

Tricky vocabulary in Part 12 of the N-400 application

USCIS examiners should not be testing English by asking for definitions of words in Part 12, because these advanced legal terms are not “words in ordinary usage.” Nevertheless, students are reporting that they have been asked to explain the meaning of words in Part 12, and have failed when they were unable to do so. The matter has been causing students a lot of anxiety lately.

Below I have indicated the word or phrase in each question on Part 12 that is most likely to be unfamiliar to students. Next to it I offer a way that a student can (minimally) describe the word/phrase. While these are in no way precise definitions, it is hoped that they will be enough to convince an examiner that the student has some idea of what the question is about.

#	word/phrase	explanation
1.	claimed	lied (about being a citizen)
2.	registered	signed up
3.	voted	picked a leader
4.	hereditary title	like a prince or princess
5.	legally incompetent	“crazy”* (mentally ill)
6.	owe	not paid yet
7.	filed	sent the form
8.	called yourself a non-resident on tax return	lied on a tax form
9.	organization, association, fund, foundation, party, club, society	a group
10.	A. Communist	like Karl Marx (Pol Pot, Chairman Mao, or Ho Chi Minh)
	B. totalitarian	like Stalin (or Mussolini, or Hitler, or Chairman Mao)
	C. terrorist	like Al Qaeda (killers)
11.	advocated	worked for
	overthrow	get rid of
12.	persecuted	hurt someone (or bullied someone)
13.	Nazi	Hitler
14.	A. genocide	killing many people
	B. torture	hurt people
	C. killing	murder
	D. [hurting someone]	
	E. forcing sexual contact	rape

	F. practice their religion	go to church (or temple or mosque)
15.	military, paramilitary, self-defense, or vigilante unit, rebel or guerilla group, militia, insurgent organization	army (people who fight with guns and bombs)
16.	prison, detention facility, labor camp	a kind of jail
17.	weapons	guns and bombs
18.	provide (weapons)	give
19.	military or paramilitary training	learn to be a fighter
	weapons training	learn to use guns or bombs
	armed force	army
20.	recruit, enlist, conscript (a person under 15)	make a child carry a gun
21.	combat	fight in an army
22.	committed a crime or offense	do something that is against the law
23.	arrested, cited, or detained	have problems with police
24.	charged with committing a crime	when you have to go to court
25.	convicted	the judge says you did a bad thing
26.	alternative sentencing, rehabilitative program, deferred prosecution, withheld adjudication	you do a bad thing, but you don't go to jail
27.	suspended sentence, probation	you do a bad thing, but you don't go to jail
	parole	leave jail early
28.	[been in jail]	
29.	[skip]	
30.	A. habitual drunkard	drink too much (alcohol)
	B. prostitute	someone who gets paid for sex
	procured a prostitute	paid someone for sex
	C. smuggled controlled substances	drug runner
	D. [married to more than one person]	
	E. obtain (a benefit)	fraud
	F. enter the US illegally	come here with no visa
	G. gambled/gambling	like playing cards for money (or making bets)
	H. alimony	money you have to pay an ex-wife or ex-husband
	I. misrepresentation to obtain public benefits	fraud
31.	give information that is fraudulent or misleading	tell lies
32.	give documentation that is fraudulent or misleading	tell lies on paper (sign something that's not true)
33.	removed, excluded, deported	a judge says you have to leave the U.S.
34.	[same as above]	

35.	[same as above]	
36.	pending against you	waiting for you
37.	armed forces	army
38.	[same]	
39.	court-martialed, administratively separated, disciplined	when a soldier does something wrong
40.	discharged	kicked out
41.	drafted	the law says you have to join the army
42.	exemption	a reason for not joining the army
43.	deserted	leave the army without permission
44.	selective service	if the U.S. needs soldiers, your name is on a list

** While students are likely to be more familiar with the word “crazy” than “mentally ill,” they should know that you can describe an idea this way, but it is offensive to describe a person with an illness this way.*

