I do if INS denies my application?**

**A** There is an administrative review process for those who are denied naturalization. If you feel that you have been wrongly denied naturalization, you may request a hearing with an immigration officer. Your denial letter will explain how to request a hearing and will include the form you need. The form for filing an appeal is the “Request for Hearing on a Decision in Naturalization Proceedings under Section 336 of the Act” (Form N-336).

## **Q 21. Can I reapply for naturalization if INS denies my application?**

**A** In many cases, you may reapply. If you reapply, you will need to complete and resubmit a new N-400 and pay the fee again. You will also need to have your fingerprints and photographs taken again. If your application is denied, the denial letter should indicate the date you may reapply for citizenship.

If you are denied because you failed the English or civics test, you may reapply for naturalization as soon as you want. You should reapply whenever you believe you have learned enough English or civics to pass the test.

## **Q 22. What do I do if I have lost my Certificate of Naturalization? What do I use as proof of citizenship if I do not have my certificate?**

**A** You may get a new Certificate of Naturalization by submitting an “Application for Replacement Naturalization/Citizenship Document”

(Form N-565) to INS. You may obtain an N-565 by calling the INS Forms Line (1-800-870-3676). Submit this form with the fee to your local INS office. It may take up to 1 year for you to receive a new certificate. If you have one, you may use your passport as evidence of citizenship while you wait for a replacement certificate.

### **Q 23. Do I need to obtain a new Permanent Resident Card (formerly known as an Alien Registration Card) when INS issues a new version of the card?**

**A** No, you only need to renew your Permanent Resident Card when it expires.

### **Q 24. If I am naturalized, is my child a citizen?**

**A** Usually if children are Permanent Residents, they can derive citizenship from their naturalized parents. This is true whether the child is a child by birth or adoption.<sup>2</sup>

In most cases, your child is a citizen if ALL of the following are true:

- The other parent is also naturalized **OR**  
You are the only surviving parent (if the other parent is dead) **OR**  
You have legal custody (if you and the other parent are legally separated or divorced);
- The child was under 18 when the parent(s) naturalized;
- The child was not married when the parent(s) naturalized; and
- The child was a Permanent Resident before his or her 18th birthday.

If you and your child meet all of these requirements, you may obtain a passport for the child as evidence of citizenship. If the child needs further evidence of citizenship, you may submit an "Application for Certificate of Citizenship" (Form N-600) to INS to obtain a Certificate of Citizenship. (Note: the child may obtain a passport or Certificate of Citizenship at any time, even after he or she turns 18.)

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<sup>2</sup>All adoptions must be completed by the child's 16th birthday in order for the child to be eligible for any immigration benefit, including naturalization.

**Q** 25. If I am naturalized but the above situation does not apply to me or my child, how can I apply for citizenship for my child?

**A** In many cases, citizens may apply for citizenship for their children:

**(1) Children by birth or adoption who are Permanent Residents**

If both parents are alive and still married to each other, but only one parent is a citizen, you may apply for citizenship for your child using an "Application for Certificate of Citizenship" (Form N-600). The child must meet ALL of the following requirements at the time he or she takes the Oath of Allegiance (Note: the Oath may be waived if the child is too young to understand it.):

- The child is under 18;
- The child is not married;
- The child is a Permanent Resident; and
- The child is in legal custody of the parent who is a citizen.

**(2) Children by birth or adoption who are NOT Permanent Residents**

If at least one of the child's parents is a citizen, the parent may apply for citizenship for the child using an "Application for Certificate of Citizenship" (Form N-600). The child must meet ALL of the following requirements at the time he or she takes the Oath of Allegiance (Note: the Oath may be waived if the child is too young to understand it):

- The child is under 18;
- The child is not married;
- The child is lawfully present in the United States in a non-resident status (e.g., with a B-2 or F-1 visa);
- The child is in legal custody of the parent who is a citizen;
- The citizen parent has lived at least 5 years in the United States; and
- At least 2 of these 5 years in the United States were after the citizen parent's 14th birthday.

In some cases, a child may have a parent who is a U.S. citizen but who has not lived in the United States for at least 5 years, 2 of which were after the citizen parent's 14th birthday. In these cases, the U.S. citizen parent may apply for citizenship for the child using an "Application for Certificate of Citizenship" (Form N-600). The child must meet ALL of the following requirements at the time he or she takes the Oath of Allegiance (Note: the Oath may be waived if the child is too young to understand it):

- The child is under 18;
- The child is not married;
- The child is lawfully present in the United States in a non-resident status (e.g., with a B-2 or F-1 visa);
- A U.S. citizen parent has a parent (the child's grandparent) who is also a U.S. citizen;
- The child is in legal custody of the U.S. citizen parent whose parent is also a U.S. citizen;
- The U.S. citizen grandparent lived at least 5 years in the United States; and
- At least two of these years in the United States were after the citizen grandparent's 14th birthday.



# Who is Eligible for Naturalization

Naturalization is the way immigrants become citizens. If you are 18 years or older and wish to apply for naturalization, you should use the “Application for Naturalization” (Form N-400).

If you want to apply for naturalization for a child who is under 18 years old, you should use the “Application for a Certificate of Citizenship” (Form N-600). For more information about applying for citizenship for your children, see questions 24-25 on pages 13-15.

In the next few pages, we describe the naturalization eligibility requirements for people who are 18 years or older and who will use the Form N-400.

The following table summarizes the naturalization requirements for *most* types of applicants. After the table is a section that provides more information on each requirement. If you still have questions about your eligibility, you should consult an immigrant assistance organization or INS.





PR

Time as  
Permanent  
Resident



Continuous Residence

# REQUIREMENTS

TYPE OF APPLICANT

**If you:**

Have been a Permanent Resident for the past 5 years and have no special circumstances

*Note: Over 90% of applicants fall into this category.*

5 years

5 years as a Permanent Resident without leaving the United States for trips of 6 months or longer

**If you:**

Are currently married to and living with a U.S. citizen  
AND  
Have been married to and living with that same U.S. citizen for the past 3 years  
AND  
Your spouse has been a U.S. citizen for the past 3 years

3 years

3 years as a Permanent Resident without leaving the United States for trips of 6 months or longer

**If you:**

Are in the U.S. Armed Forces (or will be filing your application within 6 months of an honorable discharge)  
AND  
Have served for at least 3 years

You must be a Permanent Resident on the day you file your application.

