

Form N-400 Glossary

Simple English Definitions for Challenging Words and Phrases on the Form N-400 Application for Naturalization

About the Form N-400 Glossary

The purpose of this Glossary is to help immigrants pass the USCIS Speaking test at their naturalization interviews. Part of the interview consists of the adjudicating officer asking questions about the applicant's Form N-400 Application for Naturalization. Officers occasionally ask applicants to define words or phrases on the Form N-400 to verify that the applicant has understood the question.

Here is an example:

Officer: Have you ever been a prostitute?

Applicant: No.

Officer: What is a "prostitute?"

Applicant: a person who has sex with someone for money

Many of the words and phrases on the N-400 are particularly challenging to English learners. This glossary will help applicants by providing simple English definitions for words and phrases that they are likely to find challenging. The Glossary can be used by citizenship instructors in class or by immigrants studying for their interviews on their own.

Organization of the Glossary

- Pages 2-7: Words and phrases that occur in various parts of the Form N-400
- Pages 8- 12: Words and phrases that occur in Part 12. Part 12 contains numerous questions related to an applicant's moral character, and is the section of the N-400 that is usually the most difficult for learners. Therefore, citizenship instructors often teach the vocabulary and concepts in Part 12 over several classes. Having the words and phrases from Part 12 in a separate section of the Glossary will facilitate teaching Part 12.

Note: This Glossary corresponds to the Form N-400 Application for Naturalization expiring 9/30/2022

Abjure - reject

Accommodation - extra help

Adjudication - a final decision on a legal matter or a court case

Advocate - agree with, recommend, support and tell others about an idea

Alien - someone who is not a US citizen

Alimony - money that you have to pay regularly to a former wife or husband after a divorce

Allegiance - loyalty to a person, country, or belief

Alternative sentencing/rehabilitative program - punishment penalty decided by law instead of jail

Annulled - marriage officially and legally ended as if it had never happened

Applicable - if it affects or applies to you

Armed Forces - military responsible for defending the United States

Arrested - taken to jail by the police

Authorize - give permission to an individual, a group, or an organization to provide facts

Bear arms - to own or use a gun

Bear true faith - to believe in and follow

Blind - medically unable to see

Certify under penalty of perjury - promise under law that something is true

Charge - when the police give a formal statement that you have done something illegal

Child Support - money that a husband/father or wife/mother is required to pay to support a child after a divorce

Children - sons and/or daughters

Cite/citation - order to appear in court or pay a fine for doing something illegal

Civilian - a person who is not in the military

Civilian direction - orders from someone not in the military

Claim - to say that something is true

Combat - fighting, war

Commit a crime - do something illegal

Communist - government of China, North Korea, Viet Nam, Cuba. A type of government where there is no private ownership of land, housing, business, etc.

Confined to a mental institution - kept in hospital for people who have mental health problems

Contact – communicate with a person

Conscript - require

Constitution - supreme law of the land

Controlled substance - drugs or special medicine regulated by the government

Convict - found guilty of a crime in a court of law

Country of Nationality - the country of current citizenship or nationality

Crime - doing something that breaks the law

Current - what is true right now; what is being used right now

Declared legally incompetent - judge/psychiatrist say that you are unable to make decisions for yourself due to mental health problems

Defer - delay until a later date

Delay - make something happen later

Deploy - sent to serve as soldier

Desert - leave the military without permission

Detain - hold, stop or delay

Detention facility - a jail or prison where people wait before going to court and have a trial

Directly or Indirectly - do something in an obvious way (directly) or in a hidden way (indirectly)

Disability - anything about your body or mind that makes it difficult to do things (example blindness (can't see) or deafness (can't hear))

Disclose - tell

Divorce - legally stop being married

Documentation - legal records or papers that show something is true

Domestic - relating to things that happen inside a country

Draft - when the US government orders someone to join the military for a period of time

Eligibility - meet the requirements to be able to do something

Enlist - sign up

Ethnicity - one's cultural background or where they came from

Evasion - purposely/deliberately avoiding a duty or question

Ever - at any time

Exactly - the same way

Exemption - special permission not to do something

Fail - not pass a test; not complete or do something

False - not true

Fidelity - faithful/ loyal

File - present a written statement of a request

Forcing any sexual contact or relations - touching male or female body parts when someone doesn't want it

Form of government - U.S. government elected by the people/republic

Fraudulent - make people believe a lie so you can get something you want

Gamble - pay money to guess who will win at sports or games so that you can try to get money. May be legal, like the lottery or casinos, or illegal, like betting on dog fights, etc.

Gender - male or female

Genocide - killing a group or race of people because of their religion, race, or other reason

Guerrilla group - a group of people that attack the military, police or government with weapons

Habitual drunkard - a person who regularly drinks too much alcohol (gets drunk)

Hard of hearing - unable to hear well

Height - how tall a person is in feet and inches

Illegal - against the law

Illegal gambling - gambling that is now allowed by law; dog fighting

Immigration benefit - things that can help you because you are a documented immigrant, like being able to work and live in the United States.

