
The Complete F-1 Visa Guide

**If you want to study English or another language in the USA
you will need to apply for an F-1 Visa in order to stay in the USA
as a student.**

In this guide we explain all the requirements of the F-1 Visa,
how to apply, and much more.

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What is the F-1 Visa?

The F-1 Visa is a non-immigrant student visa that allows foreigners to pursue education in the United States. This includes language training programs and/or academic studies.

Any non-US citizen who wants to study in the USA must apply for the F-1 Visa.

F-1 students must maintain a full course of study.

Temporary visitors who wish to participate in a short recreational course that is incidental to their purpose for visiting the United States may do so without an F-1 Visa.

Do I need an F-1 Visa to study English in the USA?

Whether you will need an F-1 Visa to study in the United States depends primarily on two factors: your immigration status and the type of program you wish to enroll in.

First, let's take a look at the immigration status factor.

Permanent residents (green card holders) and those with most visa types that authorize employment, such as E and H visas, may study either full-time or part-time in any type of program without restrictions.

However, those participating in the visa waiver program, also known as ESTA, may only study part-time and only during the period of time they are authorized to remain in the United States as temporary visitors, which is typically no more than six months.

If temporary visitors wish to engage in full-time study in an academic or language program, then they must apply for and receive an **F-1 Visa**.

Next, let's consider the type of program you want to study in. If you are interested in a **technical or vocational program** that

leads to a certificate or diploma, then you must apply for and receive an M-1 visa, which is valid for up to one year. Examples of programs that require an **M-1 visa** are certificate and diploma programs in the allied health fields (such as medical technician programs), at pilot training schools and at culinary institutes.

On the other hand, if you want to study full time in an academic program at a college or university, then you will need an F-1 Visa.

You will also need an F-1 Visa for full-time study in an ESL (English as a Second Language) program.

Full-time study at a college or university means being enrolled for at least 12 credit hours per semester, while full-time study in an ESL program usually requires at least 18 hours of English instruction per week.

In all cases, the program or institution to which you apply must be approved by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, also known as SEVP, which is part of the United States Department of Homeland Security.

Under U.S. immigration law, only SEVP-approved academic and language institutions are authorized to issue the I-20 Form, which is required in order to apply for an F-1 Visa.

Who does *not* need an F-1 Visa to study in the USA?

First and foremost, an F-1 Visa is only required for certain classes of non-immigrants.

A non-immigrant is a citizen or national of a country other than the United States who wishes to temporarily enter the United States.

In order to qualify as a non-immigrant, an individual must be able to demonstrate the desire to permanently return to his or her country of origin after temporarily staying in the United States.

In technical terminology, the individual must have what is called "non-immigrant intent."

Under U.S. immigration law there are many classes of non-immigrants who may attend school in the United States either full or part time without the need for an F-1 Visa or any permission from the United States government.



Examples of such individuals are temporary workers, those with an H-1 Visa, Traders and Investors (those with an E visa), and those working for a foreign company's branch in the United States (known as "intracompany transferees" with an L visa), as well as their dependents. Also, temporary visitors to the United States such as tourists on B-2 visas or citizens from visa waiver countries may study in an avocational and recreational

part-time program (such as the Language On English Unlimited Semi-Intensive Course) for relatively short periods of time as long as that their reason for entering the United States was not to become a student.

How long can I stay in the USA with the F-1 Visa?

F-1 Visas may be valid for entry to the United States for up to 10 years, but F-1 status (the ability to legally remain in the United States while enrolled in a full course of study) typically lasts for the duration of the student's approved course.

F-1 visa students must return to their home country within 60 days of the completion of their program.

Visa Extension:

The F-1 Visa is usually valid according to the length of time in your I-20 form.

If necessary you can apply for an extension to the F-1 Visa. The conditions are that you will finish your course in the USA, and return to your home country when the course has finished.

What are the Requirements for the F-1 Visa?

F-1 Visa Students must:

- ✓ Attend an SEVP approved language training program or academic institution
- ✓ Maintain full-time status
- ✓ Demonstrate financial ability to pay for their cost of living and studying in the United States. You, or your sponsor, must provide your school with a bank statement or a certified bank letter proving that you (or your sponsor) possess sufficient available funds to cover the total cost of attendance of your program.
- ✓ Maintain foreign residence and demonstrate intent to return upon course completion.



What documents do I need to apply for the F-1 Student Visa?

[Download the Checklist](#)

What is the I-20 Form?

The I-20 Form is not the F-1 (Student) Visa itself. However, you will need to get an I-20 before you can qualify for the F-1 Visa.

The I-20 Form is a United States Department of Homeland Security document and can only be issued by a qualified school official (DSO or PDSO) at an institution which is authorized under Federal Law to enroll non-immigrant students.

The I-20 is a “Certificate of Eligibility for Non-immigrant Student Status.”

How do I get an I-20 Form?

Language On will issue you an I-20 Form after you qualify for our Intensive English program and we issue you a letter of acceptance.

