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Scrutineers Handbook

By-elections



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The Australian Electoral Commission asserts the right of recognition as author of the original material. The report should be attributed as *Australian Electoral Commission By-Election Scrutineer's Handbook*.

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About this handbook

Thank you for assisting with Australia's electoral process by acting as a scrutineer. You are doing the extremely important job of helping to ensure that Australia's proud democratic tradition of transparent electoral events is maintained. Transparency and integrity in the conduct of elections and referendums have, after all, been the hallmarks of Australia's federal electoral system.

As a scrutineer, you need a clear understanding of your role including what you can and cannot do under the law. This handbook is designed to help you before, during and after polling day to be as effective as possible as a scrutineer. Remember, you can play a significant part in helping to ensure, as far as possible, that every vote counts.

What does a scrutineer do?

Scrutineers observe electoral processes to ensure the rules are followed. Candidates are not allowed to enter polling places, except to vote. They are also not permitted to observe the counting of votes (the scrutiny) for elections in which they are a candidate. They have the right, however, to appoint scrutineers to represent them during the polling and throughout the various stages of counting ballot papers.

As a scrutineer, you have the right to be present when the ballot boxes are sealed, when they are opened, when votes are being issued, and when the votes are sorted and counted, so you may confirm the integrity of election processes on behalf of the person who has appointed you.

Scrutineers may observe:

- the polling
- the early sorting of ordinary pre-poll ballot papers
- the counting of ballot papers (the scrutiny)
- the preliminary scrutiny of declaration envelopes
- the further scrutiny of declaration votes
- the fresh scrutiny of House of Representatives votes

How do I become a scrutineer?

A scrutineer appointment form must be completed, which can be obtained from any Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) office or the [AEC website](#). The candidate or other person appointing you must sign the form and give the name and address of the scrutineer.

You must then sign the undertaking on the form stating you will not attempt to influence the vote of an elector and that you will not disclose any knowledge you may acquire concerning any elector's vote.

The form may be provided in person to the relevant DRO or officer in charge of a polling place, or by fax if such facilities are available.

For a by-election, scrutineers can be appointed by a candidate running in that by-election.

The Scrutineers Handbook

This handbook is published by the AEC, the Commonwealth agency that maintains the electoral roll and conducts federal elections, by-elections, and referendums. This handbook covers information relevant to a scrutineer for a by-election. For general federal elections or referendums, scrutineers should refer to the general [Scrutineer Handbook](#).

Each chapter in the handbook lists the parts of the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* (the Electoral Act) that sets out laws applicable to scrutineers.

You may wish to consult the legislation directly for the exact provisions. Other laws including the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act* (the Constitution) may also be applicable.

The AEC can help you by providing information of a general nature about the role and duties of a scrutineer. However, it cannot provide you with formal or informal legal advice.

Legislative provisions appear in this handbook in a paraphrased form only, unless otherwise indicated. Scrutineers must satisfy themselves about their own legal position and, if necessary, refer to the exact provisions of the Constitution and the Electoral Act and consult their own lawyers.

You can access this handbook on the [AEC website](#). Legislation is published on the Federal Register of Legislation at: www.legislation.gov.au.

Abbreviations and acronyms have been kept to a minimum. Five abbreviations are used throughout the handbook:

- AEC – Australian Electoral Commission
- AEO – Australian Electoral Officer
- ARO – Assistant Returning Officer
- DRO – Divisional Returning Officer
- HoR – House of Representatives

The words ‘voter’ and ‘elector’ are used interchangeably. At the end of this handbook, you will find a glossary that explains terms that may be unfamiliar to you.

How the handbook can help you

This handbook explains what you will do as a scrutineer, and how to comply with the law during the by-election and throughout the vote counting process.

Offences relating to elections are listed in Appendix 1. Some electoral offences apply at all times, while others apply during the specific by-election period.

As information can change during the life of a publication, the [AEC website](#) is the best source of up-to-date information.

AEC National, State, Territory and Divisional Office contact details

You will find office contact details on the [AEC website](#).

Feedback welcome

The AEC welcomes your views on the usefulness of the By-election Scrutineers Handbook and any specific information provided in these pages. We invite you to provide feedback via the [AEC website](#).

The AEC also publishes Electoral Backgrounders on specific aspects of electoral law. Copies of these AEC publications can be accessed by visiting the [AEC website](#) or phoning 13 23 26.

Timing of by-elections

Whenever a vacancy occurs in the House of Representatives because of the death, resignation, absence without leave, expulsion, disqualification or ineligibility of a Member, a writ may be issued by the Speaker for the election of a new Member. A writ may also be issued when the Court of Disputed Returns declares an election void.

The timing of a by-election is a matter for the Speaker of the House of Representatives (Electoral Act, s 152). The guiding principle in fixing the date of a by-election has always been to hold the by-election as early as possible to ensure electors are not left without representation any longer than is necessary.

The **key dates in the election timetable** are available on the [AEC website](#).

Dos and Don'ts

Whenever you are acting in the role of scrutineer, you must wear the Identification Badge the AEC supplied to you in all polling places and counting centres.

As a scrutineer, you may:

- observe all voting procedures – except an elector actually marking the ballot paper, unless the elector has requested assistance (see 'Assisted voting' on page 18 for more information)
- object to the right of any person to vote
- be nominated by an elector to assist with the completion of a ballot paper
- enter and leave the polling place at any time during voting
- enter and leave the polling place at any time during the counts (your place may be taken by another appointed scrutineer)
- inspect, but not touch, any ballot paper at the count.

As a scrutineer, you must not:

- stay in a polling place unless you have provided a completed appointment form
- go into a polling place without your scrutineer's badge
- help with clearing voting booths or the removal of material from the polling place
- touch ballot papers
- interfere with a voter, or attempt to influence them
- reveal anything you know about how someone has voted
- wear a badge or emblem in support or opposition of a political party, candidate, or proposed change to the Constitution within the polling place
- deliberately show or leave in the polling place any how-to-vote card or similar direction as to how an elector should vote
- use any device with the potential capability of image and/or audio recording (including mobile phones, tablets, cameras, and video recorders) in the scrutiny areas of a counting centre
- use an image-recording device to record images of ballot papers or declaration vote envelopes in a polling place or counting centre
- unreasonably delay or interfere with the progress of counting the votes
- disclose or communicate information gained during the early sorting of ordinary pre-poll ballot papers to persons outside the counting centre before 6pm. This is an offence, and penalties may include fines and imprisonment.

Should a scrutineer fail to adhere to the above guidelines, they may be asked to leave the polling place or counting centre. A scrutineer who fails to leave when requested may be removed by the police.

Becoming a scrutineer

The Electoral Act
Part II, 'Administration'

This chapter gives you some essential background on who is responsible for conducting the election or referendum, the different roles of the people you are likely to meet on and after polling day, and more detailed information on the appointment of scrutineers.

Australian Electoral Commission

Federal elections, by-elections and referendums are conducted by the AEC.

The AEC has a National Office in Canberra, an office in each of the state capital cities and Darwin, and offices providing electoral services for House of Representatives electoral divisions.

In each state and the Northern Territory, an AEO is responsible for the management of electoral activities within their state or territory. An AEO for the Australian Capital Territory is appointed temporarily for each election period.

The AEO is the returning officer for the Senate election in the state/territory.

Each electoral division has a DRO who is responsible for the electoral administration in that division, including conducting electoral events in that division.

The DRO is the returning officer for the House of Representatives election in the division.

At the polling place

At the polling place, you are likely to come into contact with several people who have an official role.

For each electoral event, polling places are appointed for each division. Polling officials are appointed for each polling place.

Under the provisions of the Acts, the officer in charge of each polling place is called the Presiding Officer during polling – from 8am to 6pm on polling day. From 6pm, however, during the counting of the votes (the scrutiny), this officer is called the ARO.

To overcome confusion, the AEC commonly uses the term officer in charge to refer to both the Presiding Officer and ARO. Officer in charge is the term you are most likely to hear in the polling place. Most other staff employed in polling places work as issuing officers or inquiry officers. Issuing officers issue ballot papers to voters. Inquiry officers assist voters with problems that may occur during the conduct of the poll.

The Electoral Act, ss 348(1)(c), 348(3)

Other than polling officials, scrutineers, and electors intending to vote, no one is permitted in the polling place during polling, except by permission of the officer in charge.

Appointment of scrutineers

The scrutineer appointment form must be signed by the candidate (or person appointing) and include the name and address of the scrutineer. The form may be provided in person to the DRO or the officer in charge of a polling place, or by fax if such facilities are available.

Scrutineers may be appointed to act as a scrutineer during both the polling and the scrutiny, or different people may be appointed for each process.

The scrutineer appointment form is used to appoint scrutineers for early voting, polling day, and the scrutiny. Multiple forms are required if you are scrutineering at more than one venue.

Also included on the appointment form is an undertaking that each scrutineer must sign. Undertakings scrutineers are required to make include:

- not to divulge any information with respect to the vote of an elector
- not to interfere with or attempt to influence the vote of an elector
- not to communicate with any person in the polling place except so far as necessary in the discharge of their functions
- not to use any device with the potential capability of image and/or audio recording (including, but not limited to, mobile phones, tablets, cameras and video recorders) in the scrutiny area of a counting centre
- not to use any image-recording device to record images of ballot papers or declaration envelopes
- not to disclose or communicate information that relates to the early sorting of pre-poll ordinary votes to persons outside the counting centre before the close of voting
- to comply with any lawful direction.

In a by-election, only one scrutineer per candidate is allowed:

- for each early voting centre
- for each mobile polling team
- for each issuing point in a polling place on polling day
- for each officer counting the votes during the scrutiny

Scrutineers attending any form of mobile polling must organise their own transportation.

