



Becoming a U.S. Citizen: An Overview of the Naturalization Process

(music)

Welcome to the United States. Every year, many people come to the United States from countries all over the world.

“I was only ten when my family immigrated to the United States from Africa.”

“My daughter married an American.”

“When she became a U.S. citizen, she brought her mother and me to the United States.”

“We now own a small business in our community.”

“I came to the United States because I want to have a better life, especially for my children.”

Most of you can apply to become U.S. citizens after living in the United States for 5 years, or 3 years if you are married to a U.S. citizen. If you decide to become a citizen, here are some of the benefits you will enjoy:

- You can vote in elections, including choosing a President.
- You will have a U.S passport for travel.
- It will be easier to help your family immigrate.

The process of becoming a U.S. citizen is called naturalization. There are several steps in this process, including filing an Application for Naturalization, taking the naturalization test, and living in the United States as a legal permanent resident for 5 years, or 3 years if you are married to a U.S. citizen.

Even if you are not eligible to apply for naturalization right now, there are things you can do now to make sure you can become a citizen when you are ready. First, you need to learn English. You must show that you can speak, read, and write basic English to pass the naturalization test.

“In my English class, I learned many things.”

“Not just how to speak and read English, but about how other immigrants succeeded in America.”

“It made things easier for me and my family.”

Second, you need to learn about U.S. history and government. This is also called civics and is an important part of the naturalization test. In the United States, citizens play an important role in government, and you need to learn about this role. You also need to learn about the rights and responsibilities U.S. citizens have.

“In the United States, citizens can express their opinions freely, travel freely, and go to any church they choose.”

“Many people in other countries don’t have those freedoms.”



You can get help from the website of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (also called USCIS). By visiting www.uscis.gov, you can get:

- Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants. This guide will help you get settled in America and show you many ways to get the help you need. It gives suggestions for getting a job, finding a place to live, and sending your children to school, among many other topics.
- Civics Flash Cards. These study cards have sample questions and answers for the civics topics you need to know for the citizenship test.
- Quick Civics Lessons. These are short lessons about U.S. history and government. They are also available on audio CD.
- Links to websites that can help you find an English and civics class near you.
- A Guide to Naturalization. This guide will show you how to apply to become a U.S. citizen. It covers all steps in the naturalization process, requirements, and forms you need to file.

There are other things you must do now to be sure you can qualify for naturalization when you are ready to apply. You must:

- Pay income tax.
- When you get a job, you must pay taxes to the federal government. You may also have to pay taxes to your state and local governments. These taxes are called “income tax.”
- Sign up for the Selective Service. If you are a man between the ages of 18 and 26, you must sign up with the Selective Service for possible service in the U.S. Armed Forces. Registering does not mean you will be called to serve in the military, but you must sign up to say that you are willing to serve.
- Let USCIS know whenever you move or change your address.
- Maintain continuous residence in the United States. Continuous residence means you actually have lived in the U.S. as a permanent resident without going on a long trip outside the U.S. This rule applies to the 5 years before you apply for naturalization, or 3 years if you are married to a U.S. citizen. If you leave the U.S. for more than 6 months on any one trip, you may break your continuous residence. If you leave the U.S. for more than 12 months on any one trip, you are breaking your continuous residence, and you will have to start over again to be able to naturalize.
- Maintain physical presence in the United States. Physical presence means you have been inside the U.S. for a certain number of days before you apply for naturalization. You must be inside the U.S. for 30 months in the 5 years before you apply, or 18 months in the past 3 years if you are married to a U.S. citizen.
- Too many trips outside the U.S. – even if they are short trips – may mean you have been outside the country for too many total days, and you may not have enough days to meet the physical presence requirement.

For more information about these requirements, take a look at A Guide to Naturalization and A Guide for New Immigrants at uscis.gov at www.uscis.gov.

Just as there are some things you must do to be sure that you will be eligible for naturalization, there are also some things you must NOT do. For example, avoid behavior that might show lack of good moral character. To become a U.S. citizen, you need to show that you have “good moral character.” Some



examples of what might be considered a lack of good moral character are: being drunk most of the time, engaging in prostitution, and lying to get immigration or naturalization benefits.

Remember to always respect and obey the law. Do not commit crimes. When you apply for naturalization, you must report all crimes you have committed. Some minor crimes will not keep you from becoming a citizen, but if you lie about your criminal record, your lying may keep you from becoming a citizen. Also, if you commit certain crimes, you can never become a U.S. citizen. These crimes include: murder; rape; sexual abuse of a child; violent assault; trafficking in drugs, firearms, or people; and crimes defined as an aggravated felony. Generally, these are violent crimes that have a prison sentence of at least one year.

After you have been in the United States as a legal permanent resident for 5 years (or 3 years, if you are married to a U.S. citizen), you can start the process of becoming a U.S. citizen.

“In the United State, I have more chances to be what I want to be. So, I want to stay here and become a citizen.”

“I came to the United States for freedom and a chance to succeed.”

“I want my son to grow up in freedom too.”

“I’m glad I came to the United States. My neighbors make me feel at home.”

“And it’s better for my family. Becoming a U.S. citizen is important to me.”

For more information about preparing to become a U.S. citizen, visit www.uscis.gov.

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