Not Required

**If you:**

Were in the U.S. Armed Forces for less than 3 years

OR

**If you:**

Were in the U.S. Armed Forces for 3 years or more, but you were discharged more than 6 months ago

5 years

5 years as a Permanent Resident without leaving the United States for trips of 6 months or longer

*Note: If you were out of the country as part of your service, this time out of the country does not break your "continuous residence." It is treated just like time spent in the United States.*

**If you:**

Performed active duty military service during:

- World War I (November 11, 1916-April 6, 1917);
- World War II (September 1, 1939-December 31, 1946);
- Korea (June 25, 1950-July 1, 1955);
- Vietnam (February 28, 1961-October 15, 1978); or
- Persian Gulf (August 2, 1990-April 11, 1991)

You are not required to be a Permanent Resident.

Not Required

*Note: If you did not enlist or reenlist in the United States or its outlying possessions, you must be a Permanent Resident on the day you file your application.*

**If you:**

Were married to a U.S. citizen who died during a period of honorable active duty service in the U.S. Armed Forces

*Note: You must have been married to and living with your U.S. citizen spouse at the time of his/her death.*

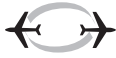
You must be a Permanent Resident on the day you file your application.

Not Required

Where to go for more information

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Physical Presence in the United States



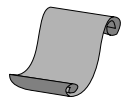
Time in District or State



Good Moral Character



English & Civics Knowledge



Attachment to the Constitution

	Physical Presence in the United States	Time in District or State	Good Moral Character	English & Civics Knowledge	Attachment to the Constitution
	30 months	3 months	Required	Required	Required
	18 months	3 months	Required	Required	Required
	Not Required	Not Required	Required	Required	Required
	30 months <i>Note: Time in the U.S. Armed Forces counts as time "physically present" in the United States no matter where you were.</i>	3 months	Required	Required	Required
	Not Required	Not Required	Required	Required	Required
	Not Required	Not Required	Required	Required	Required
	Not Required	Not Required	Required	Required	Required
	Pages 23-24	Page 24	Page 25	Pages 26-27	Pages 28-29

**PR**  
Time as a  
Permanent  
Resident



Continuous Residence

# REQUIREMENTS

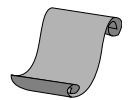
TYPE OF APPLICANT

<p><b>If you:</b> Served on a vessel operated by the United States</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OR</b></p> <p><b>If you:</b> Served on a vessel registered in the United States <i>Note: In this case, the vessel must be owned by U.S. citizens or a U.S. corporation.</i></p>	<p>5 years</p>	<p>5 years as a Permanent Resident without leaving the United States for trips of 6 months or longer</p> <p><i>Note: If you were out of the country while serving on a vessel, this time out of the country does not break your "continuous residence." It is treated just like time spent in the United States.</i></p>
<p><b>If you:</b> Are an employee or an individual under contract to the U.S. Government</p>	<p>5 years</p>	<p>5 years as a Permanent Resident without leaving the United States for trips of 6 months or longer</p> <p><i>Note: An absence from the United States for 1 year or more will break your "continuous residence." You may keep your "continuous residence" if you have had at least 1 year of unbroken "continuous residence" since becoming a Permanent Resident and you get an approved N-470 before you have been out of the United States for 1 year.</i></p>
<p><b>If you:</b> Are a person who performs ministerial or priestly functions for a religious denomination or an interdenominational organization with a valid presence in the United States</p>	<p>5 years</p>	<p>5 years as a Permanent Resident without leaving the United States for trips of 6 months or longer</p> <p><i>Note: An absence from the United States for 1 year or more will break your "continuous residence." You may keep your "continuous residence" if you have had at least 1 year of unbroken "continuous residence" since becoming a Permanent Resident and you get an approved N-470 at any time before applying for naturalization.</i></p>
<p><b>If you:</b> Are employed by one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An American institution of research recognized by the Attorney General;</li> <li>• An American-owned firm or corporation engaged in the development of foreign trade and commerce for the United States; or</li> <li>• A public international organization of which the United States is a member by law or treaty (if the employment began after you became a Permanent Resident)</li> </ul>	<p>5 years</p>	<p>5 years as a Permanent Resident without leaving the United States for trips of 6 months or longer</p> <p><i>Note: An absence from the United States for 1 year or more will break your "continuous residence." You may keep your "continuous residence" if you have had at least 1 year of unbroken "continuous residence" since becoming a Permanent Resident and you get an approved N-470 before you have been out of the United States for 1 year.</i></p>
<p><b>If you:</b> Have been employed for 5 years or more by a U.S. nonprofit organization that principally promotes the interests of the United States abroad through the communications media</p>	<p>5 years</p>	<p>5 years as a Permanent Resident without leaving the United States for trips of 6 months or longer</p>
<p><b>If you:</b> Are the spouse of a U.S. citizen who is one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A member of the U.S. Armed Forces;</li> <li>• An employee or an individual under contract to the U.S. Government;</li> <li>• An employee of an American institution of research recognized by the Attorney General;</li> <li>• An employee of an American-owned firm or corporation engaged in the development of foreign trade and commerce for the United States;</li> <li>• An employee of a public international organization of which the United States is a member by law or treaty; or</li> <li>• A person who performs ministerial or priestly functions for a religious denomination or an interdenominational organization with a valid presence in the United States</li> </ul> <p><b>AND</b> Your citizen spouse is working overseas for at least 1 year according to an employment contract or order.</p>	<p>You must be a Permanent Resident at the time of your INS interview</p>	<p>Not Required</p>

Where to go for more information

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Physical Presence in the United States

Time in District or State

Good Moral Character

English & Civics Knowledge

Attachment to the Constitution

30 months <i>Note: Time served on the vessel counts as time "physically present" in the United States no matter where you were.</i>	3 months	Required	Required	Required
30 months <i>Note: Time spent in this type of employment counts as time "physically present" in the United States no matter where you are as long as you get an approved N-470 before you have been out of the United States for 1 year.</i>	3 months	Required	Required	Required
30 months <i>Note: Time spent in this type of employment counts as time "physically present" in the United States no matter where you are as long as you get an approved N-470 before you apply for naturalization.</i>	3 months	Required	Required	Required
30 months <i>Note: Time spent in this type of employment counts as time "physically present" in the United States no matter where you are.</i>	3 months	Required	Required	Required
30 months	3 months	Required	Required	Required
Not Required	Not Required	Required	Required	Required
Pages 23-24	Page 24	Page 25	Page 26-27	Page 28-29



## Time as a Permanent Resident

Permanent Residents are people who have “permanent resident” status in the United States as provided for under our immigration laws. Permanent Residents are normally given Permanent Resident Cards. (Note: these cards used to be called Alien Registration Cards.)