Identification Badge

When you attend a polling place or a counting centre, the AEC will supply you with a badge that identifies you as a scrutineer (the Identification Badge) and a scrutineer's lanyard. Whenever you are acting in the role of a scrutineer, you must hang the Identification Badge on the scrutineer's lanyard on the front of your body and above your waist.

You must return your Identification Badge if you leave the polling place or counting centre at any time.

During the polling

The Electoral Act

Part XV, 'Postal Voting'

Part XVA, 'Pre-poll voting'

Part XVI, 'The polling'

Part XXI, 'Electoral offences'

In this chapter, you will find a description of what you are entitled to do during the polling, on polling day, and a summary of what you and others cannot do under the law. A full list of offences under the law, and the penalties these incur, is at Appendix 1.

The permissible behaviour of campaign workers and others who are likely to be in the vicinity of the polling place, such as photographers or media representatives, is also described.

Note: When a building used as a polling place is situated in enclosed grounds and the officer in charge, with the authority of the DRO, displays a signed notice at each entrance stating that the grounds are part of the polling place, those grounds are considered to be part of the polling place for purposes of an offence under section 340 of the Electoral Act.

Rights of scrutineers

As a scrutineer, you have certain rights under the Acts, whether you are within the polling place or performing your duties as a scrutineer elsewhere. These rights are outlined below, along with the sections of the Acts that specify them.

Coming and going

The Electoral Act, s 218(2)

You may enter and leave the polling place at any time during the polling. If you leave, you can be replaced by another scrutineer who has been properly appointed.

Remember, on polling day only one scrutineer for each candidate or person appointing at each issuing point can be present in the polling place at any one time and you must return your Identification Badge if you leave the polling place at any time.

At the sealing of the ballot boxes

The Electoral Act, ss 200DP(1), 200DQ, 220(a), 220(d) and 227(10)

You have the right to observe the officer in charge sealing the empty ballot box and recording the seal numbers before the poll commences at 8am. You may also observe the sealing of the ballot box at the conclusion of any polling that extends over more than one location or day.

Note: Section 220(d) of the Electoral Act – sealing ballot boxes – does not apply at counting centres.

Questioning of electors

The Electoral Act, ss 200DI(1) and 229(1)

You may observe the issuing officer asking questions to ascertain the elector's full name, place of living and whether they have voted before in the by-election.

If a person is claiming entitlement to apply for an early vote (prior to polling day), the issuing officer will also ask the person whether they are entitled to apply for an early vote.

Objections

The Electoral Act, s 231(2)

You may object to the right of any person to vote. The officer in charge must record all such objections by scrutineers.

Helping voters

The Electoral Act, ss 234 and 234A

You may assist any voter if they ask you. You may observe and accompany the officer in charge when they are requested to assist a voter who is blind or has low vision, has low literacy skills or is otherwise incapable of marking the ballot paper without assistance. These voters may, however, appoint another person to enter the voting booth with them to mark and deposit the ballot paper in the ballot box. In this case, neither the officer in charge nor the scrutineer accompanies the voter into the voting booth.

You may also be present during the issuing of votes outside the polling place to any voter who has satisfied the officer in charge that they are unable to enter the polling place itself due to physical incapacity.

What about other situations?

The Electoral Act, s 200DA(1)

You have the right to be present during the polling at an early voting centre.

The Electoral Act, ss 217 and 227

Mobile polling teams conduct mobile polling at any time on any of the 12 days preceding polling day, on polling day or on a day to which polling is adjourned.

You have the right to be present during the conduct of mobile polling at locations including, but not limited to hospitals, prisons and remote areas. In an election, mobile polling teams may carry how-to-vote material but not openly display it. They provide the how-to-vote material to voters on request.

You have the right to be present during the conduct of mobile polling in prisons in accordance with arrangements made with prison authorities.

You have the right to be present during the conduct of mobile polling in remote areas.

In all instances of attending mobile polling, you must arrange your own transport.

Offences by scrutineers

The Acts and the Criminal Code are specific about what constitutes an offence by a scrutineer. See Appendix 1 for more information. Penalties can involve a fine or imprisonment or both. This section summarises the various types of offences you need to be aware of as you perform your role as scrutineer.

If you are in any doubt about what constitutes an offence, you should seek independent legal advice.

Scrutineers must not use any image-recording device (including cameras, video recorders and camera or video-enabled mobile phones) to record images of ballot papers or declaration vote envelopes, or any other images that might identify an elector and how they have voted, in a polling place or counting centre.

Behaviour in the polling place or counting centre

The Electoral Act, ss 218, 323, 335, 341 and 348

A scrutineer must not interfere with a voter or attempt to influence any voter within the polling place. You must limit any communication you have with a voter to what is necessary for you to discharge your function as a scrutineer.

If the officer in charge considers you have committed a breach, or that you are guilty of misconduct, they may request that you be removed from the polling place by the police or by another authorised person. You may also be removed if you fail to obey the lawful directions of the officer in charge.

You must not disclose to anyone else any knowledge you may acquire as a scrutineer about how an elector has voted.

You must not disclose or communicate information that relates to the early sorting of pre-poll ordinary votes to persons outside the counting centre before the close of voting.

You must not exhibit or leave in the polling place any printed material – card or paper – that directs, instructs or is intended to influence an elector on how to vote.

You must not wear a badge or emblem in support or opposition of a political party, candidate or proposed change to the Constitution in the polling place.

Other offences during polling

Scrutineers, campaign workers and other supporters of a candidate should also be aware of various other acts and omissions that constitute an offence during elections.

The Electoral Act, Part XXI

In summary, these offences include:

- knowingly making a false or misleading statement about an elector's enrolment to them
- marking a vote or making any other mark on any other person's ballot paper without authority

- impersonating someone with the intention of securing a ballot paper to which the impersonator is not entitled
- impersonating someone with the intention of voting in their name
- fraudulently doing anything that results in a nomination paper or ballot paper being defaced or destroyed
- fraudulently putting any ballot paper or other paper into the ballot box
- fraudulently taking any ballot paper out of any polling place or counting centre
- supplying ballot papers without authority
- interfering with or doing anything that results in the unlawful destruction, taking, or opening of the ballot boxes or ballot papers.

Other offences include:

- voting more than once in the same election, and
- defacing, mutilating, destroying, or removing any kind of material displayed by or under the authority of the DRO.

Campaign workers, other than those appointed as scrutineers, may only enter the polling place once – to record their own vote. There is only one exception: when an elector who is blind, has low vision, is physically incapacitated, or has low literacy skills, nominates a campaign worker to help them vote.

The six-metre limit

The Electoral Act, s 340

Special prohibitions apply to the area within six metres of the entrance to a polling place, early voting centre or a mobile polling location.

A person (including for example, campaign workers and supporters) must not:

- canvass for votes
- solicit votes
- induce any elector not to vote for any particular candidate
- induce any elector not to vote at the by-election
- exhibit any notice or sign (other than an official notice) relating to the by-election.

Prohibitions also apply to any of these activities that are broadcast by electronic equipment and are clearly audible within six metres of the entrance to a polling place or early voting centre.

The general prohibition on canvassing within six metres of an entrance to a polling place or early voting centre means that people (such as campaign workers and supporters) who are distributing how-to-vote cards and other non-AEC notices can only hand out or display this material outside the six-metre limit.

Voting

The Electoral Act

Part XV, 'Postal voting'

Part XVI, 'The polling'

For more information on voting procedures, please visit the [AEC website](#) or phone the AEC on 13 23 26.

Voting is compulsory in Australian federal elections, by-elections, and referendums. The AEC puts a great deal of effort into ensuring every qualified elector has the opportunity to vote. As a scrutineer, you will need to know about the voting process, including the different types of votes that can be cast and the various issues involved in the management of polling during an election. This chapter discusses these matters in depth.

Scrutineers are in a trusted position, so it is particularly important you are aware of your legal obligation to observe the secrecy of the vote. You must also observe the prohibition on recording any aspect of the voting process.

Remember, you must wear an official Identification Badge identifying you as a scrutineer at all times when you are in a polling place as a scrutineer.

Certified list of voters

Before polling begins, each issuing officer at a polling place is supplied with a copy of the certified list of voters for the division for which the polling place is appointed. The certified list is used in issuing votes to electors enrolled for that division.

If a voter's name is not found on the certified list, they may cast a provisional or absent vote. Their entitlement to vote in the election will be verified before their ballot paper is added to the scrutiny.

Ballot papers

An elector is issued with a green ballot paper for the House of Representatives by-election.

Any elector who makes a mistake or 'spoils' a ballot paper before it is placed in the ballot box or in the declaration vote envelope may receive a new one when they return the spoilt ballot paper to the issuing officer.

Methods of voting

As a scrutineer, you will observe electors using various methods to record their votes. You should therefore be aware of the different categories and methods of voting, as the rules differ slightly in the observation of each:

- ordinary voting
- declaration voting, including:
 - provisional votes
 - early votes, which can be cast in person or by post.

Ordinary voting

An ordinary vote is recorded by an elector whose entitlement to vote is verified at the place of polling and whose name is marked off a certified list of voters.

Ordinary votes may be cast on, or in certain circumstances before, polling day. Most of these votes are counted on polling day, after the close of voting.

At the polling place, the elector will be asked questions to ascertain the elector's full name, place of living and whether they have voted before in the by-election. The issuing officer may ask one or more other questions to establish the identity of the elector.

If the issuing officer is satisfied with these answers, the elector is entitled to vote and receives a ballot paper. The issuing officer initials the ballot paper and marks the name of the voter off the certified list.

The elector must then proceed alone to a voting booth and, in private, for each ballot paper:

- mark their vote on the ballot paper
- place it in the ballot box and leave the polling place.

Declaration voting

A declaration vote is recorded by an elector whose entitlement to vote cannot be confirmed at the place of voting. The elector makes a signed declaration on an envelope and then puts their completed ballot paper inside. These votes are counted after polling day if the elector's entitlement to vote is verified using the information provided on the declaration envelope.