Immigration status - a person's legal situation with the U.S. government

Impairment - a physical or mental condition that limits abilities

Insurgent organization - a group of people that use weapons to fight a government

Jail - a building where police take people who are arrested for breaking the law

Labor camp - a place where people are forced to work

Lawful permanent resident - a person who is legally living in the United States for an unlimited period of time; also known as a permanent resident alien, a resident alien permit holder, or a green card holder

Left – go away

Legally - allowed by law

Legally incompetent - mentally ill or not able to think properly or make decisions for -

Lie - to say things that are not true

Marital status - whether you are legally single "never married", married, divorced, widowed, separated, marriage annulled

Married - having a husband or wife. This means legally married

Mental institution - a hospital for people with mental health problems

Military unit - a group of people that work for a government to fight in a war

Militia - an army that does not work for a government

Misleading - tell someone information that is not true to get something that is wanted

Misrepresentation - not telling the truth

Mm/dd/yyyy - month/day/year

Examples: February 3, 2012 = 02/03/2012 ; October 21, 1988 = 10/21/1988

Narcotics - any illegal or unlawfully possessed drug, including heroin, cocaine, etc.

Naturalization - process to become a US citizen

Noncombatant - to work in military without using weapons e.g. helping in hospital, kitchen, office

Oath - a promise

Oath of Allegiance - a solemn promise to be loyal to the US made during naturalization ceremony

Obtain - to get something

Occupation - job or profession

Occupy - to take over and control by military force

Offense - doing something against law

Overdue - late; late in being done

Overthrow - to remove a leader or government from power by using force

Owe - have a debt; be required to pay

Paramilitary unit - a group of people who act like the military, but do not work for a government

Parole - let go from jail before end of sentence

Penalty - punishment

Perform noncombatant services - work for military that does not involve fighting

Perform work of national importance - do work that is important to the country during a national emergency

Perjury - the crime of telling a lie under oath

Persecute - to hurt someone because of religion, nationality or political opinions

Police unit - a group of people who work for a government to catch people who break the law

Potentate - a ruler with direct power over his/ her people

Prevent - stop someone from doing something or stop something from happening

Previous - happening before now

Prior - earlier

Prison - a building where criminals must stay as punishment for breaking the law

Prison camp - a prison for enemy soldiers or other military during a war

Probation - a time when a person who has broken the law gets out of prison early for good behavior in prison but is required to report regularly to a probation officer

Procure - get

Prostitute - a person who has sex with someone for money

Public benefit - money from the government for things such as food stamps, housing, medical or Social Security payments

Rebel group - a group of people who fight a national government for power

Recent – happening or beginning not long ago

Recruit - ask

Register - sign up and put your name on an official list

Removal, exclusion, rescission and deportation proceedings - the formal process that happens when a non-citizen must leave the United States because the government believes the person is not entitled to be in the country, is illegally in the country, or has violated immigration laws

Removal: make someone leave US

Exclusion: not allow person to enter US

Rescission: cancellation of agreement to remain in the United States

Deportation: arrest and force a person to return to country they came from

Proceedings: a legal case to decide a person's immigration status

Renounce - say publicly that you give up or no longer believe in or support something

Residence - where you live; your home

Resident - a person who lives in a specific place

Return – come back to United States

Self-defense unit - a group of people fighting to protect themselves

Sign Language Interpreter - a person who uses hand signs to translate for applicants who are deaf or hard of hearing

Single - not married now and never married before

Smuggle - bring something illegally into the country

Spouse - the person you are married to: husband or wife

Suspended sentence - legal delay in a penalty or sentence

Tax return - send tax forms to US government for tax year

Terrorist - a person or organization that uses fear and violence to control people to get what they want

Title of nobility - Belonging to a Royal Family. E.g. king, queen, prince, princess

To bear arms - have guns, to fight in the military

Torture - hurt someone badly on purpose

Total – complete

Totalitarian - a political system in which people have no power and are controlled by a dictator

Trip – travel or journey to a place

U.S. Armed Forces - all military branches (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard) responsible for defending the United States

Vigilante unit - a group of people who act like the police but are not real police

Weapon - something used to fight such as a gun, knife, or bomb

Weight - how much a person weighs in pounds

Widowed - marital status if your husband or wife has died and you have not married again

(f) widow; (m) widower

Work backwards – count to or toward what is behind or happened before

Form N-400 Part 12

The following words and phrases appear in Part 12.

Adjudication – a final decision on a legal matter or a court case

Advocate – agree with, recommend, support and tell others about an idea

Alien – someone who is not a US citizen

Alimony – money that you have to pay regularly to a former wife or husband after a divorce

Allegiance – loyalty to a person, country, or belief

Alternative sentencing/rehabilitative program- punishment penalty decided by law instead of jail

Arrested – taken to jail by the police

Bear arms – to own or use a gun

Charge – when the police give a formal statement that you have done something illegal

Child Support – money that a husband/father or wife/mother is required to pay to support a child after a divorce

Cite/citation – order to appear in court or pay a fine for doing something illegal

Civilian direction - orders from someone not in the military

Claim – to say that something is true

Combat – fighting, war

Commit a crime – do something illegal

Communist – government of China, North Korea, Viet Nam, Cuba. A type of government where there is no private ownership of land, housing, business, etc.