Most applicants must be a Permanent Resident for a certain number of years before they may apply for naturalization. But it is not enough to be a Permanent Resident for the right number of years. You must also be in “continuous residence” during that time.



## Continuous Residence

“Continuous residence” means that you have not left the United States for a long period of time. If you leave the United States for too long, you may interrupt your “continuous residence.”

**Absences between 6 and 12 months.** If you leave the United States for more than 6 months, but less than 1 year, the law states that you have disrupted your

“continuous residence” unless you can prove otherwise. To prove that you have not disrupted your “continuous residence,” you will need to provide an original IRS Form 1722 listing tax information for the past 3 years or copies of the income tax forms you filed for the past 3 years. You may also be asked to provide some of the following:

- proof that your family resided in the United States during your absence;
- copies of tax records;
- copies of rent or mortgage payments; or
- copies of paystubs.

**Absences of 1 year or longer.** In almost all cases, if you leave the United States for 1 year or more, you have disrupted your “continuous residence.” This is true even if you have a Re-entry Permit.

If you leave the country for 1 year or longer, you may be eligible to re-enter as a Permanent Resident if you have a Re-entry Permit. But none of the time you were in the United States *before you left* the country counts toward your time in “continuous residence.”

You may file your Application for Naturalization (Form N-400) up to 3 months before you meet your “continuous residence” requirements. For example, if you are applying based on 5 years of “continuous residence” as a Permanent Resident, you can apply when you have been a Permanent Resident in “continuous residence” for 4 years and 9 months. INS allows you to send your application before you have met the requirement for “continuous residence” only. You must meet all the other eligibility requirements when you file your application with INS.

Fortunately, if you return within 2 years, some of your time *out of the country* does count. In fact, the last 364 days of your time out of the country (1 year minus 1 day) counts toward meeting your “continuous residence” requirement.

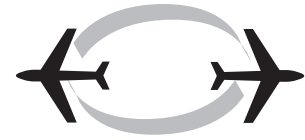
There are a few small groups of applicants who do not have any “continuous residence” requirement (for example, members of the U.S. Armed Forces).

There are also a few small groups of people who can leave the country for over 1 year and not disrupt their “continuous residence.” To maintain their “continuous residence” while out of the country, these people must file an “Application to Preserve Residence for Naturalization Purposes” (Form N-470). See the table at the beginning of this section for more information on who can use an N-470 and when they must file it.

## Physical Presence in the United States

“Physical presence” means that you have actually been in the United States. Most applicants must be physically present in the United States for a certain number of months to be eligible for naturalization.

Many people do not understand the difference between the “physical presence” requirement and the “continuous residence” requirement. “Physical presence” involves the total number of days you were outside the United States on all of your trips. “Continuous residence” involves the number of days you were outside the United States during a single trip. Even if you never took a trip that was long enough to disrupt your “continuous residence,” you may have taken so many short trips that you do not meet the “physical presence” requirement.



### **“Continuous Residence” Example**

- An applicant became a Permanent Resident on January 1, 1990.
- She lived in the United States for 3 years, then returned to her native country for 1 year and 3 months.
- She got a Re-entry Permit before leaving the United States so that she could keep her Permanent Resident status.
- The applicant re-entered the United States with Permanent Resident status on April 1, 1994.

Question: When is the applicant eligible for naturalization?

Answer: On April 2, 1998, 4 years and 1 day after she returned to the United States. The last 364 days the applicant was out of the United States count toward her time as a Permanent Resident in “continuous residence,” but the 3 years in the United States before leaving do not.

When counting the total number of days you have been out of the country, include all trips you have taken outside the United States. This includes short trips and trips to Canada and Mexico. For example, if you go to Canada for a weekend, you must include that trip when you are counting how many days you have spent out of the country. Generally, partial days spent in the United States count as whole days spent in the United States.

Students may apply for naturalization either where they go to school or where their family lives (if they are still financially dependent on their parents).

There are small groups of applicants who may count time abroad as time in the United States for the “physical presence” requirement. For example, any time spent in the U.S. Armed Forces counts as time in the United States even if you were stationed overseas. See the table at the beginning of this section for more information.

January						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

### Time as a Resident in District or State

Most people must live in the district or state in which they are applying for at least 3 months before applying. A district is a geographical area defined by INS and served by one of the 33 INS “District Offices.” You can find out in which district you live by referring to the single page titled “Your Local INS Office,” located in the back pocket of this *Guide*.

## Good Moral Character

To be eligible for naturalization you must be a person of good moral character. INS will make a determination on your moral character based upon the laws Congress has passed. In the following section, we describe some of the things INS may consider.

**Criminal Record.** Committing certain crimes may cause you to be ineligible for naturalization (INS calls these “bars” to naturalization). Aggravated felonies (committed on or after November 29, 1990) and murder are permanent bars. You may never become a citizen if you have committed one of these crimes.

Other crimes are temporary bars. Temporary bars usually prevent you from becoming a citizen for a certain amount of time after you commit the crime.

The “Application for Naturalization” (Form N-400) asks several questions about crimes. You should report all crimes that you have committed including ones that have been expunged (removed from your record) and ones that happened before your 18th birthday. If you do not tell INS about these crimes and we find out about them, you may be denied naturalization (even if the crime itself was not a crime for which your case could be denied).

**Lying.** If you do not tell the truth during your interview, INS may deny your application for lacking good moral character. If INS grants you naturalization and you are later found to have lied during your interview, your citizenship may be revoked.

Please note that if you have committed certain serious crimes, INS may decide to remove you from the United States. If you have questions, you may want to seek advice from an immigrant assistance organization or an immigration attorney before applying.



### EXAMPLES of Things that Might Show a Lack of Good Moral Character

- Any crime against a person with intent to harm
- Any crime against property or the Government that involves “fraud” or evil intent
- Two or more crimes for which the aggregate sentence was 5 years or more
- Violating any controlled substance law of the United States, any state, or any foreign country
- Habitual drunkenness or drunk driving
- Illegal gambling
- Prostitution
- Polygamy (marriage to more than one person at the same time)
- Lying to gain immigration benefits
- Failing to pay court-ordered child support or alimony payments
- Confinement in jail, prison, or similar institution for which the total confinement was 180 days or more during the past 5 years (or 3 years if you are applying based on your marriage to a United States citizen)
- Failing to complete any probation, parole, or suspended sentence before you apply for naturalization
- If you have recently been ordered deported or removed, you are not eligible for citizenship. If you are in removal proceedings, you may not apply for citizenship until the proceedings are complete and you have been allowed to remain in the country as a Permanent Resident.
- Terrorist acts
- Persecution of anyone because of race, religion, national origin, political opinion, or social group





## English and Civics

According to the law, applicants must demonstrate:

- "an understanding of the English language, including an ability to read, write, and speak...simple words and phrases...in ordinary usage in the English language...."
  - "a knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of the history, and of the principles and form of government, of the United States...."
- (b) If you are over 55 and have lived in the United States as a Permanent Resident for periods totaling at least 15 years, you do not have to take the English test. You do have to take the civics test in the language of your choice;
- (c) If you are over 65 and have lived in the United States as a Permanent Resident for periods totaling at least 20 years, you may also take a simpler version of the civics test in the language of your choice.

