A Guide to Selected U.S. Travel and Identity Documents

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This guide has been prepared to assist those tasked with examining travel and employment authorization documents. The guide contains color photographs of the most commonly used documents but it is not comprehensive. There are earlier valid revisions of the illustrated documents and other less common documents that are not included.

Because the attachments are reproductions, the exact size and color may deviate from the original. Do not make identifications based on size and/or color alone.

If you have any questions concerning the authenticity of one of those documents, you are encouraged to contact your local INS office.
GENERAL INFORMATION CONCERNING ALIEN STATUS

In accordance with the 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution, any person born in and subject to the jurisdiction of the United States is a citizen of the U.S. at birth. U.S. citizenship may also be acquired through DERIVATION from the U.S. citizen parent when children are born abroad or through NATURALIZATION after meeting the necessary residency requirements. All persons not citizens or nationals of the U.S. are aliens, which generally are classified as PERMANENT RESIDENTS (“Immigrants”), NON-IMMIGRANTS, or UNDOCUMENTED ALIENS.

PERMANENT RESIDENT ALIENS enjoy almost all of the same rights as U.S. citizens. This status may be obtained through a number of different procedures and, unless taken away administratively, is granted for life. Aliens with permanent residency must carry evidence of their status. The INS no longer requires permanent residents to report their address annually.

NON-IMMIGRANT ALIENS are admitted to the U.S. for a temporary period of time and for a specific purpose, most often as a tourist. There are different categories of non-immigrants, and they are identified through letter/number symbols (e.g. B-2). Non-immigrants are also required to present evidence of their lawful status in the U.S. to offices of the INS. This will usually consist of a passport containing a visa and an Arrival/Departure Record (INS Form I-94).

UNDOCUMENTED ALIENS are those who may have crossed the border illegally and/or been smuggled into the interior of the U.S., or those who have violated their non-immigrant status by accepting unauthorized employment, remaining longer than permitted, or committing some other violation. Some of these aliens purchase counterfeit documents or assume another person’s identity by using fraudulently obtained genuine documents.
A **UNITED STATES PASSPORT** is a document that is issued by the State Department to persons who have established that they are citizens of the United States by birth, naturalization, or derivation of citizenship. The primary purpose of the passport is to facilitate travel to foreign countries by establishing U.S. citizenship and acting as a vehicle to display any appropriate visas and/or entry/exit stamps that may be necessary.

Passports are also very reliable documents which may be used within the United States to establish citizenship, identity, and employment authorization.

**NOTE:** There are approximately fifteen different versions of the U.S. passport that are presently valid and vary from the 1998 version illustrated above.
The **RESIDENT ALIEN CARD**, Form I-551, was introduced in January 1977 and phased in over a period of time. In addition to the photograph, the I-551 contains the bearer’s signature and fingerprint.
The **RESIDENT ALIEN CARD**, Form I-551, was revised in August 1989. This version was the first Alien Registration Card to contain an expiration date on every card. Usually, it is valid for ten years from the date of issue. The expiration date indicates when the card expires and must be renewed. It does **NOT** indicate that the alien’s status has expired. The card was modified in January 1992 when a white box was added behind the fingerprint.
The **PERMANENT RESIDENT CARD**, Form I-551, was introduced in December 1997. Noticeable differences on the front of the card include: Change of card title from **RESIDENT ALIEN CARD** to **PERMANENT RESIDENT CARD**, a three line machine readable zone and a hologram.

![Photo Side](image)

![Reverse](image)

The Optical Memory Stripe contains encoded cardholder information as well as personalized etching which depicts the bearer’s photo, name, signature, date of birth, alien registration number, card expiration date and card number.
The EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION CARD, Form I-688A, is the first card issued to aliens who qualified under the “Amnesty Program” of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. It was produced with a Polaroid identification camera and covered with a special secure plastic laminate. The expiration date is found on the front of the card while the authorized use is explained on the reverse of the card.

