

A blue geometric pattern background consisting of various shades of blue triangles and polygons, creating a textured, crystalline effect.

Teaching to the Test: A Practical Guide to Preparation for the Citizenship Interview

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Agenda

1. About The ILC and My Background
2. Goals of the Presentation
3. Citizenship Interview Basics
4. General and Specific Methodologies
5. Five Keys to Success
6. Interview Simulation
7. Postscript

The Immigrant Learning Center (The ILC)

1992

The ILC is started through the vision of Founder and CEO Diane Portnoy (right) to provide free English classes for foreign-born adults – more than 11,500 to date.



2003

The ILC Public Education Institute is established to counter anti-immigrant sentiment via research, studies, articles, books, web archives, and webinars.

The Institute for Immigration Research at George Mason University

2012

Launched the [Institute for Immigration Research](#) at George Mason University, with a multi-disciplinary immigration focus.



My Background

- Citizenship instructor at The ILC for the past 6 1/2 years
- Teach full classes, small groups, and individual students
- Students range from low to moderate to high literacy
- Specialize in final interview preparation
- Work onsite and remotely
- Create targeted materials
- Conduct professional workshops

High-Level Goals for the Presentation

- **Demystify** the **entire** process
- Illustrate what I mean by “**demystify**,” “**entire process**,” and “**teaching to the test**”
- Explore techniques and materials to facilitate that approach
- Overall success rate vs. ILC results, given low-literacy students and multi-level classes

Attendee Goals for the Presentation

- **Steps** in interview process.
- How to gauge a student's **level of fluency** for the test.
- What are the **priorities**: fluency, civics, comprehension?
- The best way to **prepare students** for the interview., including low literacy students.
- How to make the **content engaging and interactive**, especially when **online**.
- How are **reading and writing** portions conducted?
- **Practice interviews as a group activity?**
- How to anticipate **legal or personal hurdles?**
- Are there **marriage-specific issues?**

- **Resource** material and examples.
- **New options** for review of the test.
- **Test updates.**

Citizenship Interview Basics

The Citizenship Interview *currently* consists of the following four components:

1. **Civics:** Must answer six questions correctly from a maximum of ten
2. **Reading:** Must read one sentence correctly from a maximum of three
3. **Writing:** Must write one sentence correctly from a maximum of three
4. **Conversation:** Must answer questions from the Personal and Part 12 Sections of the N-400 Citizenship Application

General Program Methodology

- Confirm the student's immigration status (green card date, application submitted?)
- Assess students for their English fluency and relevant knowledge
- Provide instruction in the key vertical areas (i.e., civics, reading, writing, conversation) based on that assessment
- Teach students to apply what they have learned in practice interviews

Specific Program Methodology: Five Keys to Success

1. Simulate and practice the entire interview:
“Before, During, and After” Specifics
2. Engage in "Necessary Overkill"
3. Tailor the interview to the student
4. Conduct a series of mock interviews
5. Follow-up

1. Simulate and practice the entire interview

- ✓ **Before:** Virtual walk-through, documents to bring, lawyer pros and cons

Required Documents

Appointment letter

Green card

Passport(s)

ID (if available)

Optional Documents As Necessary

Marriage certificate(s)

Divorce and/or death certificate(s)

Children's birth certificate(s)

Spouse's citizenship certificate



1. Simulate and practice the entire interview

- ✓ **During:** Oath; green card, passport, state ID; photo, fingerprints; civics, reading, writing, application Q & A

Techniques and Hints

- Don't lie, don't guess
- Left/right + index finger
- Pronouns (he/she)
- Question words (when vs. where vs. how long), emphasize in civics
- Listen-Think-Speak
- Scramble civics, practice all 100
- Reading and writing: most frequent sentences, key vocabulary
- Low- and multi-level literacy
- Engagement: maps, photos, multiples (states, holidays), Jeopardy-style, humor



1. Simulate and practice the entire interview

- ✓ **After:** Applicant reviews and signs off on personal info, receives results form, learns about naturalization ceremony

1. Simulate and practice the entire interview
- 2. Engage in "Necessary Overkill"**

2. Engage in "Necessary Overkill"

- ✓ Ask more questions and meanings than the officer
- ✓ Part 12 questions: "No" (1-44) and "Yes" (45-50)
- ✓ "Easy" vs "Hard"

1. Simulate and practice the entire interview
2. Engage in "Necessary Overkill"
- 3. Tailor the interview to the student**

3. Tailor the interview to the student

- ✓ Review the application
- ✓ Identify vulnerable points
- ✓ Prepare the student to answer relevant personal questions

3. Tailor the interview to the student

Key Application Areas: Personal

Basis: Green card for 5 years vs. 3 years

Dates and names

Work and school

Marriage(s) for both applicant and spouse

Children

Travel history: cumulative, long trips (documentation)

Maximum Absence (5 years) $365 \times 5 = 1,825/2 = \mathbf{912.5 \text{ Days}}$

Maximum Absence (3 years) $365 \times 3 = 1,095/2 = \mathbf{547.5 \text{ Days}}$

180 Days = Single Trip Continuous Maximum

3. Tailor the interview to the student

Key Application Areas: Part 12

“Yes” to “No” questions (1-44)

“No” to “Yes” questions (45-50)

Taxes

Organizations

Military background

Arrested/Cited/Detained: definitions

Meanings

It is important for the student to at least hear and recognize the questions

1. Simulate and practice the entire interview
2. Engage in "Necessary Overkill"
3. Tailor the Interview to the student
- 4. Conduct a series of mock interviews**

4. Conduct a series of mock interviews

- ✓ Teaching mode
- ✓ Interview mode
- ✓ Interview mode (with masks during pandemic)
- ✓ One-on-one vs. group practice

1. Simulate and practice the entire interview
2. Engage in "Necessary Overkill"
3. Tailor the Interview to the Student
4. Conduct a series of mock interviews

5. Follow-up

5. Follow-up

- ✓ Debrief student
- ✓ Write and distribute comprehensive summary
- ✓ Invite student to return to class to describe the interview
- ✓ Modify script, if necessary

6. Interview Simulation

Emilly Vieira from Brazil:

- Applied 18 months ago
- Teaching Mode

**7. Postscript:
Some Online Web Site Enhancements
(uscis.gov)**

- Change of address
- Text ahead for callbacks
- Request appointment
- Request new access code
- Reschedule biometrics appointment

7. Postscript: Proposed Interview Redesign (Q4 2024)

- Civics: multiple choice, pros and cons
- Speaking: describe pictures, pros and cons
- Trial tests

More Resources

USCIS Citizenship Practice Test, Interview and Application Resources
on The ILC's Educator Resource Hub: <https://www.ilctr.org/uscis-citizenship-application-practice-test-and-interview/>

- Applying for Citizenship videos
- Preparing for the Civics Exam videos
- Study Table for the Civics Portion of the U.S. Naturalization Test
- And more!

More Resources and Forms

Web Sites

- ILC (ilctr.org)
- Project Citizenship (projectcitizenship.org)
- MIRA (miracoalition.org)
- USCIS (uscis.gov)
- USCIS (uscis.gov/citizenship)

Forms

- N-400: Citizenship Application
- N-648: Request for Medical Waiver
- N-600: Citizenship Application for Minor Children
- N-14: Request for Evidence



**Thank
you!**

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