This means that to be eligible for naturalization, you must be able to read, write, and speak basic English. You must also have a basic knowledge of U.S. History and Government (also known as "civics").

**Exceptions.** Certain applicants, because of age or disability, have different English and civics requirements. Age and disability exceptions are discussed below.

*Age* — There are three important exemptions for testing based on age:

- (a) If you are over 50 and have lived in the United States as a Permanent Resident for periods totaling at least 20 years, you do not have to take the English test. You do have to take the civics test in the language of your choice;

You must meet these requirements at the time you file your application. To qualify for one of these exceptions, your time as a Permanent Resident does not have to be continuous. You are eligible for the exemption as long as your total time residing in the United States (as a Permanent Resident) is at least 15 or 20 years. You may not count time when you were not a Permanent Resident.

*Disability* — If you have a developmental disability or a mental or physical impairment, you may be exempt from the English and civics requirements. To request an exception, you must file a "Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions" (Form N-648) with your application. If you believe you qualify, contact a licensed medical doctor, psychiatrist, or clinical psychologist who will need to complete and sign your N-648.

To apply for a disability exception, your disability:

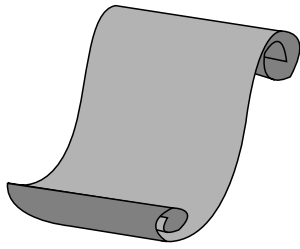
- must be at least 1 year old (or be expected to last 1 year); and
- must not have been caused by illegal drug use.



*A medical exception from the English and civics requirement does not exempt you from taking the Oath of Allegiance to the United States. If you cannot take and understand the meaning of the oath, you are not eligible for citizenship no matter what type of disability you have.*

**Preparing for the Test.** Many schools and community organizations help people prepare for their citizenship test. Some of these programs are very good. However, INS does not review or approve any of these outside classes or materials.

You can find sample civics questions in the back pocket of this *Guide*. You can also find a set of sample sentences similar in structure to the ones you might be asked to write or read aloud during your English test.



## Attachment to the Constitution

All applicants for naturalization must be willing to support and defend the United States and our Constitution. You declare your "attachment" to the United States and our Constitution when you take the Oath of Allegiance. In fact, it is not until you take the Oath of Allegiance that you actually become a U.S. citizen.

**Renounce Foreign Allegiances.** As stated in the Oath, you must renounce all foreign allegiances to become a U.S. citizen.

**Support the Constitution.** You must also be willing to support and defend the principles of the U.S.

Constitution and the laws of the United States

**Serve the United States.** When required by law, you must be willing to (1) fight in the U.S. Armed Forces, (2) perform non-combatant service in the U.S. Armed Forces, and (3) perform civilian service for the United States.

If, because of your religious teachings and beliefs, you are against fighting or serving in the military, INS may exempt you from these requirements. You will need to send a letter with your application requesting a modified oath and explaining why you are unable to take the Oath as it is written above. Please see page 39 for more information about this process.

In addition to your promise to serve the United States when required, INS also considers the following three things when determining if you are truly willing to serve the United States:

*Selective Service* — Male applicants generally need to register with the Selective Service before applying for naturalization. You are exempt from this requirement if you are a woman, if you are a man who was born before January 1, 1960, or if you are a man who did not enter the United States until after your 26th birthday.

## The Oath of Allegiance

*I hereby declare, on oath,  
that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and  
fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of  
whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen;  
that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the  
United States of America against all enemies, foreign and  
domestic;  
that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same;  
that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by  
the law;  
that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the  
United States when required by the law;  
that I will perform work of national importance under civilian  
direction when required by the law; and  
that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or  
purpose of evasion; so help me God.*

If this requirement applies to you, you will need to provide your Selective Service number to INS when you apply. You may get your Selective Service number by calling the Selective Service (1-847-688-6888 or 1-847-688-2576).

If you are a male who was born on or after January 1, 1960, and who lived in the United States between the ages of 18 and 26, but you did not register with the Selective Service before you turned 26, you must do the following:

- Request the Selective Service System's Questionnaire Form by calling 1-847-688-6888 or 1-847-688-2576;
- Complete and return the form to the Selective Service;
- Receive a "status information letter" from the Selective Service; and
- Send the "status information letter" with your application.

If you are a male who has not yet turned 26, you should register with the Selective Service by calling one of the numbers above before applying for naturalization.

*Alien Discharge from the U.S. Armed Forces* — If you ever received an exemption or discharge from the U.S. Armed Forces because you are an alien, you may be ineligible for naturalization.

*Desertion from the U.S. Armed Forces* — If you were ever convicted of desertion from the U.S. Armed Forces, you are ineligible for naturalization. Desertion means that you left military service before you were discharged.



# What to Expect: An Overview of the Naturalization Process



## Preparing to Apply

- Read *A Guide to Naturalization*
- Complete the Naturalization Eligibility Worksheet
- Obtain an Application for Naturalization (Form N-400)



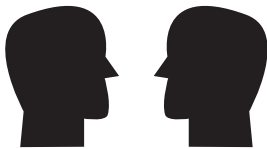
## Completing Your Application and Getting Photographed

- Complete your application
- Get two photographs taken
- Collect the necessary documents
- Send your application, documents, and fee to the appropriate Service Center



## Getting Fingerprinted

- Receive an appointment letter from INS
- Go to the fingerprinting location
- Get your fingerprints taken
- Mail additional documents if INS requests them
- Wait for INS to schedule your interview



## Being Interviewed

- Receive an appointment for your interview
- Go to your local office at the specified time
- Provide additional documents if INS requests them
- Take the English and civics tests
- Answer questions about your application and background
- Receive a decision



## Taking the Oath

- Receive a ceremony date
- Check in at the ceremony
- Return your Permanent Resident Card
- Answer questions about what you have done since your interview
- Take the oath
- Receive your Certificate of Naturalization

# Preparing to Apply



## 1. Read *A Guide to Naturalization*

Reading *A Guide to Naturalization* is the first step in the naturalization process. We realize that some naturalization requirements may be difficult to understand. Many people have questions about naturalization. If you read this *Guide* before beginning the naturalization process, many of your questions will be answered. INS hopes that giving you good information will help you to better prepare your application. Better-prepared applications will result in quicker processing times. It is your responsibility to enter the naturalization process fully informed and ready to provide the necessary information and documents.