A declaration vote can be cast as:

- an early declaration vote prior to polling day either in person or by post
- a provisional vote prior to or on polling day.

Provisional voting – eligibility

An elector may be issued with a provisional vote if:

- their name cannot be found on the certified list of voters for the division (the Electoral Act, s 235(1) (a), or
- their name is on the certified list of voters, but their address does not appear on the list (these may be silent electors who for reasons of personal or family safety do not have their address shown) (the Electoral Act, s 235(1)(b);
- the officer in charge has asked the person one or more questions under s 229(4) of the Electoral Act about matters shown on the certified list of voters for a particular person to establish whether the person is that particular person and one of the following applies:
 - their answers do not accord with the relevant information shown for that particular person on the list (the Electoral Act, s 235(1)(c)(i)
 - their answers accord with the relevant information shown for that particular person on the list but the officer is not satisfied that the person is that particular person (the Electoral Act, s 235(1)(c)(ii)
 - they refused to answer fully (the Electoral Act, s 235(1)(c)(iii), or
- their name has been marked on the certified list of voters as having already voted at the polling place (and the voter claims not to have voted before) (the Electoral Act, s 235(1)(d), or
- the person is provisionally enrolled as a new citizen (the Electoral Act, s 235(1)(e).

Provisional voting – completion and return

The Electoral Act, s 235

The following procedures apply to provisional voting:

- the issuing officer must show the voter a written statement (either as a separate card or on the back of the declaration envelope) explaining provisional voting and the procedures followed
- the provisional voter must complete the envelope with their details (with the exception that an elector with their address suppressed from the electoral roll is not required to publicly disclose their address)
- the provisional voter must sign a declaration on an envelope provided for the purpose, in the presence of the issuing officer, who must then sign as witness to the declaration and add the date
- on receipt of a ballot paper, the provisional voter casts their vote in the ordinary manner
- the provisional voter returns the ballot paper to the polling officer, who then places it in the signed and witnessed declaration envelope, seals it and puts it in the ballot box for later dispatch to the DRO.

Early voting

An elector may apply in person for an early vote at an early voting centre on any of the grounds applicable to postal voting (as per appendix 2) and cast either a pre-poll declaration or pre-poll ordinary vote. Alternatively, they may apply for a postal vote or cast their vote with a mobile polling team.

Electors who are blind or have low vision and Antarctic electors will be able to cast a secret vote via special call centre arrangements. Further information for candidates and scrutineers about the locations and hours of operation of call centres is available by contacting the AEC on 132326 or emailing info@aec.gov.au.

Scrutineers have the right to be present during the conduct of early voting.

The Electoral Act, ss 200DJ(2) and 231(2)

At the request of a scrutineer, the officer in charge must make a note and keep a record of any objection by the scrutineer to the right of the voter to vote by pre-poll declaration or pre-poll ordinary vote.

On polling day some early voting centres provide voting services for electors from interstate.

Postal voting

You may observe the preliminary scrutiny of postal vote certificates, extraction of ballot papers and subsequent counting of postal votes.

Electors who may be eligible for postal voting include those who will not be in their home state or territory on polling day, are seriously ill, infirm or unable to leave work, or for religious reasons are unable to attend a polling place. The conditions for entitlement to a postal vote are given in detail in Appendix 2.

Voting at mobile polling places

Mobile polling provides the opportunity for electors who are unable to go to polling places to vote at a by-election. Mobile polling services may be delivered at any place where the Electoral Commissioner determines they may be needed and may commence up to 12 days before polling day, on polling day, or on a day to which polling is adjourned.

Once determined, the places, days and times of mobile polling arrangements are published on the [AEC website](#). Mobile polling can take place at locations including, but not limited to hospitals, prisons, and remote areas.

Please note, establishments that have agreed to mobile polling may have entry requirements that apply to AEC staff and scrutineers who attend these locations to observe polling. Entry requirements may include COVID vaccination, influenza vaccination, wearing a mask, undertaking a rapid antigen test and, in some jurisdictions, a working with vulnerable people clearance.

Candidates and scrutineers are required to ensure scrutineers who are attending mobile polling locations are able to comply with the entry requirements of that location to avoid potential disruptions to polling. Acceptable forms of evidence to support compliance may need to be provided if requested by the establishment. A list of mobile polling locations will be made available on the AEC website soon after the Issue of Writ for an electoral event. You may contact establishments receiving mobile polling for details of their entry requirements.

Assisted voting

Voting inside the polling place

The Electoral Act, ss and 224 234

As a scrutineer, you may assist any voter if they ask you. Assisted voting is available at all polling places including areas visited by mobile polling teams, such as hospitals, prisons, and remote areas.

The officer in charge may permit any voter who is blind or has low vision, is physically incapacitated, or has low literacy skills, to be accompanied by a person appointed by the voter so that the person (in accordance with the voter's wishes) can mark and deposit the voter's ballot paper in the ballot box on behalf of the voter.

Where no such person is appointed, the officer in charge may perform this role in the presence of scrutineers or, if no scrutineers are present, in the presence of a polling official or another person appointed by the voter.

The officer in charge at a hospital will inform the elector of their right to be assisted in casting a vote when necessary.

In any situation where a voter requires assistance, the voter may indicate a voting intention to the officer in charge with a written statement, including a how-to-vote card.

Voting outside the polling place

The Electoral Act, s 234A

If the officer in charge is satisfied that an elector is unable to enter the polling place because of physical disability, illness, advanced pregnancy, or other conditions, they may allow the elector to vote outside in close proximity to the polling place.

The officer in charge must inform any scrutineers at the polling place that an elector will vote outside the polling place and that one scrutineer per candidate or person appointing is allowed to be present when the elector votes. As a scrutineer, you are entitled to observe the process (though not the marking of the ballot papers, unless the officer in charge is called on by the voter to assist in marking the ballot papers). The voter must mark their ballot papers in the presence of a polling official and then hand them to the polling official.

The polling official must ensure the ballot papers are immediately returned to the polling place and put in the ballot box in the presence of any scrutineers who were present when the elector voted.

If the voter also satisfies the officer in charge that they are unable to vote without assistance, the officer in charge may, with the voter's consent, allow a polling official to mark the ballot paper as the voter indicates.

The voter may indicate a voting intention to the officer in charge with a written statement, including a how-to-vote card.

The scrutiny

The Electoral Act

Part XVI, 'The polling'

Part XVIII, 'The scrutiny'

Schedule 3, 'Rules for the conduct of a preliminary scrutiny of declaration votes'

As a scrutineer, you may be present at the checking and counting of the ballot papers after the close of polling. You may be present at the early sorting of ordinary pre-poll ballot papers from 4pm on polling day. This chapter details what you can and cannot do as a scrutineer during the counting process. It also describes the AEC's procedures so you will know what to expect as you observe the counting of ballot papers on polling night and in the days following.

What scrutineers do

The Electoral Act, ss 264, 265 and 274

As a scrutineer, you have certain roles under the Act. These roles are outlined below.

Sealing and opening ballot boxes

You have the right to inspect the condition of and observe the sealing (if relevant) and opening of ballot boxes. Ballot boxes containing votes taken by mobile polling teams are forwarded to the DRO for counting. These ballot boxes are opened and the scrutiny of the HoR ballot papers is conducted on polling night or as soon as possible after polling night.

Counting ballot papers

You have the right to observe the counting of ballot papers on polling night by AROs, including the two-candidate-preferred count conducted after the counting of first preference HoR votes. You may also view the flow of preferences from other candidates, but only if this does not unreasonably delay the scrutiny.

You may observe the counting of ballot papers following polling night, including the fresh scrutiny of HoR ballot papers, the preliminary and further scrutiny of declaration votes, and any recount of ballot papers.

Objections

The Electoral Act, s 267

You may object to the admission or rejection of any ballot paper at a scrutiny. The officer conducting the scrutiny will then decide whether the vote is formal or informal and mark the ballot paper as 'admitted' or 'rejected'. The officer may reject a ballot paper as informal even if no scrutineer has objected to it.

Countersigning endorsements

Electoral officers package ballot papers and other materials relating to the by-election for dispatch to the divisional office. You may countersign endorsements of the contents on any containers of ballot papers, and countersign statements setting out the number of first preference votes for each candidate and the number of informal ballot papers.

Coming and going

You may come and go during the scrutiny, provided there is never more than one scrutineer per candidate or person appointing per polling official engaged in the scrutiny at any one time.

Remember, you must return your Identification Badge if you leave the counting centre at any time.

What scrutineers must not do

During the scrutiny, you must not:

- handle ballot papers in any way
- unreasonably delay or interfere with the counting of votes.

While you have the right to observe all stages of the scrutiny and challenge the formality decisions made by scrutiny staff on HoR ballot papers, it is the duty of the ARO to ensure the results from the polling place are delivered in an orderly and timely way.

If the ARO, DRO or AEO, as the case may be, is of the opinion that allowing you to inspect votes would unreasonably delay the scrutiny, you may be told that you are no longer allowed to inspect the votes (the Electoral Act, s 265(2)).

On polling day

Early sorting of ordinary pre-poll ballot papers

From 4pm on polling day some ballot boxes containing ordinary pre-poll HoR ballot papers will be opened for early sorting.

This process involves unfolding the ballot papers and sorting them to first preferences or informal, but they are not counted.

As a scrutineer you may observe the early sorting process, but you are not entitled to object to a ballot paper before the closing of the poll. Challenges may occur when the official scrutiny begins at 6pm.

It is an offence to disclose or communicate information that relates to the early sorting of ballot papers to persons outside the counting centre before the closing of the poll. Penalties include fines and imprisonment.

Polling night scrutiny

The counting of ordinary votes begins in each polling place immediately after the poll closes at 6pm on polling day.

On polling night, polling officials are required to complete the following tasks after the close of polls:

- count the first preferences on the HoR ballot papers
- conduct a two-candidate-preferred count of the HoR ballot papers (note: this is an indicative count only)
- sort and reconcile declaration vote envelopes and counterfoils.