Confined to a mental institution – kept in hospital for people who have mental health problems

Conscript – require

Constitution – supreme law of the land

Contact – communicate with a person

Controlled substance – drugs or special medicine regulated by the government

Convict – found guilty of a crime in a court of law

Crime – doing something that breaks the law

Current – what is true right now; what is being used right now

Declared legally incompetent – judge/psychiatrist say that you are unable to make decisions for yourself due to mental health problems

Defer – delay until a later date

Deploy – sent to serve as soldier

Desert – leave the military without permission

Detain – hold, stop or delay

Detention facility – a jail or prison where people wait before going to court and have a trial

Directly or Indirectly – do something in an obvious way (directly) or in a hidden way (indirectly)

Disclose – tell

Documentation – legal records or papers that show something is true

Draft – when the US government orders someone to join the military for a period of time

Enlist – sign up

Ever – at any time

Exemption – special permission not to do something

Fail – not pass a test; not complete or do something

False – not true

File – present a written statement of a request

Forcing any sexual contact or relations - touching male or female body parts when someone doesn't want it

Form of government - U.S. government elected by the people/republic

Fraudulent - make people believe a lie so you can get something you want

Gamble - pay money to guess who will win at sports or games so that you can try to get money. May be legal, like the lottery or casinos, or illegal, like betting on dog fights, etc.

Genocide - killing a group or race of people because of their religion, race, or other reason

Guerrilla group - a group of people that attack the military, police or government with weapons

Habitual drunkard - a person who regularly drinks too much alcohol (gets drunk)

Illegal - against the law

Illegal gambling - gambling that is now allowed by law; dog fighting

Immigration benefit - things that can help you because you are a documented immigrant, like being able to work and live in the United States.

Insurgent organization - a group of people that use weapons to fight a government

Jail - a building where police take people who are arrested for breaking the law

Labor camp - a place where people are forced to work

Lawful permanent resident - a person who is legally living in the United States for an unlimited period of time; also known as a permanent resident alien, a resident alien permit holder, or a green card holder

Left – go away from the United States

Legally - allowed by law

Legally incompetent - mentally ill or not able to think properly or make decisions for self

Lie - to say things that are not true

Married - having a husband or wife. This means legally married

Mental institution - a hospital for people with mental health problems

Military unit - a group of people that work for a government to fight in a war

Militia - an army that does not work for a government

Misleading - tell someone information that is not true to get something that is wanted

Misrepresentation - not telling the truth

Narcotics - any illegal or unlawfully possessed drug, including heroin, cocaine, etc.

Naturalization - process to become a US citizen

Noncombatant - to work in military without using weapons e.g. helping in hospital, kitchen, office

Oath - a promise

Oath of Allegiance - a solemn promise to be loyal to the US made during naturalization ceremony

Obtain - to get something

Occupy - to take over and control by military force

Offense - doing something against law

Overdue- late; late in being done

Overthrow - to remove a leader or government from power by using force

Owe- have a debt; be required to pay

Paramilitary unit - a group of people who act like the military, but do not work for a government

Parole - let go from jail before end of sentence

Perform noncombatant services - work for military that does not involve fighting

Perform work of national importance - do work that is important to the country during a national emergency

Persecute - to hurt someone because of religion, nationality or political opinions

Police unit - a group of people who work for a government to catch people who break the law

Prison - a building where criminals must stay as punishment for breaking the law

Prison camp - a prison for enemy soldiers or other military during a war

Probation - a time when a person who has broken the law gets out of prison early for good behavior in prison but is required to report regularly to a probation officer

Prostitute - a person who has sex with someone for money

Public benefit - money from the government for things such as food stamps, housing, medical or Social Security payments

Rebel group - a group of people who fight a national government for power

Recruit – ask

Register - sign up and put your name on an official list

Removal, exclusion, rescission and deportation proceedings - the formal process that happens when a non-citizen must leave the United States because the government believes the person is not entitled to be in the country, is illegally in the country, or has violated immigration laws

Removal: make someone leave US

Exclusion: not allow person to enter US

Rescission: cancellation of agreement to remain in the United States

Deportation: arrest and force a person to return to country they came from

Proceedings: a legal case to decide a person's immigration status

Resident - a person who lives in a specific place

Self-defense unit - a group of people fighting to protect themselves

Smuggle - bring something illegally into the country

Suspended sentence - legal delay in a penalty or sentence

Tax return - send tax forms to US government for tax year

Terrorist - a person or organization that uses fear and violence to control people to get what they want

To bear arms - have guns, to fight in the military

Torture - badly hurt someone on purpose

Totalitarian - a political system in which people have no power and are controlled by a dictator

U.S. Armed Forces - all branches (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard) responsible for defending the United States

Vigilante unit - a group of people who act like the police but are not real police

Weapon - something used to fight such as a gun, knife, or bomb