## 2. Complete the Naturalization Eligibility Worksheet

Complete the eligibility worksheet in the back pocket of this *Guide* to decide if you are eligible to apply for naturalization. If you do not meet all the requirements, you may save both time and money by waiting until you are eligible to apply.

If you complete the eligibility worksheet and have questions about your eligibility, you should seek advice by:

- calling “Ask Immigration” (see the single page titled “Your Local INS Office” in the back pocket of this *Guide* to see which telephone number to call);
- going to an INS information counter;
- contacting a community immigrant assistance organization; or
- talking to an immigration attorney.

## 3. Obtain an Application for Naturalization (Form N-400)

Once you have completed the eligibility worksheet and believe that you are eligible for naturalization, you should obtain an application. The application is called the “Application for Naturalization” (Form N-400). You may obtain an N-400 by calling the INS Forms Line (1-800-870-3676) or by downloading it from the internet: (<http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/forms/download/n-400.htm>).

# Completing Your Application and Getting Photographed



## 1. Complete your application

Once you have an N-400, you must fill it out completely. INS may ask for additional information if you leave it out of your application. This will delay the processing of your naturalization application.

Please be aware that you will be required to answer questions about your application at your interview. When completing your application, you should answer all questions honestly.

## 2. Get two photographs taken

You should include two color photographs with your application. If you do not send photographs with your application, INS will return the application to you.

Your photographs should be the same size as the sample below.

They must also be:

- unmounted and printed on thin paper, on a white background with a  $\frac{3}{4}$  profile view of the right side of your face; and
- taken within 30 days of the date they are sent to INS.



Finally, your head should be bare (unless you are required to wear a headdress by a religious order).

You should print your name and “A”– number lightly in pencil on the back of each photograph.

For more information on the photograph requirements, see the single page titled “Color Photograph Specifications,” located in the back pocket of this *Guide*.

## 3. Collect the necessary documents

You will need to include copies of several documents with your application.

Use the checklist on the following page to make sure you include the right documents.

Please be sure to send an English translation with any document that is not already in English. The translation must include a statement from the translator that he or she is competent to translate and that the translation is correct.



*The checklist on the following page will tell you when you need to send original documents and when you may send copies. If you must send an original document to INS, remember to make and keep a copy for your records.*



## Documents you need to include with your N-400:

### All applicants must send:

- A photocopy of both sides of your Permanent Resident Card (previously known as Alien Registration Card);
- Two color photographs (¾ frontal image); AND
- A check or money order (for the latest fee see the insert titled "Current Naturalization Fees" in the back pocket of this *Guide*).

### If an attorney or accredited representative is acting on your behalf, send:

- Form G-28, "Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Representative."

### If your current name is different than the name on your Permanent Resident Card, send:

- The document which legally changed your name (marriage license, divorce decree, OR court document)  
OR a detailed explanation of why you use a different name.

### If you are applying for naturalization on the basis of marriage to a U.S. citizen, send:

- Proof that your spouse has been a U.S. citizen for at least the past 3 years (birth certificate, naturalization certificate, certificate of citizenship, copy of the inside of the front cover and signature page of your spouse's valid U.S. passport, OR Form FS240, "Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America");
- Your current marriage certificate;
- Proof of termination of ALL of your spouse's prior marriages (divorce decree OR death certificate); AND
- An original IRS Form 1722 listing tax information for the past 3 years OR copies of the income tax forms you filed for the past 3 years.

### If you were previously married, send:

- Proof of termination of ALL of your prior marriages (divorce decree OR death certificate).

### If you have ever been in the United States military, send:

- An original Form N-426, "Request for Certification of Military or Naval Service;" AND
- An original Form G-325B, "Biographic Information."

### If you have taken a trip outside of the United States that lasted for 6 months or more since becoming a Permanent Resident, send:

- An original IRS Form 1722 listing tax information for the past 5 years (or for the past 3 years if you are applying on the basis of marriage to a U.S. citizen).

### If you have a dependent spouse or children and have been ordered to provide financial support, send:

- Copies of the court or government order to provide financial support; AND
- Evidence that you have complied with the court or government order (cancelled checks, money order receipts, a court or agency printout of child support payments, OR evidence of wage garnishments).

### If you have ever been arrested or detained by any law enforcement officer for any reason and no charges were filed, send:

- An official statement from the arresting agency or applicable court indicating that no charges were filed.

### If you have ever been arrested or detained by any law enforcement officer for any reason and charges were filed, send:

- An original or certified copy of the complete court disposition for each incident (dismissal order, conviction record, OR acquittal order).

### If you have ever been convicted or placed in an alternative sentencing program or rehabilitative program, send:

- The sentencing record for each incident; AND
- Evidence that you completed your sentence (probation record, parole record, OR evidence that you completed an alternative sentencing program or rehabilitative program).

### If you have ever had any arrest or conviction vacated, set aside, sealed, expunged, or otherwise removed from your record, send:

- An original or certified copy of the court order vacating, setting aside, sealing, expunging, or otherwise removing the arrest or conviction.

### If you have ever failed to file an income tax return when it was required by law, send:

- Copies of all correspondence with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) regarding your failure to file.

### If you have any Federal, state, or local taxes that are overdue, send:

- A signed agreement from the IRS, state, or local tax office showing that you have filed a tax return and arranged to pay the taxes you owe;  
AND
- Documentation from the IRS, state, or local tax office showing the current status of your repayment program.

### If you are applying for a disability exception to the testing requirement, send:

- An original Form N-648, "Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions," completed by a licensed medical doctor or licensed clinical psychologist.

### If you did not register with the Selective Service and you 1) are male, 2) are over 26 years old, 3) were born on or after January 1, 1960, and 4) were a Permanent Resident between the ages of 18 and 26, send:

- A "Status Information Letter" from the Selective Service (call 1-847-688-6888 for more information).

#### **4. Send your application, documents, and fee to the appropriate Service Center**

Send your application directly to the Service Center that serves your area. If you try to take or mail your application to a local INS office, it will be returned to you.

