

New Citizen News

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The “New Citizen News” newsletter highlights the success of learners who have passed their citizenship interviews with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). It is a teaching tool for both learners enrolled in Citizenship classes and for high beginning to advanced learners in regular ESL.

Personal background information and details about the learner’s citizenship interview are gathered by the instructor in an interview that takes about 20 minutes. Each learner’s story is written in language that is simple enough for a level two or three ESL learner to understand and is printed in the “New Citizen News.”

Here are examples of interview questions:

- What is your name?
- Where are you from?
- How old are you (optional)?
- When did you come to the U.S.?
- Why did you leave your country?
- Why did you want to become a U.S. citizen?
- Tell me about your INS interview. When was it? Were you nervous before the interview? Was the INS officer friendly? Was this your first citizenship interview?
- What questions about U.S. history and government did the INS officer ask us?
- What sentence(s) did you write at the interview?
- What do you want to tell other learners who are getting ready for their citizenship interviews (optional)?

A newsletter that focuses on citizenship puts a personal face on the naturalization process. The newsletter can be used as a supplement to a citizenship or other classroom reading text and can be used by a tutor working on-on-one with learners. A variation of this version of the newsletter would be to have advanced-level ESL learners put together an issue as a classroom-writing project. Classmates could interview one another, write and edit stories and produce the newsletter on a classroom computer.

The main reasons for publishing the newsletter are to celebrate the learners’ success in becoming citizens, and to encourage other learners who have applied or will be applying for citizenship. The chief benefit for learners is that they have written proof that people of all ages, nationalities and English abilities can, and do, pass the INS citizenship interview. For learners in regular ESL classes, the newsletter can be used to start a classroom discussion of the eligibility requirements for U.S. citizenship, as well as the benefits, rights and responsibilities of being a citizen.

This practice could be conducted in any ABE program where one or more learners have gained citizenship. If there are not enough new citizens to warrant an entire newsletter, one learner's success story could be included with other articles. The expense of producing a newsletter is limited to photocopying and developing photographs included in the newsletter.