The expiration date may be extended by placing a small sticker on the reverse side. There are two different types of extension stickers which have been used. One extends the expiration date for 90 days and the other for 1 year. Multiple stickers may be used for further extensions.
The TEMPORARY RESIDENT CARD, Form I-688, is the second document issued to aliens who further qualify under the “Amnesty Program”. It is produced in the same manner as the I-688A and contains the same security features. The text statement on the reverse side is different and explains the additional privileges granted to the bearer.
The I-688 may be extended by placing a sticker on the reverse. Again, multiple stickers may be used for further extensions.

Once the bearer becomes a permanent resident, a larger sticker is placed on the reverse which explains the new status of the bearer. With this endorsement, the bearer has the same privileges as a permanent resident.
This EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION DOCUMENT, Form I-688B, is issued to aliens who are not permanent residents but have been granted permission to be employed in the U.S. for a specific period of time. The card was produced originally with a Polaroid process similar to the I-688 and I-688A, but has the added feature of interlocking gold lines across the front.
In May 1995, some INS offices began issuing a modified I-688B. The most significant change was to the card stock which was changed from a Polaroid process to a synthetic material called Teslin on which the biometric and biographic data of the bearer was printed. Note that, on this version, the bearer’s name is printed on two lines.

Form I-688B (May 1995)

In August 1995, changes were made to the software which prints the I-688Bs and the name reverted to the one line format similar to that of the original card.

Form I-688B (August 1995)
In January 1997, INS began issuing a new Employment Authorization Document, Form I-766. The new card is a credit card type of document. The front of the card contains a photo, fingerprint, and signature of the rightful holder. The reverse contains a standard bar code, magnetic strip, and a two-dimensional bar code which will contain unique card, biographic, and biometric data.
WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is now issuing a new version of the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) or Form I-766. The EAD serves as proof to employers that an individual is authorized to work in the United States. The new card is designed with numerous security features to prevent counterfeiting and fraud. The card includes a magnetic strip, a two-dimensional barcode, and several features that can be used in forensic examination to determine the card’s authenticity.

“USCIS is continuously looking for new ways to enhance national security to maintain the integrity of the immigration system,” said Eduardo Aguirre, Director of USCIS. “Including these new security features into one of the most widely used immigration document allows USCIS to make sure the right applicant receives our country’s benefits.”

The new EAD eliminates all references to the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and includes only markings that identify it as a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and USCIS document. On March 1, 2003 USCIS became one of the three former INS components to join DHS. USCIS is charged with fundamentally transforming and improving the delivery of immigration and citizenship services.

An EAD is normally valid for up to one year, although there are some cases in which a longer validity period is authorized. An EAD is typically produced and mailed within three days after an individual’s application for benefits is processed and approved. The current production rate of the EAD is about 24,000 per week.
There are 2 types of **NON-IMMIGRANT VISAS**. The non-machine readable visa is printed with a multicolored ribbon while the machine readable visa is a sticker which is applied to the passport page. The visa is used for entry purposes and must be valid on the date of entry into the U.S.. It is not necessary for the visa to be valid after entry.
When an alien has been granted admission into the U.S. by an Immigration Inspector at an authorized Port of Entry, he/she will be issued an **ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE RECORD**, Form I-94, the bottom portion of which is stapled to a page in the Alien’s passport. This document explains how long the bearer may remain in the U.S. and the terms of admission.

Form I-94
SOCIAL SECURITY CARDS

Although SOCIAL SECURITY CARDS are not immigration documents, they are mentioned here because they are often used as identification and to establish employment authorization.

Social Security cards have been issued since 1936 and have been revised more than 20 times. Originally, the seal on the social security card read Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. In May 1980, it was changed to the Department of Health and Human Services. In April of 1995, it was changed again to read Social Security Administration. Some counterfeiters have failed to notice these changes.

In October of 1983, security features were added to the card. All social security cards issued since October 1983 have been printed on raised (intaglio) printing and the signature line consists of microline printing of the words “SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION” in a repeating pattern.

![Social Security Card Sample]