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Citizenship Applicants to Face New Civics Test and Tighter Oversight Under USCIS 2025 Reforms

Effective Oct. 20, USCIS will require applicants to pass a reinstated 2020-style civics test while implementing tougher eligibility checks, moral character standards, & stricter reviews of disability exceptions in a broader modernization of naturalization

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U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has formally reinstated a revised version of the naturalization civics test, marking the first step in a multi-phase reform effort aimed at strengthening civic knowledge and reinforcing statutory requirements for American citizenship.

On September 18, 2025, USCIS published a final notice confirming the implementation of the updated test. Beginning October 20, 2025, applicants who file Form N-400 will be required to

take the new version of the civics test. Those who file before the deadline will continue to take the 2008 version.

Key Features of the 2025 Civics Test

The revised exam restores the 2020 format, which includes:

- A bank of 128 civics questions.
- A 20-question oral test, with applicants needing at least 12 correct answers to pass.
- A streamlined interview procedure that allows officers to stop once an applicant has passed or failed.

The English-language portion of the naturalization test remains unchanged.

USCIS announced that updated study materials and educational resources will be provided before the new exam takes effect.

Broader Reforms Announced September 16

The changes to the civics test are part of a larger modernization initiative unveiled by USCIS on September 16, 2025. In a proposed rule published in the Federal Register, the agency outlined several adjustments intended to deepen applicants' understanding of U.S. history, government, and civic values, while tightening other areas of the naturalization process.

Among the measures:

- Stricter standards for demonstrating good moral character, including disqualification for unlawful voting or misrepresentation of citizenship status.
- Increased scrutiny of disability exceptions.
- More thorough neighborhood investigations to confirm eligibility.

Looking Ahead

According to USCIS, these reforms are designed to align the naturalization process more closely with statutory requirements and ensure that new citizens have a stronger grounding in civic principles.

The final rule reinstating the 2020-style civics test was published September 18. Additional phases of reform are expected in the coming months as USCIS continues its overhaul of the naturalization process.