The current fee you must send with your application is on the one page insert titled “Current Naturalization Fees” in the back pocket of this *Guide*.

You may file for naturalization up to 3 months before you have met the “continuous residence” requirement. For example, if you are required to be in “continuous residence” for 5 years before you naturalize, you may apply once you have been in “continuous residence” for 4 years and 9 months.

Use the following list to determine where to send your application, documents, and fee:

If you live in Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, Territory of Guam, or the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, send your application to:

**California Service Center**  
**P.O. Box 10400**  
**Laguna Niguel, CA 92607-0400**

■■■■■■■■■■

If you live in Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, or Wyoming, send your application to:

**Nebraska Service Center**  
**P.O. Box 7400**  
**Lincoln, NE 68501-7400**

■■■■■■■■■■

If you live in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, or Texas, send your application to:

**Texas Service Center**  
**P.O. Box 851204**  
**Mesquite, TX 75185-1204**

■■■■■■■■■■

If you live in Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, D.C., West Virginia, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or the U.S. Virgin Islands, send your application to:

**Vermont Service Center**  
**75 Lower Weldon Street**  
**St. Albans, VT 05479-0001**

■■■■■■■■■■

If you are overseas and filing an N-400, you should send your application to the Service Center that serves the INS office where you want to be interviewed. For example, if you want to be interviewed in the Honolulu office, you should send your application to the California Service Center.

# Getting Fingerprinted



## 1. Receive an appointment letter from INS

Once you have filed your application with INS, you will receive a letter from INS telling you where and when to have your fingerprints taken. In most cases, the letter will tell you to go to an Application Support Center or a police station. A van will come to certain areas to fingerprint applicants who are located far away from the nearest fingerprinting location. Your notice from INS will tell you if a van serves your area.

## 2. Go to the fingerprinting location

Take your notice letter from INS, your Permanent Resident Card, and another form of identification (drivers license, passport, state identification card) with you. Your second form of identification should have your photograph on it.

## 3. Get your fingerprints taken

Currently, most sites are using ink to take fingerprints. Eventually, every fingerprinting site will use electronic technology to take fingerprints without ink.

In order to do a criminal background check, INS will send your fingerprints to the FBI. In some cases, the FBI may reject your fingerprints because of the quality of the prints. INS is working hard to fix this problem. If the FBI rejects your fingerprints, INS will notify you and schedule a second visit to the fingerprinting site. If your fingerprints are rejected, you will not be asked to pay again. If the FBI rejects your fingerprints twice, you will be asked to provide police clearances for each place you have lived in the past 5 years. You will need to contact the police departments in the places you have lived to get these clearances.

## 4. Mail additional documents if INS requests them

While the FBI is checking your background, INS will be locating your immigration file. Sometimes, INS may need additional documents from you before we can schedule your interview. If INS needs more information from you, we will send you a letter telling you what we need and where to send it.

## 5. Wait for INS to schedule your interview

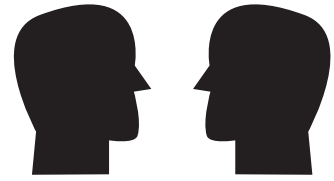
Once everything is ready, INS will schedule you for an interview. At this time, INS will send you an interview notice in the mail that will tell you the date, time, and place of your interview.



### Important

*Applicants who are 75 years or older at the time of filing do not have to be fingerprinted. Applicants who are overseas will be instructed by INS to be fingerprinted at a U.S. consular office.*

# Being Interviewed



## 1. Receive an appointment for your interview

You will receive a notice in the mail telling you when and where you must appear for your interview. You will not receive a second notice. If you must reschedule your interview, you should contact the office where your interview is scheduled by mail as soon as possible. You should explain your situation and ask to have your interview rescheduled. When a new date has been set, INS will send you a new interview notice.



*To make sure you get your interview notice, you must notify INS every time your address changes.*

## 2. Go to your local office at the specified time

You should appear at the office where you are to be interviewed before the time of your interview. Many INS offices are crowded. So unless you need to, you may not want to bring other people with you to your interview.

If you fail to appear at your interview without contacting INS, your case will be “administratively closed.” If your case is “administratively closed” and you do not contact INS within 1 year to reopen your case, your application will be denied.



*Rescheduling an interview may add several months to the naturalization process, so try to attend your original interview date.*

## 3. Provide additional documents if INS requests them

In some cases, INS may ask you to bring additional documents to the interview. These documents will be listed on your appointment letter. If you fail to bring the necessary documents, your case may be delayed or denied.

## 4. Take the English and civics tests

During your interview, your ability to read, write, and speak English will be tested (unless you are exempt from the English requirements). You will also be given a civics test (to test your knowledge and understanding of U.S. History and Government) unless you are exempt.

**English.** Your English will be tested in one of the following ways:

- (1) **Reading.** In order to test your reading ability you may be asked:
  - to read out loud parts of the N-400;
  - to read a set of civics questions and then answer them; or

- to read several simple sentences out loud.
- (2) **Writing.** In order to test your writing skills, the INS officer will ask you to write one or two simple sentences (see the sample sentences in the back pocket of this *Guide*).
  - (3) **Speaking.** Your speaking ability will be tested when you answer questions about yourself and your application during your interview.

**Civics.** During your interview, you will be asked to verbally answer a set of civics question or to take a written multiple-choice test with up to 20 questions (see the sample civics questions in the back pocket of this *Guide*).

## 5. Answer questions about your application and background

At your interview, an INS officer will place you under oath and then ask you about:

- your background;
- evidence supporting your case;
- your place and length of residence;
- your character;
- your attachment to the Constitution; and
- your willingness to take an Oath of Allegiance to the United States.

In addition, the INS officer may ask you some other questions to make sure that you meet all the eligibility requirements. Be prepared to explain any differences between your application and the other documents you have provided to INS.



*Remember that you are under oath. Always tell the truth during your interview. If you lie during your interview, you will be denied citizenship. If you are granted citizenship but then INS finds out that you lied on your application or during your interview, your citizenship may be taken away.*

A representative may accompany you to your interview if you have sent a “Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Representative” (Form G-28) with your application.

Also, if you are exempt from the English requirements, you may bring an interpreter to the interview. If you have any disabilities, you may bring a family member or legal guardian with you at the discretion of the INS officer.

## 6. Receive a decision

After your interview, your application for citizenship will be granted, denied, or continued.