The counting of ordinary votes taken at pre-poll voting centres also commences as soon as possible after 6pm on polling day.

All proceedings at the count must be open to you. The scrutiny may be adjourned from time to time as might be necessary until the counting of the votes is complete.

Informal votes

A ballot paper is generally considered informal if it is not filled out correctly in accordance with the relevant Act and the instructions on the ballot paper. It therefore cannot be included in the scrutiny.

The formality of ballot papers is covered in more detail under the heading “Formality of votes” on page 23 of this publication.

House of Representatives count on polling night

The HoR are initially sorted by the polling officials into first preference votes for each candidate and informal ballot papers. The results are then tabulated and the first preference vote figures for each candidate are telephoned to the relevant DRO.

Divisional staff then enter these figures for each polling place into the national computerised Election Management System, which in turn updates the Tally Room (TR) on the [AEC website](#).

Indicative two-candidate-preferred

On the completion of the count of first preferences for the HoR at each polling place, the officer in charge must, as directed by the relevant AEO (in accordance with s 274(2A) of the Electoral Act), conduct an indicative distribution of preferences on a two candidate-preferred basis. This provides an indication of the likely outcome of the election in each division.

The procedure for the indicative two-candidate-preferred count is outlined below.

- After nominations close, the AEC selects two candidates in each division to whom preferences of all other candidates will be distributed indicatively on election night. These candidates are chosen in most cases on the basis of previous election results.
- The names of the two candidates are not made public before the close of polling. At each polling place, the ARO announces the

names of the two candidates at the commencement of the count.

- Polling officials sort the ballot papers into first-preference piles for each of the candidates. The ballot papers for the two nominated candidates are removed to a secure area and the ballot papers for the remaining candidates are notionally allocated to one of the two nominated candidates according to who is more preferred or gets the ‘best preference’.

For example, if the two nominated candidates are Candidate A and Candidate B then a ballot paper that has ‘1’ Candidate C, ‘2’ Candidate D, ‘3’ Candidate A and then ‘4’ Candidate B will be allocated to Candidate A. A ballot paper that showed ‘1’ Candidate D, ‘2’ Candidate B (etc) would be allocated to Candidate B.

Like the count of first preference votes, this result is telephoned through to the DRO, who enters it into the Election Management System, which in turn updates the TR on the [AEC website](#).

The full distribution of preferences for HoR votes is conducted by the DRO in the weeks after polling day.

On polling night, the only figures released for the Senate are the first preference votes for groups and ungrouped candidates.

After polling night – fresh scrutiny or re-check

House of Representatives after polling night

The initial scrutiny of HoR ballot papers conducted at the polling place on polling night is routinely followed by a ‘fresh scrutiny’ conducted at a divisional out-posted centre in the days following polling day. The fresh scrutiny is a re-check of all ordinary votes received from every polling place, pre-poll voting centre and mobile polling team within a division.

The fresh scrutiny of HoR ballot papers also includes a two-candidate-preferred count, to confirm the TCP result from election night. This count is conducted in essentially the same manner as the indicative two-candidate-preferred count conducted in polling places on election night.

Following the fresh scrutiny, a full distribution of preferences is also carried out for each polling place.

Scrutiny of declaration votes

Declaration votes generally do not get counted on polling night; instead, they are counted in the weeks following polling night. The counting of these votes takes longer than the counting of ordinary votes.

The DRO and staff in the counting centre conduct the scrutiny of declaration votes in two stages:

- the **preliminary scrutiny** of postal vote certificates and declaration vote envelopes containing early or provisional votes to determine whether each person is entitled to a vote
- the **further scrutiny** where the ballot papers admitted to the scrutiny are taken out of their envelopes and then treated in the same way as ordinary ballot papers.

Preliminary scrutiny

The preliminary scrutiny of declaration vote envelopes determines which declaration votes are admissible and can proceed to further scrutiny. The preliminary scrutiny of early and postal declaration vote envelopes can begin from the receipt of the declaration vote envelopes. This assists the DRO to begin the further scrutiny of these types of declaration votes promptly after polling day.

Electronic Certified List (ECL) devices will be used to assist staff in conducting preliminary scrutiny.

Following preliminary scrutiny, envelopes may be opened to extract ballot papers however no ballot paper is scrutinised before the close of the poll.

The DRO will contact candidates before the preliminary scrutiny to advise times, dates, and locations of preliminary scrutinies.

Postal vote certificates

Section 228(5A) of the Electoral Act requires the AEC to wait for up to 13 days after polling day for any outstanding postal (or other declaration) votes. These votes are included in the count if they were cast before 6pm on polling day and are received by a designated AEC staff member within 13 days after the close of the poll. These envelopes may need to be forwarded by the receiving officer to the owning DRO. For this reason, the counting of postal votes is an ongoing process for up to three weeks after polling day.

A postal ballot paper will be accepted for further scrutiny if the DRO is satisfied:

- that the elector is enrolled for the division
- that the vote contained in the envelope was recorded prior to the close of the poll (which is done by checking the date the witness has signed)
- that the signature on the postal vote certificate is valid
- that the signature is correctly witnessed.

Following the removal of signature checking requirements from the Electoral Act, the AEC implemented an authentication checking system to confirm that the person who submits a Postal Voting Application (PVA) is the same person who completes the Postal Voting Certificate (PVC). This is to be done via a security question and answer process, with signature checking as a back-up. PVCs must not be rejected if the security answer is incorrect or not provided, as it is not a mandatory field and does not invalidate the PVC.

If there is doubt that the signature on a PVC is that of the elector, the DRO must check the signature against the most recent enrolment record (if any) of the elector's signature available.

Early and provisional vote declaration envelopes

The requirements for the preliminary scrutiny of early (pre-poll) and provisional votes are essentially the same as those for the preliminary scrutiny of postal votes.

A declaration vote will be accepted for further scrutiny if the DRO is satisfied:

- that the elector is enrolled for the division
- that the certificate or declaration has been properly signed and witnessed.

Votes will not be admitted where:

- the elector was provisionally enrolled at 17 years of age but had not turned 18 on or before polling day
- the elector's claim to be enrolled was received by the AEC after the close of rolls for the by-election.

A vote will generally be admitted if clerical, computer error or omission was responsible for the elector's name or address being excluded from the electoral roll.

Further scrutiny of declaration votes

Declaration votes generally do not get counted on polling night. From the Monday before polling day, the DRO opens the declaration vote envelopes that have passed the preliminary scrutiny. The ballot papers are extracted, without being inspected, and placed in a ballot box. At the further scrutiny, they are counted in a counting centre in the period following polling night, following the same procedures as after 6pm on polling day.

The DRO will advise candidates of the times, dates and locations of the further scrutiny. Scrutineers have the same rights and responsibilities at a further scrutiny in a counting centre as they have at the scrutiny of ballot papers in a polling place after 6pm on polling day.

Formality of votes

The Electoral Act

Part XVI, 'The polling'

Part XVIII, 'The scrutiny'

As a scrutineer, you have the right to challenge the admission or rejection of any ballot paper at the scrutiny. The grounds for a challenge may be the formality or informality of the ballot paper. You therefore need to know the difference between an informal vote and a formal vote.

Please refer to the [Ballot paper formality guidelines](#) for further guidance and examples.

Stages of the scrutiny

The scrutiny of ballot papers has two stages:

- an initial formality check, where votes that do not satisfy certain criteria are excluded
- a subsequent examination of those votes that pass the formality check to determine which candidate has been elected.

Checking formality

To help decision makers correctly identify ballot papers as formal or informal, there are:

- two **formality** tests that must be applied to all ballot papers
- five **principles** that must be applied to every ballot paper that passes the initial two tests
- a set of **guidelines** that underpin these principles.

The ARO at the polling place and the DRO at the fresh scrutiny are the appropriate decision makers. To assist with the consistent application of the formality principles, decision makers should attempt to look at as many disputed ballot papers as possible at the one time.

If the polling place officials conducting the scrutiny of HoR ballot papers are in doubt about the formality of a ballot paper, they will put it in a separate pile for the ARO to review.

If an ARO is unsure of the formality of any ballot paper, they should always include them with the other informal ballot papers.

All informal HoR ballot papers are checked at the fresh scrutiny, and by following the above process, the ARO ensures consistent decision-making on the formality of possibly contentious ballot papers.

Ballot paper formality tests

All ballot papers will be required to undergo two tests before progressing through formality checking. Failure of either of these tests will result in an informal ballot paper and no further formality checking will be required.

- Is the ballot paper authentic?
- Does the ballot paper identify the voter?

Authentic ballot papers

Generally, a ballot paper will carry an official mark (watermark or printed security detail) and the initials of the issuing officer.

However, ballot papers that do not carry these markings are not necessarily informal. They should be presented to the DRO to decide on their formality.

Ballot paper alteration by polling officials

A fully printed ballot paper for a division may be altered to become a ballot paper for another division (i.e. the names of the candidates are crossed out by the issuing officer and the names of candidates for the other division are written in their place). This only applies if there is more than one election on the same day.

Where ballot papers have been altered by polling officials the vote is still formal if:

- the political party names are not all correctly listed, for example the wrong party names are listed against the candidates, or the party names are not listed
- a ballot paper has the names of any candidate spelt incorrectly, provided the identity of the candidate is still clear
- the ballot paper has the names of the candidates in the wrong order
- the candidate's surname is only listed on the altered ballot paper, as long as no two candidates share a surname.

NOTE: There is no legal requirement for a ballot paper prepared by an official under s 209(6) or s 209(7) of the Electoral Act to contain a party logo and therefore the absence of a logo does not make the ballot paper informal.

However, irrespective of the way the voter has voted, the ballot paper is informal if:

- an altered ballot paper does not contain the names of every candidate for the division.
- the candidate's given names only are listed on the altered ballot paper.

