

Immigration Information

[TEXT ONLY](#) [HOME](#) [WHAT'S NEW](#) [FAQS](#) [SEARCH](#) [GLOSSARY](#)

[TRANSLATE](#) [PRINTPAGE](#)

[CONTENTS](#) [PREVIOUS](#) [NEXT](#) [QUERY](#) [QUERY HELP](#) [CLEAR SEARCH](#) [HIT LIST](#) [PREVIOUS HIT](#) [NEXT HIT](#) [LAWS](#)

INSERTS/Adjudicator's Field Manual - Redacted Public Version/Adjudicator's Field Manual - Redacted Public Version (3 of 3), Customer Service./2.9 Providing Courteous, Professional and Knowledgeable Service to Upset Applicants.

2.9 Providing Courteous, Professional and Knowledgeable Service to Upset Applicants.

(a) General. From time to time during your career as an adjudicator, you will encounter applicants who are angry, or hostile or who may be unwilling to cooperate with you. You must use your best judgment in every situation as to the proper steps to take. The following general suggestions can help you provide courteous, professional and knowledgeable service during these difficult situations.

(b) What makes applicants upset? An applicant might be upset for many possible reasons. Regardless of the cause, respond as a professional. The applicant may be upset because:

- The applicant had expectations (realistic or unrealistic) that were not met.
- The applicant was already upset at something or someone else (e.g., personal matters, a boss, or a family member).
- The applicant feels tired, stressed, or frustrated.
- You or someone else promised the applicant something that was not delivered.
- You or someone else was rude, indifferent, unpleasant, or discourteous.
- You told the applicant one thing; another staff member told him/her something else.
- The applicant wasn't listened to. \ 9

(c) Basic Principles for Handling Upset Applicants. Assess the situation. In most cases, by simply using good communication skills, you should be able to handle the situation by yourself. If necessary, however, consult your supervisor. In a very small number of cases, an applicant may threaten you or become violent. In these cases, you should always seek immediate assistance, and follow your local office policy regarding these situations.

If possible, resolve the problem. In some cases, an applicant will be upset about a problem that you must help them to resolve. If you can resolve an applicant's problem consistent with the laws, regulations, and agency policies, do it. While there is no single answer to every possible problem, the following tips can help:

- Apologize. Depending on the circumstances, even if you are unsure about who exactly is responsible for the problem, you can sincerely apologize that the applicant was inconvenienced.
- Listen and empathize. This will enable you to determine exactly what happened and will demonstrate that you understand the applicant's position.
- Confirm that you understand the problem. Before you can fix a problem, make sure you understand the problem. Ask questions about anything you do not understand or need clarified. Then restate the problem back to the applicant to ensure that you have correctly understood the situation.
- Take appropriate steps to fix the problem. Depending on the nature of the problem, you may be able to solve the problem yourself or refer it to someone else. In either case, act as swiftly as possible on the matter. Review any available USCIS or DHS materials (e.g., the A-file, T-file, forms, and/or applications) that shed light on the situation. If you are referring the applicant to another person, unit, or branch of DHS, if possible, first communicate with the other DHS personnel to ensure that they are available. \ 10
- Don't respond to rudeness with rudeness. If an applicant speaks rudely to you, you must still respond professionally. While responding with rudeness might make you feel good at the time, it will only escalate the situation and will not help you successfully complete the interview.

· Don't take an applicant's behavior personally. In some cases, an applicant will be angry with the U: general or frustrated about something that has nothing to do with you or the situation. Taking some personally can often escalate the conflict, rather than help resolve the situation. The following example illustrates how not to take something personally vs. taking something personally.

Applicant: I can't believe this is taking so long! Why can't you speed this up?



Not taking it personally

Officer: I understand that this process can take a long time.



Taking it personally

Officer: It's not *my* fault!

· Avoid defensiveness. While you should always provide the applicant with as much information possible to help calm a tense situation, a defensive manner will only worsen the problem. The example illustrates a non-defensive vs. a defensive response.

Applicant: I can't believe I am going to have to come back for another interview!



Non-defensive response

Officer: I understand that you don't want to come back here, but under the law, your application approved until you can establish that you and Ms. Smith are married.



Defensive Response

Officer: I don't care if you want to come back here or not, but I can't approve your application until you can establish that you are married to Ms. Smith.