To begin the process or to see if you qualify for our Intensive English course, please complete our school application and provide us with a copy of your passport.

Requirements to get started:

- 1. Language On Application for Admission
- 2. Copy of your passport (valid for at least 6 more months)

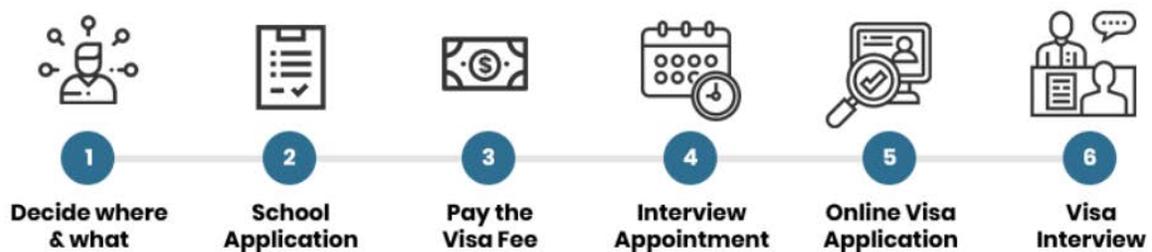
Please send your signed application and a copy of your passport to info@languageonschools.com.

If you have any questions, please contact us directly and we will be happy to help!

How to Apply for the F-1 Visa

Before you apply for the F-1 Visa, you must apply to and be accepted by an SEVP-approved school.

These are the steps to apply for the F-1 Visa:



1. Decide where and what you want to study

Before you apply for the F-1 Visa, you must apply to and be accepted by an SEVP-approved school, such as Language On Schools

2. Complete the application process at your chosen school

Complete the school application(s) and submit a clear copy of your passport and bank statement.

When you are accepted, the school will issue you an I-20 Form and enroll you in SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System).

Please visit the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) website to learn more.

3. Pay the SEVIS I-901 Fee

Visit the official website of the Department of Homeland Security to make the payment online.

*Note: If you are traveling with your family (spouse and/or children under the age of 21), they will also need to receive an I-20 but do not need to pay the SEVIS Fee.

4. Schedule a Visa Interview

Find a U.S. Embassy or Consulate (generally in your home country) where you can schedule and attend your visa interview.

Please visit the websites of U.S. Embassies, Consulates, and Diplomatic Missions to find an Embassy or Consulate and follow the instructions.

The process may vary between different Embassies and Consulates.

PLAN AHEAD!

Make sure to check the Visa Appointment & Processing Wait Time for the Embassy or Consulate that you plan to visit.

5. Complete the Online Visa Application

In order to schedule your interview you must complete the online Visa Application Form DS-160.

*Note: You will need to include a photograph of yourself. Make sure to read about the photograph requirements before you begin the application.

You can read more about the visa application and the fees by visiting the official US Department of State website.

6. Attend the Visa Interview

Before the interview, make sure you have completed these steps:

1. Received your Form I-20 ✓
2. Received a Letter of Acceptance ✓
3. Paid SEVIS I-901 Fee ✓
4. Completed Visa Application Form DS-160 and scheduled the interview ✓

The F-1 Visa Interview – How to Prepare

DOCUMENTS AND PAYMENTS

You should take complete and concise supporting documentation to the appointment. Some of the supporting documents include:

1. Certified Form I-20
2. SEVIS I-901 Payment Confirmation
3. Documentation of ties to your home country (if applicable)
4. Original identification documents and two recent passport-style photos
5. Your Letter of Acceptance and if applicable other educational supporting documents
6. Financial supporting documents
7. Health records (if applicable)

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

These are some of the topics that you need to prepare to answer in your F-1 Visa Interview:

- ✔ Study Plans
- ✔ School Choice
- ✔ Academic Studies (past and future)
- ✔ Financial Status
- ✔ Post-Course Plans

How long does it take to process the F-1 Visa?

It depends on the country (and sometimes the city) where you will be applying for your visa. Each United States embassy and consulate has different processing times, which typically range from a few days to a few weeks.

You can visit the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate where you will be applying to see their current wait times.

Can I study with my family with the F-1 Visa?

Under U.S. immigration law, only the legal spouse and minor children under the age of 21 of F-1 Visa Students qualify for F-2 status.

The spouse and children of F-1 students are known as “dependents.”

*Dependents over the age 14 must usually be present for a visa interview at a U.S. embassy or consulate in order to be granted an F-2 visa.

I’m a Tourist in the USA. Can I change my status to the F-1 Visa?

Provided that you are lawfully present in the United States with a tourist visa (B-1/B-2) and have at least 30 days remaining in your stay (based on the date stamped in your passport), you may apply to change your status from B-1/B-2 to F-1.



However, it often takes many months for USCIS to adjudicate change of status applications, so if starting your studies soon is a priority for you, you may want to consider returning to your home country to apply for initial attendance from abroad. This typically takes only a few weeks.