Alteration by polling officials

Example – ballot paper alteration by polling official

House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State Mayo
Electoral Division of ~~Division Name~~

Number the boxes from 1 to 8/⁴
in the order of your choice

3 SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT
*NGUYEN
Independent*

1 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY
*BROWN
Nationals*

2 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY
*POINTER
Labor*

4 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY
*STEWART
Family First*

SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is formal

All surnames are different. That is, the ballot paper has been altered with the candidates' surnames only and no two candidates share a surname.

House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State Mayo
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8/⁴
in the order of your choice

3 SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT

SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

2 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

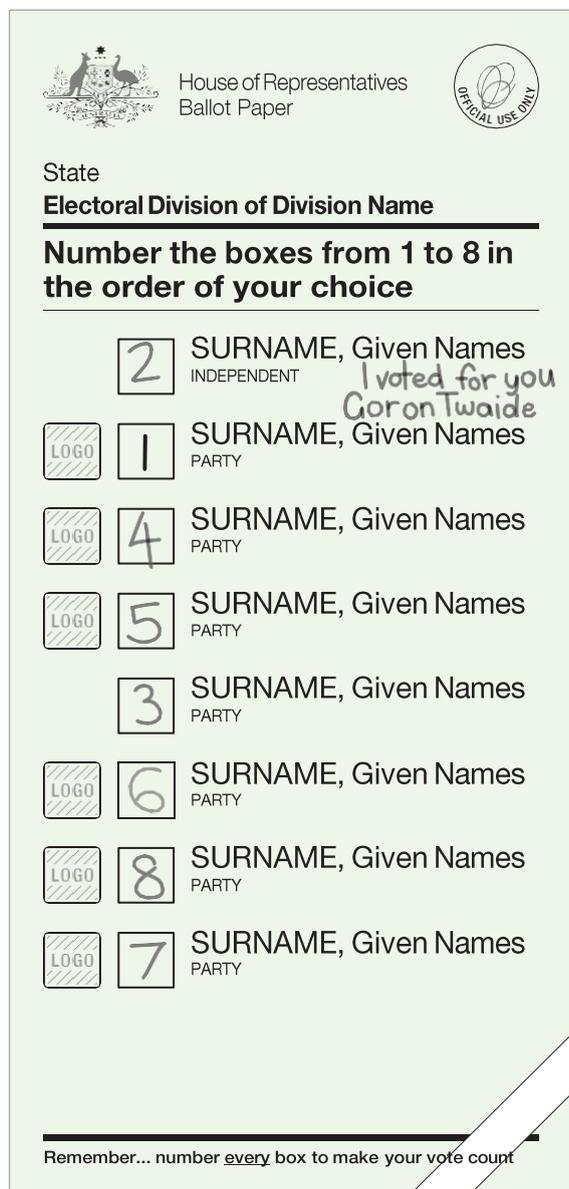
This ballot paper is informal.

There is no candidate's name beside the third box.

Identification of voter

A ballot paper that has been marked in a way that could identify the voter should be presented to the DRO to decide on formality.

Example – ballot paper that may identify a voter



House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

2 SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT *I voted for you
Gor on Twaide*

LOGO 1 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 4 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 5 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

3 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 6 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

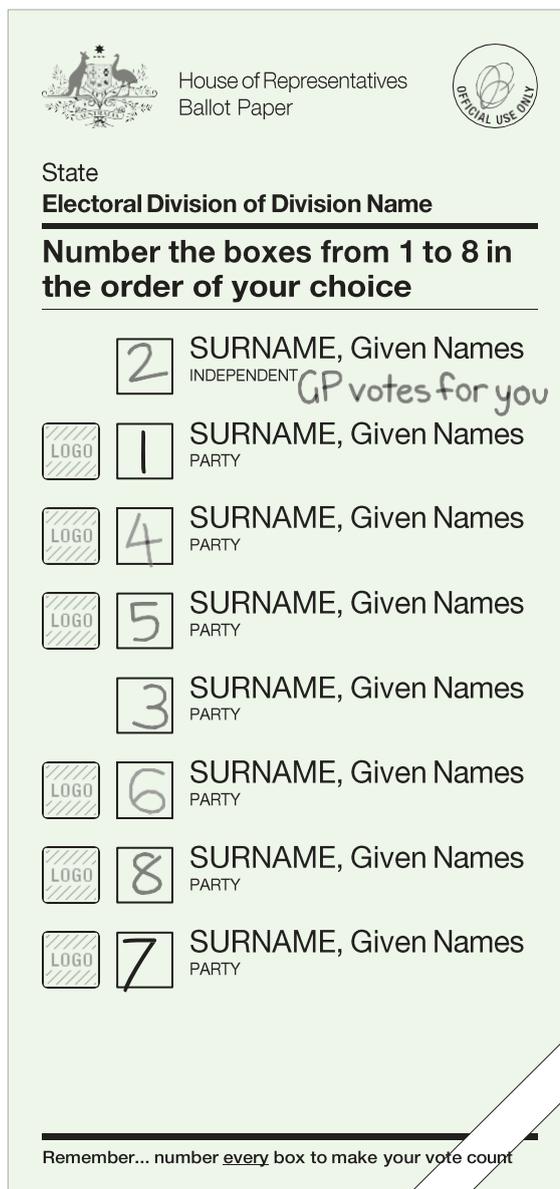
LOGO 8 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 7 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper may be informal

If, in the opinion of the DRO, there is sufficient writing on the ballot paper to uniquely identify the voter, the ballot paper is informal.



House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

2 SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT *GP votes for you*

LOGO 1 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 4 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 5 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

3 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 6 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 8 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 7 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper may be formal

If, in the opinion of the DRO there is not enough information to identify the voter the ballot paper is formal.

Ballot paper formality principles

There are five overarching principles that must be considered when interpreting the marks on any ballot paper that has passed the initial two tests. They are:

Start from the assumption that the voter has intended to vote formally

The assumption needs to be made that an elector who has marked a ballot paper has done so with the intention to cast a formal vote.

Establish the intention of the voter and give effect to this intention

When interpreting markings on the ballot paper, these must be considered in line with the intention of the voter.

Err in favour of the franchise

In the situation where the voter has tried to submit a formal vote, i.e. the ballot paper is not blank or defaced, doubtful questions of form should wherever possible be resolved in the voter's favour.

Only have regard to what is written on the ballot paper

The intention of the voter must be unmistakable, i.e. do not assume what the voter was trying to do if it's not clear – only consider what was written on the ballot paper.

The ballot paper should be construed as a whole

By considering the number in each square as one in a series, not as an isolated number, a poorly formed number MAY be recognisable as the one missing from the series.

Lawful numbering sequence

Ballot papers have different numbering sequence requirements. Whether a numbering sequence is lawful will depend on the type of ballot paper. However, there are some general principles that apply to the assessment of all ballot papers:

- consecutive sequence of numbers
- overwriting
- acceptable forms of numbering
- empty boxes
- placement of votes
- variations in handwriting, and
- candidate name substitution.

House of Representatives guidelines

Consecutive sequence of numbers

A House of Representatives ballot paper is only formal if the voter has indicated a first preference and consecutively numbered all boxes. A number in the series may not be repeated or skipped.

If one box is left blank and all other boxes have been numbered in a consecutive sequence starting with the number '1', the paper is formal providing:

- the blank box is the last in the consecutive sequence
- there is no marking at all in the box.

Alterations to numbers will not make a ballot paper informal, provided the voter's intention is clear, for example a number can be crossed out and another number written beside it.

Example – consecutive numbering

The image shows a sample House of Representatives Ballot Paper. At the top left is the Australian coat of arms. To its right is the text 'House of Representatives Ballot Paper'. At the top right is a circular logo with 'OFFICIAL USE ONLY' around a stylized 'H'. Below this, the text reads: 'State', 'Electoral Division of Division Name', and 'Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice'. There are eight numbered boxes, each with a 'LOGO' placeholder to its left. The numbers are: 5 (with a handwritten '1' next to it), 7, 2, 6, 3, 8, 4, and 8. To the right of each number is the text 'SURNAME, Given Names' and 'PARTY'. At the bottom, a horizontal line is followed by the text 'Remember... number every box to make your vote count'.

This ballot paper is formal

There are eight consecutive numbers reasonably discernible.

Overwriting

If a number is overwritten in a way that makes it impossible to read, then the ballot paper is informal.

Example – overwritten ballot paper



House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

2	SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT
LOGO 1	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 3	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 4	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
5	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 6	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 8	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 7	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is formal

The third box is an overwritten '3', the fourth box is an overwritten '4'.



House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

5	SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT
LOGO 1	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 1	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 3	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
2	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 6	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 8	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 4	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is informal

The overwriting in the second square is indecipherable

Acceptable forms of numbering

For voting in the House of Representatives, voters may use a consecutive sequence in various styles – such as: numerals (1 2 3), words (one two three), roman numerals (I II III IV), or ordinal numerals (1st 2nd 3rd). In certain cases, a mixture of numbering sequences can be used, provided that the voter's intention is clear. Voters can use letters in a consecutive series (A B C) provided A is the first preference and no letters are repeated or skipped. A mixture of letters and numbers will result in an informal ballot paper.

Example – numbering

Example 1.

House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

3 SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT

LOGO 1 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 2 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 7 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 8 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 5 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 4 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 6 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

SAMPLE

The ballot paper above is informal.

A tick is not a valid first preference mark.

Example 2.

House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

Two SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT

LOGO 3 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO One SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 4 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 5 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 6 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 7 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 8 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

SAMPLE

The ballot paper above is formal.

Numbers can be written as words or figures.

Example 3.

House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

A SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT

LOGO 1 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 2 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 6 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 3 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO E SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 4 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 8 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

SAMPLE

The ballot paper above is informal.

A mixture of numbers and letters has made the voter's intention unclear.

