

Preparing beginning literacy students for the citizenship writing test

1	2	3	4	5	6
a	day	his	ball	want	house
I	new	she	like	good	today
is	for	get	love	food	happy
in	are	big	cook	class	store
at	on	can	wife	play	
my	has	man	live	tree	drink
to	not	son	bike	farm	drive
he	the	job	talk	have	family
go	her	dog	work	blue	
	you	car	very	they	

Step 1: Make flashcards for each of the six sets of sight words. Go through each set of words to make sure the student can read the words. In some cases, you might need to offer a sentence example so that the student understands the word. (For the word “day”: “Today is a sunny day.”) *Note: there’s no need to cover all of the lists at once. You may only get through one set—or half of a set—a week. That’s OK.*

Step 2: Arrange the flashcards to form very simple sentences such as:

I like to cook.	The man is happy.
He has a car.	I like my job.
The food is good.	I work on a farm.
I love my family.	They drive to work.

Have your student practice reading the sentences aloud. (If necessary, clarify the meaning of the sentences.) *For fun, you can also try scrambling the cards and having your student arrange the words to reconstruct the sentence. Or invite the student to try using the flashcards to generate some new sentences. (But remember, these two exercises are not part of the citizenship test, and your student doesn’t have to be able to do these things to pass it.)*

Step 3: Do a dictation test for each sight word—read the word aloud (offer a sentence example if you think the student is not sure what the word means) and ask student to write it on a notebook page. Practice any problems words in class and assign them for homework (to write ten times). Quiz these words again the next time. *Note: It’s not necessary for students to practice spelling words aloud—being able to write the word is all that counts in the citizenship test.*

Step 4: Dictate very simple sentences (like those in step 2) using words in the list. Speak slowly and clearly, and repeat as often as needed. If the student makes an error, underline or circle the location of the error, and give the student a chance to self-correct. If the student cannot self-correct, then provide the correction yourself. Any sentences that were difficult for the student should be copied for homework and quizzed again the next week.

Preparing beginning literacy students for the citizenship writing test

Step 5. At each session, copy a few sentences from the USICS Sample Dictation Sentences List, but blank out the words that your student already knows how to write. For example, write:

___ children _____ ___ school.

Then dictate, slowly and clearly, “The children play at school.” Repeat each sentence as often as you need to. If necessary, discuss the meaning of the sentences.

Step 6. Take three or four sentences at a time from the citizenship dictation list. Read the sentences together and make sure your student understands what they mean. Practice writing and re-writing any unfamiliar words in the sentence. Have your student copy each sentence ten times for homework. For the next lesson, give a dictation quiz of the assigned sentences, correct (or have the student self-correct) any errors, and then begin on another set.

Note: Students should learn to put a capital letter at the beginning of the sentence, and capitalize words like English, Boston, America, etc. They should also learn to put a period at the end of each sentence. However, if they are nervous at the test, and forget to use proper punctuation, they probably will still pass. Minor spelling mistakes (like “need” instead of “needs”) may also be overlooked, so reassure the student that small mistakes are not the end of the world. If the examiner can read and understand the sentence, it’s probably going to pass. In addition, if the student cannot write the sentence that the examiner dictates, he/she will be given a second, and even a third sentence. If the student fails with all three sentences, he/she will be told to come back in a few months and take the writing test again (at no cost).