**Granted.** Sometimes INS can tell you if you will be granted citizenship at the end of your interview. In some cases, you may be able to take an oath ceremony the same day as your interview (where available). Otherwise, you will receive a notice telling you when and where your oath ceremony will be.

**Continued.** The INS officer may also “continue” your case. This means your case is put on hold. If your case is continued, it will add time to your naturalization process. The most common reasons for continuation are (1) failing the English and civics tests, and (2) failing to give INS the documents we need.

When your case is continued, you will be asked to do one of two things. You will either be asked (1) to come to a second interview, usually within 60-90 days of the first interview or (2) to provide additional documents. If you do not do what INS asks, your application may be denied.

**Denied.** INS may also deny your application for naturalization. If INS denies your application for naturalization, you will receive a written notice telling you why.

There is an administrative review process for applicants who receive denials. If you feel that you have been wrongly denied citizenship, you may request a hearing with an INS officer. Your denial letter will explain how to request a hearing and will include the form you need. The form for filing an appeal is the “Request for Hearing on a Decision in Naturalization Proceedings under Section 336 of the Act” (Form N-336).



# Taking the Oath



## 1. Receive a ceremony date

If INS approves your application for naturalization, you must attend a ceremony and take the Oath of Allegiance to the United States. INS will notify you by mail of the time and date of your ceremony. The notice INS sends you is called the “Notice of Naturalization Oath Ceremony” (Form N-445). In some cases, INS may give you the option to take the Oath on the same day as your interview. If you decide to take a “same-day” oath, INS will ask you to come back to the office later that day. At this time, you will take the Oath and receive your Certificate of Naturalization.

## 2. Check in at the ceremony

When you arrive at the ceremony, you will be asked to check in with INS. Try to arrive early. Remember that often there are many other people being naturalized with you who must also be checked in.

If you cannot attend the ceremony on the day you are scheduled, you should return the INS notice (Form N-445) to your local office. You should include a letter explaining why you cannot be at the ceremony and asking INS to reschedule you.

## 3. Return your Permanent Resident Card

You will be required to return your Permanent Resident Card to INS when you check in for your oath ceremony. You will no longer need your Permanent Resident Card because you will receive your Certificate of Naturalization at the ceremony.

## 4. Answer questions about what you have done since your interview

If more than a day has passed between your interview and the ceremony, you will need to answer several questions. These questions will be located on the back of the notice INS sends you (Form N-445).

Some of the questions on the back of the N-445 include: “Have you traveled outside the United States?” and “Have you claimed exemption from military service?” You should read the questions carefully and mark your answers before you arrive at the ceremony.



*Answer the questions on the back of the Form N-445 only for the time since your interview.*

## 5. Take the oath

You are not a citizen until you have taken the Oath of Allegiance. You will take the Oath during the ceremony. An official will read each part of the Oath slowly and ask you to repeat his or her words. The Oath can be found on page 28 of this *Guide*.

**Changes to the Oath.** You may take the Oath, without the words “to bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law...” if you provide enough evidence that you are opposed to fighting on behalf of the United States because of your religious training and beliefs.

If you provide enough evidence and INS determines that you are opposed to any type of service in the Armed Forces because of your religious training and beliefs, you may omit the words “to perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by law.”

If INS determines you are unable to swear the Oath using the words “on oath,” you may replace these words with “and solemnly affirm.” Finally, if INS determines you are unable to use the words “so help me God” because of your religious training or beliefs, you may omit these words.

If you believe you qualify for a modified Oath, you should include a letter explaining your situation with your application. INS may also ask you to provide a document from your religious organization explaining its beliefs and stating that you are a member in good standing.

**Hereditary Titles.** If you have any hereditary titles or positions of nobility, you must give them up at the oath ceremony.

## 6. Receive your Certificate of Naturalization

Once you have taken the Oath, you will receive your Certificate of Naturalization. You may use this document as proof that you are a U.S. citizen.



*We strongly recommend that you obtain a U.S. passport soon after your naturalization ceremony.*

A passport serves as evidence of citizenship and is easier to carry around than a Certificate of Naturalization. In addition, if you lose your Certificate of Naturalization, it can take up to 1 year to receive a new certificate. If you do not have a passport, you will not have evidence of citizenship during the time you are waiting for a new certificate. You can often get an application for a passport at your oath ceremony or at most post offices.



# Customer Service Standards

## **You should expect INS staff to be:**

- Professional
- Courteous
- Knowledgeable

## **You should expect the naturalization process to be:**

- Fair
- Consistent
- Timely

## **You should expect information on the naturalization process and on the status of your application to be:**

- Accurate
- Readily available

## **INS also expects certain things from you. You should:**

- Treat INS employees with courtesy
- Read *A Guide to Naturalization*
- Read and follow the instructions on your application
- Be prepared at each step of the process

## **Making a Customer Service Complaint**

INS realizes that in some offices it is taking a long time to process applications. We are currently working at reducing processing times.

If you have a complaint about the way that an INS employee treated you, you should speak with that employee's direct supervisor if possible. If your complaint is not addressed or you could not speak with the supervisor, you may write a letter to the Director of your District Office. Filing a complaint will not affect your eligibility for naturalization.

You can also use the "Report of Complaint" (Form I-847). This form is a pre-addressed postcard that is sent to INS Headquarters in Washington, DC. You may order the I-847 from the INS Forms Line (1-800-870-3676).





# Where to Go for Help

There are many resources available to naturalization applicants. Some of these are:

**INS Telephone Centers.** If you want more information about naturalization, you may call the “Ask Immigration” telephone number given on the one-page insert titled “Your Local Office” in the back pocket of this *Guide*.

**Community Based Organizations (CBOs).** In most communities, there are organizations that assist immigrants who want to become naturalized. These organizations often offer classes in English and civics. They may also help immigrants complete their applications. CBOs may charge a fee or they may offer their services free of charge.

You may locate a CBO by contacting your local INS office. You may also look in the phone book under “Immigration and Naturalization” or “Immigration and Naturalization Consultants” or talk to other immigrants who have been naturalized.



*You should be certain that the organization or attorney you contact is reliable and has a good reputation. One way to be sure of the quality of a CBO is to ask them for references or if the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) accredits them.*

**Immigration Attorneys.** If you have questions about your eligibility, you may want to talk to an immigration attorney. Attorneys are usually listed in the phone book under “Lawyers” or “Attorneys.” In many cases, the phone book also has a directory of attorneys by the type of law they practice. You may be able to find attorneys who assist immigrants by looking in the directory under “Immigration and Naturalization.”