Two candidates only

In the case of only two candidates on a HoR ballot paper, if the voter has placed a '1' in the box beside a candidate and

- left the second box blank, or
- inserted any other number

the ballot paper will be deemed formal (s 268(1)(c) of the Electoral Act).

Empty boxes

For House of Representatives ballot papers a single box may be left empty provided it is the last in the series and on the condition there is no marking in the box at all. A scribble or dot etc in the final box will result in informality if it is not recognisable as the next number in the series.

Two or more empty boxes on a House of Representatives ballot paper results in an informal vote.

Example – empty boxes on ballot paper



House of Representatives Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

3	SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT
LOGO 2	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 1	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 4	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
5	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 6	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 7	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is informal

No discernible figure in the eighth square.



House of Representatives Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

1	SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT
LOGO 4	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 2	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
5	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 3	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO 6	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
LOGO	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is informal

There are two empty boxes.

Placement of votes

The vote can be made inside the box or beside the box/candidate name, provided the intention of the voter is clear.

Example – placement of votes



House of Representatives
Ballot Paper



State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

<input type="checkbox"/>	6	SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
<input type="checkbox"/>	8	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY
<input type="checkbox"/>	7	SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is formal

The figure in the eighth square reasonably resembles a '7'.



House of Representatives
Ballot Paper



State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

<input type="checkbox"/>		SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT	2
<input type="checkbox"/>		SURNAME, Given Names PARTY	1
<input type="checkbox"/>		SURNAME, Given Names PARTY	4
<input type="checkbox"/>		SURNAME, Given Names PARTY	5
<input type="checkbox"/>		SURNAME, Given Names PARTY	3
<input type="checkbox"/>		SURNAME, Given Names PARTY	6
<input type="checkbox"/>		SURNAME, Given Names PARTY	8
<input type="checkbox"/>		SURNAME, Given Names PARTY	7

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

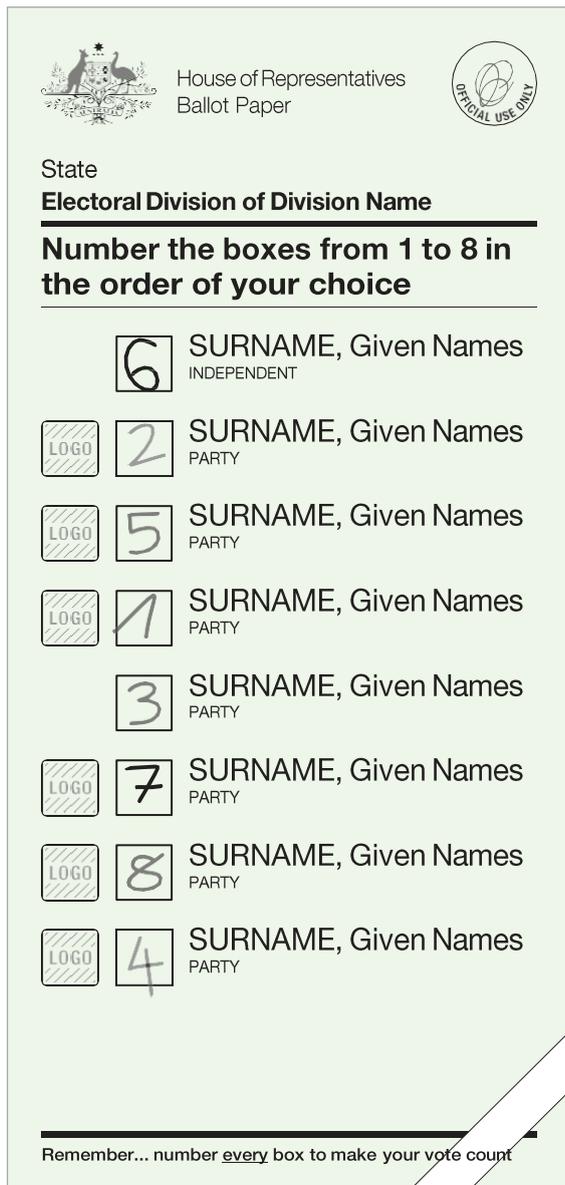
This ballot paper is formal

There is a consecutive series of discernible numbers beginning with '1' and the voter's intention is clear.

Variations in handwriting

Unconventional but recognisable variations in handwriting, such as placing a stroke through the vertical stem of the number '7' or an upward angular stroke before the familiar vertical stroke on the number '1', should not result in a ballot paper being informal, provided any variations result in a series of numbers and the voter's intention is clear.

Example – variations in handwriting



House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

6 SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT

LOGO 2 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 5 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 1 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

3 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 7 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

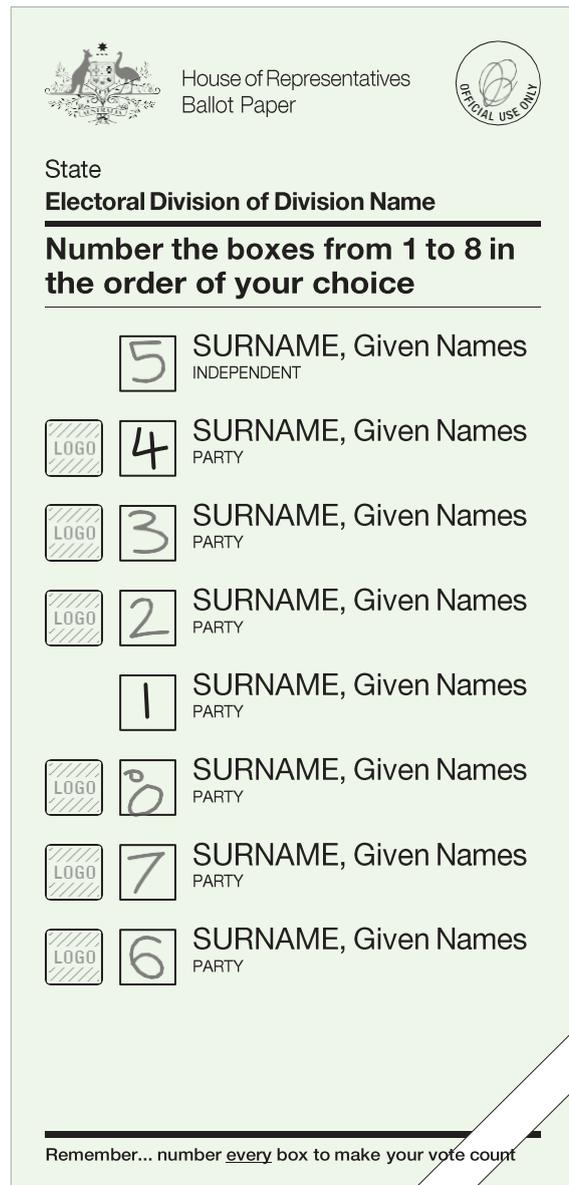
LOGO 8 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 4 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is formal

The figure in the fourth box reasonably resembles a '1'.



House of Representatives
Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

5 SURNAME, Given Names
INDEPENDENT

LOGO 4 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 3 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 2 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

1 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 0 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 7 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

LOGO 6 SURNAME, Given Names
PARTY

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is formal

There is a consecutive series of discernible numbers beginning with '1', and the voter's intention is clear.

Candidate name substitution

If the voter crosses out or replaces a candidate's name on a ballot paper, that ballot paper is informal unless the square adjacent to the substitute candidate name is left blank or given the last preference in which case section 268(1)(c) of the Electoral Act would likely permit the HoR ballot paper being considered formal.

Note that this does not include cases where a fully printed ballot paper is altered to become a ballot paper for another division by a polling official.

If a candidate name has been added to the ballot paper by the voter and been allocated any number except the last number, the vote is informal.

Example – candidate name substitution

House of Representatives Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

2 SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT

1 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

4 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

5 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

3 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

6 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

8 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

7 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

9 Donald Duck

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is formal

The voter has indicated consecutive preferences for all nominated candidates commencing with the number '1'.

House of Representatives Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

2 SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT

1 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

4 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

5 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

3 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

6 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

8 ~~SURNAME, Given Names PARTY~~
Donald Duck

7 ~~SURNAME, Given Names PARTY~~
Mickey Mouse

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is informal

The voter has not indicated a preference for all the candidates in the election.

House of Representatives Ballot Paper

State
Electoral Division of Division Name

Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice

2 SURNAME, Given Names INDEPENDENT

9 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

4 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

3 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

5 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

6 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

8 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

7 SURNAME, Given Names PARTY

1 Donald Duck

Remember... number every box to make your vote count

This ballot paper is informal

The voter has not indicated a valid first preference.

Allocation of preferences

The Electoral Act

Part XVIII, 'The scrutiny'

This chapter describes in some detail the different processes during the scrutiny for determining the successful candidates. It will be most useful to those who are acting as scrutineers for the first time at an election. The better your understanding of the voting system and counting procedures, the more effective you are likely to be as a scrutineer.

As a scrutineer, you have an essential role to play in observing that all due process is followed on behalf of your candidate until the result is declared.

Fresh scrutiny

After polling day, upon receipt of ballot papers from the officers-in-charge/AROs, the DRO conducts a fresh scrutiny, or re-check, of ballot papers. This proceeds separately for the HoR ballot and the DRO Senate count.

More than 85 per cent of the total HoR formal vote, including early votes, is counted on election night. The remainder, comprising postal, absent, provisional and early declaration votes, cannot be counted until after election night.

House of Representatives

The Electoral Act, s 274

The system of voting used for HoR elections is a full preferential voting system. The voter must indicate a preference for all candidates on the ballot paper. This system has been used in Australian federal elections since 1918.

The system of counting votes for the HoR requires a candidate to obtain an absolute majority (more than 50 per cent of the formal votes) to be elected.

Firstly, all the number '1' formal first preference votes are counted for each candidate. If no candidate has an absolute majority of first preference votes, counting of votes then proceeds as outlined below.

