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The Naturalization Guide

A plain-English guide to becoming a U.S. citizen — eligibility, the N-400 process, the civics/English test, and the questions to ask before your interview.

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Understanding Naturalization Eligibility

Most green card holders become eligible to apply for naturalization after 5 years of continuous permanent residence in the United States, or after 3 years if married to and living with a U.S. citizen. Beyond the residence period, USCIS generally reviews continuous residence, physical presence in the U.S. during that period, residence in your state or district before filing, and good moral character.

Current service members and many veterans may qualify for expedited naturalization, sometimes without the standard residence requirement at all, depending on the type and timing of their service.

The N-400 Process, Step by Step

- 1 File Form N-400 with supporting documents and the filing fee.
- 2 Attend a biometrics appointment, if required.
- 3 Attend your naturalization interview, including the civics and English test.
- 4 Receive a decision — approved, continued, or denied.
- 5 If approved, attend an oath ceremony to formally become a citizen.

Document Checklist

Being organized before you file can meaningfully reduce delays. Here is a general starting checklist:

- Green card (permanent resident card)
- Valid passport or other government-issued photo ID
- Federal tax returns or transcripts for the required period
- Proof of continuous residence (leases, utility bills, employment records)
- Detailed travel history for trips outside the U.S.
- Marriage certificate, divorce decrees, and children's documents, if applicable
- Passport-style photographs, if currently required
- Filing fee or a fee waiver request, if you qualify

The Civics & English Test, Generally

The test generally covers American government, American history, and civics topics such as geography and symbols, along with reading, writing, and speaking English. Some applicants may qualify for age- and residence-based exceptions, or a disability waiver — worth confirming with a member of our staff before your interview.

Questions to Ask a Citizenship Attorney

- Based on my history, when am I actually eligible to file?
- Could anything in my record affect my good moral character review?
- Do I need to report any past travel or address changes I haven't disclosed yet?
- Am I likely to qualify for any civics or English test exceptions?
- What happens to my other citizenship if I naturalize?
- Does my child's status change automatically once I naturalize?

Ready to Talk to Someone?

Call {{PPC_NUMBER}} for a free, no-obligation consultation, or visit citizenships.id to use our free eligibility tools and AI assistant.

Legal Disclaimer: This guide provides general information about U.S. naturalization and citizenship for educational purposes only. It is not legal advice and does not create an attorney-client relationship. Naturalization eligibility, USCIS processing times, and interview outcomes are case-specific and depend on your individual immigration history and current USCIS rules, which vary by field office and change over time. Citizenships.id is not a law firm. For advice about your specific situation, consult a licensed attorney.