**INS Information Counters.** If you have questions that have not been answered either by this *Guide* or by the other resources listed here, you may always go to the information counter at your local INS office. There you may speak directly to an INS employee.



# Glossary of Terms

**A Guide to Naturalization** – The brochure you are reading is *A Guide to Naturalization*.

**Aggravated Felony** – Usually refers to particularly serious crimes. If you have committed an aggravated felony, you may be permanently ineligible for naturalization. The Immigration and Nationality Act and the laws in each state determine what is considered an aggravated felony.

**Application Support Center (ASC)** – INS offices where applicants usually have their fingerprints taken. Once you have filed your application with INS, you will receive a notice telling you which ASC serves your area.

**AR-11, Alien's Change of Address Card** – This is the form you use to tell INS when you have moved to a new address. The AR-11 is pre-printed with INS' address. It is very important to tell INS when your address changes. This way you will receive any information we send you, including interview notices and requests for additional documents.

**Certificate of Naturalization** – A certificate given at the oath ceremony. It serves as proof of your citizenship. INS also recommends getting a United States passport as evidence that you are a citizen.

**Community Based Organization (CBO)** – Organizations that assist immigrants who are new to the United States or who are going through the naturalization process. Many CBOs will help you complete your application and guide you through the naturalization process. CBOs may charge a fee or offer their services free of charge.

**Constitution** – The supreme law of the United States. It may be changed only through amendment by Congress and ratification by three-fourths of the states.

**Continued** – One of three things that may happen to your case after your interview (granted, denied, or continued). If your case is continued, it is put on hold until further action is taken by you or INS. If your case is continued, INS may ask you to provide more documents or to come to an additional interview.

**Continuous Residence** – An important requirement for naturalization. "Continuous residence" may be broken if you take a single trip out of the country that lasts for 6 months or more.

**Denied** – One of three things that may happen to your case after your interview (granted, denied, or continued). If your application is denied, you have not met the eligibility requirements for naturalization.

**Districts** – The geographic divisions of the United States used by INS. There are 33 INS districts in the United States.

**G-28, Notice of Entry of Appearance as Attorney or Representative** – The form you must file with your N-400 if you wish to bring a representative with you to your INS interview.

**Good Moral Character** – Good moral character is an important eligibility requirement for naturalization. When determining if an applicant has "good moral character," INS considers such things as honesty and criminal records.

**Granted** – One of three things that may happen to your case after your interview (granted, denied, or continued). If you are eligible, your application will be approved or "granted." After you take the Oath of Allegiance, you will be a United States citizen.

**I-847, Report of Complaint** – You may use this form if you have a complaint about the service at INS. The I-847 is a postcard that is addressed to INS Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

**INS Forms Line** – The INS Forms Line distributes all forms for immigration and naturalization. You can call the Forms Line at 1-800-870-3676 to have any INS forms sent to you, including the “Application for Naturalization” (Form N-400).

**INS Information Counter** – INS offices have information counters staffed by INS employees called Immigration Information Officers (IIOs). IIOs are available to answer questions you have about naturalization.

**N-400, Application for Naturalization** – The N-400 is the application that all people 18 years of age or older use to become naturalized.

**N-445, Notice of Naturalization Oath Ceremony** – If you are approved for naturalization, you will receive an N-445 telling you when and where to attend your swearing in ceremony. On the back of the form will be several questions that you must answer before you check in at the ceremony.

**N-470, Application to Preserve Residence for Naturalization Purposes** – The N-470 is a form that can be used by a small group of people who leave the country for longer than 1 year to maintain their “continuous residence.”

**N-565, Application for Replacement Naturalization/ Citizenship Document** – If you lose your Certificate of Naturalization or your Certificate of Citizenship, you may file an N-565 to get a new one. This process may take up to 1 year, so INS advises naturalized citizens to also get a United States passport as evidence of their United States citizenship.

**N-600, Application for Certificate of Citizenship** – If you are a citizen by birth or by law, you may file an N-600 to get a Certificate of Citizenship. This applies to people who were born outside of the United States to United States citizen parents and to people who become citizens based on their parents’ naturalization.

**N-648, Medical Certification for Disability Exceptions** – The form used to apply for a disability exemption. If you have a qualifying medical disability that prevents you from fulfilling the English and civics requirement, you must have a certified medical doctor, psychiatrist, or psychologist complete and sign an N-648. You must submit the N-648 with your application.

**Naturalization** – Naturalization is the process by which immigrants become citizens.

**Naturalization Eligibility Worksheet** – A tool that you may use to determine if you are eligible for naturalization. There is an eligibility worksheet in the back pocket of this *Guide*. You do not send this worksheet to INS at any time; it is for your use only.

**Oath Ceremony** – To become a naturalized citizen of the United States, you must attend an oath ceremony where you take the Oath of Allegiance to the United States.

**Oath of Allegiance to the United States** – The oath you take to become a citizen. When you take the Oath of Allegiance to the United States, you are promising to give up your allegiance to other countries and to support and defend the United States, the Constitution, and our laws. You must be able to take and understand the Oath of Allegiance in order to become a naturalized citizen.

**Permanent Resident** – A Permanent Resident is a person who has been granted permanent resident status in the United States and has (or is waiting for) a Permanent Resident Card.

**Permanent Resident Card** – The Permanent Resident Card is an INS document that identifies a person as a Permanent Resident. The Permanent Resident Card may be identified as either Form I-151 or Form I-551. The Permanent Resident Card used to be known as the Alien Registration Card and “green card.”

**Physical Presence** – Physical presence in the United States is an important eligibility requirement. Most naturalization applicants must spend a specified amount of time in the United States in order to meet the “physical presence” requirement for naturalization. Except in a few cases, time spent outside of the United States, even

if you go to Canada or Mexico briefly, does not count toward your “physical presence.”

**Port-of-Entry** – The Port-of-Entry is the place where you legally entered the country or where you were granted an adjustment of status to a Permanent Resident.

**Selective Service** – The Selective Service is the Federal agency responsible for providing manpower to the United States Armed Forces in an emergency. You must register with the Selective Service if you (1) are male, (2) are over 26 years old, (3) were born on or after January 1, 1960, and (4) were a Permanent Resident between the ages of 18

and 26. For more information call the Selective Service at 1-847-688-6888.

**Service Center** – There are four INS Service Centers in the United States. You must send your naturalization applications to one of these Service Centers. See page 35 for more information about the Service Center to which you send your application.

**United States Passport** – A United States passport is a document that identifies you as a United States citizen. All naturalized citizens are encouraged to get a passport as soon as possible after they are naturalized.