A full distribution of preferences takes place in every division, even where a candidate has an absolute majority of first preference votes.

Step 1: The candidates are ranked according to how many formal first preference votes they have received in the election.

Step 2: If no candidate has an absolute majority, the candidate who has received the fewest first preference votes is excluded, and all the ballot papers held by that candidate are transferred to the continuing candidates, according to the next available preference expressed on each ballot paper.

Step 3: The process of excluding the candidate who has the fewest votes continues until a single candidate has an absolute majority of the votes.

Step 4: The candidate who has an absolute majority of votes is elected.

Example of a distribution of preferences: Division of Lowe – (2007 Federal Election)

	Rerceretnam, Marc (GRN)		Murphy, John (ALP)		Shailer, Bill (CDP)		Tsolkakis, Jim (LP)		
Count	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Votes	%	Total
First	6 774	8.61	38 766	49.27	1 616	2.05	31 518	40.06	78 674
Second	230		572		EXCLUDED		814		1 616
Total	7 004	8.90	39 338	50.00			32 332	41.10	78 674
Third	EXCLUDED		5 798				1 206		7 004
Total			45 136	57.37			33 538	42.63	78 674
			ELECTED				UNSUCCESSFUL		

In cases where the distribution of preferences is required to determine the result, this does not normally occur until at least 13 days have elapsed after polling day, to allow for the receipt of declaration votes.

The AEO for a state or territory may, however, direct a DRO to conduct a provisional scrutiny of preferences as part of the fresh scrutiny.

Two-candidate-preferred count

The result of the full distribution of preferences is used to calculate the two-candidate-preferred statistics.

Two-party-preferred count

In divisions that do not have Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Coalition candidates as the final two candidates, a 'Scrutiny for Information' is conducted to determine the two-party-preferred result.

A 'Scrutiny for Information', in these cases, is a notional distribution of preferences to find the result of preference flows to the ALP and Coalition candidates.

Tied result

If there is a tied result on the final count, there is an immediate fresh scrutiny of votes and a fresh scrutiny of all rejected declaration votes.

If one candidate then receives an absolute majority of votes, the DRO declares the result accordingly. If not, the DRO shall give to the Electoral Commissioner written notice that the election cannot be decided.

The Electoral Act, ss 274(9C) and 357(1A)

If the fresh scrutinies confirm the deadlock, the DRO advises the Electoral Commissioner that the election cannot be decided. The Electoral Commissioner must then file a petition disputing the election result with the Court of Disputed Returns.

Appendix 1: Offences

Scrutineer offences

The Electoral Act describe certain offences that relate particularly to scrutineers.

For offences committed on or after 7 November 2024, the value of one penalty unit is \$330.

	Offence	Maximum Penalty	Comment
<i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>			
s 218(1) Electoral Act	Interfering with or attempting to influence any elector within the polling place or communicating with any person in the polling place except as is necessary in the discharge of the scrutineer's functions A scrutineer who commits such a breach, or is guilty of misconduct or fails to obey the lawful directions of the officer in charge may be removed from the polling place by the police or a person authorised by the officer in charge	Imprisonment for 6 months or 10 penalty units, or both	
s 218(2B) Electoral Act	If present during the early opening and sorting of pre-poll ballot papers (s.274(2AA)), disclosing or communicating information that relates to those actions to persons outside the counting centre before the closing of the poll.	Imprisonment for 6 months or 10 penalty units, or both	Applies to scrutineers
s 323 Electoral Act	Disclosing any information acquired concerning the vote of any elector in a manner that is likely to enable identification of the elector	Imprisonment for 6 months or 10 penalty units, or both	Applies to AEC officers and scrutineers
s 335 Electoral Act	Exhibiting or leaving in any polling place any card or paper that directs or instructs an elector how to vote	5 penalty units	Does not apply to official instructions exhibited by proper authority at a polling place
s 341(1) Electoral Act	Wearing or displaying a badge or emblem of a candidate or political party in a polling place	10 penalty units	Applies to AEC officers and scrutineers
s 348(1) Electoral Act	Engaging in misconduct or failing to obey any lawful direction of the person in charge Applies to anyone at a polling place or counting centre	5 penalty units	Applies to any early voting centre, any polling place on polling day or any counting centre. An offender may be removed by the police or anyone else authorised by the person in charge

Other offences

Scrutineers, campaign workers and other supporters of candidates should also be aware of various other acts and omissions that constitute an offence during the polling period.

	Offence	Penalty	Comment
<i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>			
s 339(1)(c) Electoral Act	Fraudulently doing an act that results in the destruction or defacement of any nomination paper or ballot paper	Electoral Act: six months imprisonment.	
s 339(1)(d) Electoral Act	Fraudulently putting any ballot paper or other paper into the ballot box	Electoral Act: six months imprisonment.	
s 339(1)(e) Electoral Act	Fraudulently taking any ballot paper out of any polling place or counting centre	Electoral Act: six months imprisonment.	
s 339(1)(g) Electoral Act	Supplying ballot papers without authority	Electoral Act: six months imprisonment.	
s 339(1)(h) Electoral Act	Doing an act that results in the unlawful destruction of, taking of, opening of, or interference with, ballot boxes or ballot papers	Electoral Act: six months imprisonment.	
s 339(1A) Electoral Act	Voting more than once in the same election	10 penalty units.	
s 339(1C) Electoral Act	Intentionally voting more than once in the same election	60 penalty units or 12 months imprisonment	
s 339(2) Electoral Act	Engaging in any act that results in the defacement, mutilation, destruction or removal of any notice, list or other document affixed by, or by the authority of, any DRO	5 penalty units	

Polling place offences

The following acts are prohibited within six metres of the entrance of a polling place, early voting centre or a mobile polling team. These provisions apply to candidates, campaign workers, scrutineers, and candidates' representatives.

When a building used as a polling place is situated in enclosed grounds and the DRO has authorised the officer in charge to display a notice signed by the DRO at each entrance stating that the grounds are part of the polling place, those grounds are considered to be part of the polling place for the purposes of these offences.

	Offence	Penalty	Comment
<i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>			
s.340(1)(a) Electoral Act	Canvassing for votes	5 penalty units	Consequently, campaign workers and supporters must only hand out how-to-vote cards to electors outside the six-metre limit from the designated entrance to any polling location
s.340(1)(b) Electoral Act	Soliciting the vote of any elector	5 penalty units	
s.340(1)(c) Electoral Act	Inducing an elector not to vote for a particular candidate	5 penalty units	
s.340(1)(d) Electoral Act	Inducing an elector not to vote at the election	5 penalty units	
s.340(1)(e) Electoral Act	Exhibiting any notice or sign (other than an official notice) relating to the election	5 penalty units	

These acts are also prohibited if they involve broadcasting by electronic equipment and are clearly audible within six metres of the entrance to a polling place or early voting centre, even if the equipment is located outside of six metres of the entrance to a polling place or early voting centre.

For example, a person who is using a loudspeaker or radio equipment attached to a car to solicit for votes will breach the provision if the car is parked in the car park adjacent a polling place and the loudspeaker broadcast can be heard at the polling place entrance even if the car park is 20 metres away from the polling place.

A person found guilty of this offence can be fined up to 5 penalty units.

Offences under other Commonwealth legislation

There are also offence provisions in the *Criminal Code Act 1995 Cth* (Criminal Code) and the *Crimes Act 1914 Cth* that are relevant to the by-election process. These include forgery (Criminal Code, Part 7.7), false or misleading statements (Criminal Code, Part 7.4) and unlawful destruction of Commonwealth property (Crimes Act, s.29).

The elements of those offences, and their respective penalties, can be found in the respective legislation.

Appendix 2: Postal voting

Eligibility

The Electoral Act, s 183 and Schedule 2

The Acts state that an elector is entitled to apply for a postal vote if:

- throughout the hours of polling on polling day, the elector will be absent from the electoral division for which the elector is enrolled
- the elector will not, at any time during the hours of polling on polling day, be within eight (8) kilometres by the nearest practicable route of any polling place in the state or territory for which the elector is enrolled
- throughout the hours of polling on polling day, the elector will be travelling under conditions that will prevent the elector attending a polling place in the state or territory for which the elector is enrolled
- the elector will be unable to attend a polling place on polling day because of:
 - serious illness
 - infirmity
 - approaching childbirth
 - a reasonable fear for their personal wellbeing or safety
- on polling day, the elector will be unable to attend a polling place because the elector will be at a place (other than a hospital) caring for a person who is seriously ill or infirm or who is expected shortly to give birth
- throughout the hours of polling on polling day, the elector will be a patient at a hospital and unable to vote at the hospital
- because of the elector's religious beliefs or membership of a religious order, the elector:
 - is precluded from attending a polling place, or
 - for the greater part of the hours of polling on polling day, is precluded from attending a polling place
- on polling day, the elector is in prison serving a sentence of less than three years or otherwise under detention (please note that not all people in prison or under detention are eligible to vote)
- the elector's address has been excluded from the roll (silent elector)
- throughout the hours of polling on polling day, the elector will be engaged in their employment or occupation, and
 - if the elector is an employee, the elector is not entitled to leave of absence, and
 - in any other case, the absence of the elector for the purpose of attending a polling place to vote would likely to cause loss to the person in their occupation.

Application

The Electoral Act, s 184

An application for a postal vote can be made online through the AEC's Postal Voting Application or via a paper form and must:

- contain a declaration by the applicant that they are an elector entitled to apply for a postal vote, and
- be made after the issue of the writ for the by-election or the public announcement of the proposed date of the by-election, whichever is the earlier, and before 6pm on the Wednesday before polling day.