*Note that tourists in the United States on a visa waiver through the ESTA system are not eligible to apply for F-1 status while in the United States.

I'm already studying in the USA. Can I transfer to a different school?

If you are already an F-1 Student in the United States, you may transfer to another school certified by SEVP to enroll F-1 Students.

However, you may not transfer to a vocational training program that enrolls foreign students on M-1 visas without applying for a change of status (if eligible) or returning home to apply for the M-1 visa from abroad.

*Note that M-1 students may not apply for a change of status to F-1 under U.S. immigration law.

F-1 Students may transfer to another SEVP-certified school at any time during their program or during their 60 day grace period, which begins upon the student's successful completion of his or her program.

Can F-1 Students Work While Studying in the USA?

The direct but not-so-simple answer to this question is, **it depends.**

According to U.S. government regulations, there are two classes of F-1 students:

- ✔ Academic students and
- ✔ Language students.

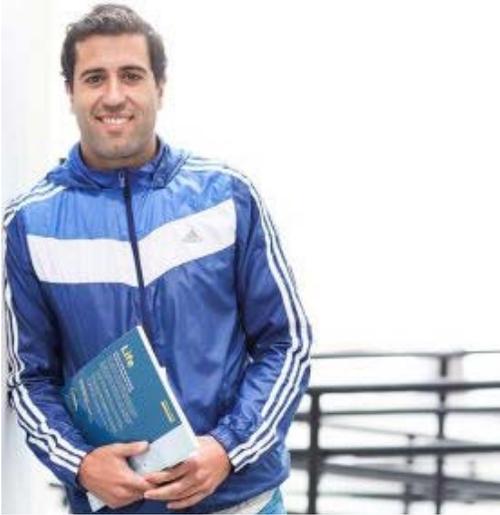
Academic students are those students who are enrolled in a certificate, diploma or degree program in an academic field of study (such as the humanities, sciences, social sciences, business, medicine or law).

Language students are students who have enrolled in an intensive English program (or IEP), such as Language On's intensive English course.

The rules for working while in the United States are different for each class of international student.

However, the most important rule applies equally to both academic and language students:

International (F-1) students may not work in the United States unless they have received formal, written authorization from an authorized school official, known as a Designated School Official or DSO.



It is also important to keep in mind that neither academic nor language F-1 students may operate a business while in the United States. If you wish to open and run a business in the United States, then you must apply for and receive an E-2 (treaty investor) visa.

Both academic (i.e., degree, certificate or diploma seeking) students and language students may work on-campus for up to 20 hours per week as long as their school offers on-campus employment for international students.

Such employment must be related to the school's provision of student services.

However, it is relatively uncommon for SEVP-approved language schools to offer on-campus employment to their F-1 students.

This is the only type of employment available to F-1 language students, as under U.S. immigration law **F-1 language students may never work off-campus.**

Subject to written approval by a school official, F-1 academic (degree seeking) students may engage in three types of off-campus employment after they have completed their first year of full-time study.

The three types of off-campus employment available to academic (but not language) students are known as:

- ✔ Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- ✔ Optional Practical Training (OPT) and
- ✔ Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) optional practice training extension.

In all cases, off-campus employment must be related to the academic student's area of study and must be authorized in advance by a designated school official at the student's school.

What are OPT and CPT?

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

OPT is a one-year period during which undergraduate students may legally work in order to obtain practical job training to complement or complete their educational program.

Only undergraduate degree-seeking F-1 students are eligible for OPT. F-1 language students are not eligible for OPT under U.S. immigration law.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

CPT is temporary authorization to work in the United States for college and university students. College and university students may take part in paid work through CPT that is directly related to their major field of study. Only students enrolled in a qualifying degree program at an authorized college or university are eligible for CPT.

English language students are not eligible for CPT under U.S. immigration law.

Can an F-1 Visa Student access the US Healthcare system?

All persons present in the United States may seek medical treatment while in the United States, but they may be required to pay for that treatment if they do not have appropriate health insurance.

Unlike most other developed nations, the United States does not have free, government-provided health care.

As a result, even a relatively minor medical problem can become very expensive for international students.

This is why it is important for all students to have some sort of health insurance while studying in the United States.

Can an F-1 Visa Student apply for a Green card?

No – unless the individual is otherwise qualified (such as due to being married to a United States citizen)

F-1 visa students must return to their home country within 60 days of the completion of their program.

Can I renew my F-1 Visa?

Yes, as long as you are still enrolled in your program of study and maintaining full-time status.

If your F-1 visa expires while you are studying in the United States, you will need to return to your home country to renew your visa if you plan on travelling outside of and then returning to the United States before your program ends.

We hope you have found our guide useful, and we have answered all your questions about the F-1 Visa and how to apply to study in the USA.

The process can seem quite complicated, so just take it step by step.

If you would like to study English at Language On Schools, our friendly Student Advisers will be happy to help you with the application process.

Language On has English Schools in [Miami](#), [Miami Beach](#), [Orlando](#) and [Aventura](#).

Come and join us!



Instant Answers

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