· Stay under control. If you allow an applicant to upset you or allow prejudices to influence you, you lose control of the interview. If an applicant says something that upsets you, don't take it personally; instead, remain calm and respond in a professional manner. Keep the interview focused on your job. If you lose your control, the interview can quickly degenerate. The following provides examples of acceptable and unacceptable ways of controlling the interview.



Acceptable ways of controlling the interview

- Being alert, firm, assertive, and businesslike.
- Keeping the interview focused on gaining the information you need to decide whether the applicant should be granted.



Unacceptable ways of controlling the interview

- Being intimidating, belligerent, or unprofessional.

- Listen. Active, empathetic, and focused listening will help you determine exactly what the problem is and how you can respond to it. In some cases, simply giving someone an opportunity to vent their frustration can help calm the situation. The following listening techniques are often effective
- Empathize. Empathy demonstrates that you have listened to the applicant and understand their feelings and point of view. It doesn't require you to agree with the applicant's assessment of the situation. The following example illustrates an empathetic response vs. a hostile response.

Applicant: "I can't believe I am going to have to provide so many documents. This is really difficult. I don't understand why you can't just adjudicate the application now!"



Empathetic response:

Officer: "I understand that you need to provide a lot of information, but if you can provide me with the documentation that establishes that you and Ms. Smith have been married for three years, then I can make a determination about your application."



Hostile response:

Officer: "Tough. That's *your* problem, not mine!"

- Restate the problem. A good way to demonstrate that you have heard and understood the applicant's problem is to restate his/her problem.
- Ask questions. When you're not clear exactly why an applicant is frustrated, ask questions to provide him/her with an opportunity to explain his/her situation.
- Use selective agreement. When an applicant is upset about something, selective agreement is a good technique to calm the situation. It not only allows the applicant to vent and shows you are listening but also keeps the interview on track. The following example contrasts selective agreement with complete agreement and a hostile response.

Applicant: "I can't believe I had to wait 11 months for this interview. That's too long!"



Selective Agreement

Officer: "I agree. Eleven months is a long time to wait for an interview, but now you are here. If that is acceptable to you, I would like to get started on your interview."



Complete Agreement

Officer: "You're right, that *is* too long. You wouldn't believe how long some *other* people have had to wait."



Hostile Reaction

Officer: "Don't complain to *me* about how long this took! Do you want to do this interview now or

- Provide clear explanations. In some cases, an applicant will be frustrated because he or she doesn't understand something about a particular aspect of the process or why you are asking a certain question. Always be willing to offer clear explanations that clarify an applicant's questions.
- Pay attention to your non-verbal and verbal communication. Especially during hostile situations, both how you communicate verbally and non-verbally can either escalate or calm the situation. If your body language conveys that you are paying attention to the applicant and if your tone of voice remains respectful, you help calm the situation.
- Seek voluntary compliance in the face of resistance. In some cases, an applicant may ask questions about what you are doing or express frustration about a particular issue. First distinguish between reasonable and unreasonable resistance; in some cases, the applicant's question prevents the interview from moving forward. In these cases, listen empathetically, and answer whatever questions you can while moving on with the interview. However, when the interview clearly stalls, utilize the following framework for obtaining voluntary compliance:¹¹
 1. Ask. Politely ask for what you need. "Mr. Smith, could you please provide me with documentation establishing that you and Ms. Smith have been married for the past three years?"
 2. Set the context. If your original request is denied, politely provide the legal, policy, and procedural reasons for your request. "Mr. Smith, under section 319 of the law, you are required to demonstrate that you and Ms. Smith have been legally married for the past three years for your application to be approved."
 3. Politely explain the applicant's various options if he or she does, or does not, comply with your request. "Mr. Smith, it is your choice about whether to provide me with this documentation. However, if you can't provide me with documentation that establishes this aspect of your case, I can't make a favorable decision about your application. If you *can* provide me with documentation that establishes this aspect of your eligibility, then I can make a decision about your application."
 4. Confirm and move on. Determine whether the applicant is going to comply with your request. If yes, you will continue with the interview.
 5. Act. If you come to the end of the interview, give the applicant one last chance to provide the information. If he or she does not, politely provide the applicant with an N-14 letter (for naturalization cases) or other appropriate notice that requests the information in writing.
 6. If necessary, take a break. If you have had a particularly difficult interview, take a couple of minutes to compose yourself before you begin your next interview.

[Go to the Next Page](#)