Completion and return

The Electoral Act, s 194

On receipt of the postal vote material, which comprises a postal vote certificate and postal ballot papers, the elector should substantially observe the requirement to:

- show the unmarked ballot papers and unsigned postal vote certificate to an authorised witness
- sign the postal vote certificate in the presence of the authorised witness
- have the authorised witness sign, date, and indicate the capacity in which the witness acts on the postal vote certificate
- cast a vote in the presence of the authorised witness, but so that the authorised witness cannot see the vote
- post or deliver the sealed envelope to the appropriate DRO.

Postal vote envelopes containing the ballot papers need to be received by the AEC on or before 13 days after polling day. The postal vote must be completed by 6pm on polling day and can be posted or delivered within the 13 day timeframe to:

- any DRO
- an early voting officer
- any polling place on polling day before the close of the poll; or
- a person who is at an office of the AEC and who is either:
 - the Electoral Commissioner, Deputy Electoral Commissioner or AEO
 - a person employed under Division 4 of Part II of the Electoral Act
 - a member of the staff of the AEC who is engaged under the *Public Service Act 1999* as an ongoing Australian Public Service employee, or
 - employed under section 35(1)(b) of the Electoral Act.

Postal voting arrangements and deadlines

The following conditions apply:

- For postal vote applications received up to and including 6pm on the Friday eight days before polling day, the AEC is to dispatch postal voting material to the applicant by post or other appropriate (non-electronic) means. For applications received in this period, the applicant may also request another means of delivery (non-electronic). If these means are reasonable and practicable, the AEC is required to dispatch the postal voting material by those means.
- The AEC is to dispatch postal voting material by the most reasonable and practicable means for applications received after 6pm on the Friday eight days before polling day and up to and including 6pm on the Wednesday before polling day.
- The AEC will not be required to post or deliver postal vote material to those electors whose applications for postal votes were received after 6pm on the Wednesday prior to polling day.

Registered general postal voters

The Electoral Act, ss 185 and 186

Electors who are registered general postal voters will automatically be sent a postal vote certificate and postal ballot papers as soon as they become available after a by-election is called.

As ballot papers for an election cannot be printed until after nominations have been finalised, there is at least a two-week period after the issue of the writ before ballot papers can be distributed.

In practical terms this means that the first dispatch of postal ballot papers to any postal voter is not possible until the 3rd day following declaration of nominations (See Appendix 3).

An elector may also apply to be registered as a general postal voter if one of the grounds specified in section 184A of the Electoral Act applies.

Appendix 3: Additional information available to scrutineers

The AEC produces a range of publications for scrutineers, candidates and other participants in elections and referendums in addition to the Scrutineers Handbook.

Some of the information materials available are:

- Candidates Handbook: information for candidates in the election
- Electoral Pocketbook: a quick reference guide to the last federal election
- Nominations Guide for Candidates: a quick reference guide for prospective candidates
- Ballot Paper Formality Guidelines: detailed information on how electoral officials determine formality of ballot papers
- Electoral Backgrounders: backgrounders discuss particular issues in the electoral process
- Funding and Disclosure Guides: separate guides for candidates, political parties and donors.

Other information materials will be available during by-election campaigns.

A copy of the Scrutineers Handbook is available on the [AEC website](#).

General information on a range of topics is available by visiting the [AEC website](#), from all AEC offices, or by phoning 13 23 26.

Other official material

All relevant official electoral forms can be obtained from the [AEC website](#).

Glossary

Term	Description
Assistant Returning Officer (ARO)	The officer in charge of each polling place is officially called the 'presiding officer' during polling but is called the ARO during the scrutiny (see also 'Officer in charge').
Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)	The independent statutory authority established in 1984 to maintain and update the Commonwealth electoral roll, raise public awareness and conduct federal elections and referendums.
Australian Electoral Officer (AEO)	The AEC's chief manager in each state and the Northern Territory. An AEO for the Australian Capital Territory is only appointed for each election period. The AEO is the returning officer for the Senate in their state or territory.
By-election	A by-election is held whenever a vacancy occurs in the House of Representatives. A supplementary election must be held if a candidate for a House of Representatives election dies in the period between close of nominations and polling day.
Candidate	A person standing for election to the Senate or House of Representatives.
Certified list of voters	The official electoral roll used to mark off electors' names. Polling officials place a mark against an elector's name when the elector is issued with a ballot paper at a polling place, or where appropriate during early voting, to indicate that the elector has voted. The certified list can be in paper or electronic format.
Close of rolls period	The roll closes on the seventh day after the issue of the writ.
<i>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</i>	The legislation governing the Commonwealth electoral process. Referred to as 'the Electoral Act' in this handbook.
Constitution	Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act
Counting centre	Any site at which a scrutiny or counting of votes is to be, or is being, conducted.
Court of Disputed Returns	A candidate, an elector or the AEC may dispute the validity of an election or return by a petition to the High Court sitting as the Court of Disputed Returns. The court has wide powers to resolve the matter.
Declaration vote	A declaration vote is recorded by a voter whose entitlement to vote cannot be confirmed at the place of voting. The voter makes a signed declaration on an envelope and then puts their completed ballot papers inside. These votes are counted after polling day if the voter's entitlement to vote is verified using the information provided on the declaration envelope.
Divisions (electorates)	For representation in the House of Representatives, Australia is divided into Electoral Divisions. The number of these divisions is determined by population. To ensure equal representation, the boundaries of these divisions have to be redrawn or redistributed periodically.
Divisional Returning Officer (DRO)	The AEC officer responsible for conducting the election in each division. The DROs are the returning officers for the House of Representatives in their divisions and are also responsible for electoral administration within that division, in particular, the maintenance of the electoral roll, providing information sessions to schools and community groups and preparations for the next election.

Term	Description
Early vote	A postal vote or a vote cast at an early voting centre or via a mobile polling team in the lead-up to polling day. They are cast by electors who will not be able to get to a polling place on polling day.
Election Management System	The AEC system which centrally calculates election results, displays those results and is the interface to the Tally Room on the AEC website .
<i>Electoral and Referendum Regulation 2016</i>	Regulations that support the operation of the Act.
Electoral Commissioner	The person nominated as the electoral commissioner in accordance with section 18 of the Electoral Act.
Financial disclosure return	A document detailing information on the receipts and expenditure of participants in the political process. There are specific return forms for candidates, their donors and political parties. Financial disclosure return forms for candidates are made public 24 weeks after polling day.
Formal	A ballot paper is generally considered formal if it is filled out correctly in accordance with the Act and the instructions on the ballot paper. It is therefore included in the scrutiny.
Fresh scrutiny	A re-check of votes cast in a House of Representatives election or referendum, conducted by the DRO in the days following polling day.
How-to-vote cards	Cards provided to voters by candidates or campaigns showing how a group, party or candidate would like voters to fill in their ballot papers.
Informal	A ballot paper is generally considered informal if it is not filled out correctly in accordance with the Electoral Act or Referendum Act and the instructions on the ballot paper. It cannot therefore be included in the scrutiny.
Issuing officer	Polling officials who issue ordinary ballot papers to electors whose names are found on the certified list of voters, mark the certified list, complete the account of ballot papers and assist with the count of ballot papers after the close of poll.
Issuing point	The part of the polling place where ballot papers are issued to electors.
Mobile polling team	A team of polling officials who bring the polling to the elector. They visit electors in locations including nursing homes, prisons and remote locations to enable them to vote.
Nomination form	The official form which must be used by a candidate nominating for election.
Officer in charge (OIC)	The officer who is in charge at a polling place. They are called 'presiding officers' during polling (8am to 6pm). From 6pm, during the scrutiny, they are called the Assistant Returning Officer (ARO).
Ordinary vote	An ordinary vote is recorded by an elector whose entitlement to vote is verified at the place of polling and whose name is marked off on a certified list of voters. Ordinary votes may be cast on, or in certain circumstances, before polling day. These votes are counted on polling day after the close of polling.

Term	Description
Ordinary vote	An ordinary vote is recorded by an elector whose entitlement to vote is verified at the place of polling and whose name is marked off on a certified list of voters. Ordinary votes may be cast on, or in certain circumstances, before polling day. These votes are counted on polling day after the close of polling.
Polling official	There are two categories of polling officials, those who are required to work in the period before polling day to assist with mobile and early voting, and those who are required to work in a polling place on polling day only.
Polling place	A place appointed to take the votes of electors on polling day.
Postal Vote Certificate	The certificate specific to postal voting on which the voter declares their entitlement to vote, inserted inside the return envelope provided by the AEC.
Preferential voting (full)	A system of voting in which the voter completes the ballot paper by putting the number '1' in the box next to the candidate who is their first choice, the number '2' in the box next to their second choice, and so on until every box is numbered. This is called Full Preferential Voting and is the method used in the House of Representatives.
Provisional votes	Votes cast at a polling place where the elector's name cannot be found on the certified list, or where the elector's name has been marked off the certified list as having voted, or where the elector has silent enrolment, or where, after questioning, the elector has failed to satisfy the OIC that they are a particular person on the certified list.
Registered officer	A person nominated by a registered political party to be the registered officer for the purposes of the Act.
Registered political party	A party registered with the AEC under Part XI of the Electoral Act.
Scrutineers	People appointed by candidates to be their representatives at polling places, or at any place at which the scrutiny of votes is being conducted. Scrutineers have the right to be present when the ballot boxes are sealed and opened and when the votes are sorted and counted so that they may check any possible irregularities, but they may not touch any ballot paper.
Scrutiny	The counting of votes, which leads to the result.
Silent elector	An elector who has applied to have their address not appear on the roll for reasons of personal safety or safety of their family members.
Tally Room (TR)	A website results system, which provides election and referendum information and results in a user-friendly format.
Two-candidate-preferred	These figures show where preferences have been distributed to the likely final two candidates in a House of Representatives election.

Term	Description
Two-party-preferred	These figures indicate results where HoR preferences have been distributed to the major sides of politics – the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal and National Party Coalition. In most cases two-candidate-preferred and two-party-preferred are the same because the final two candidates are ALP and the Liberal and National Party Coalition. In an electorate held by an independent or another party, the counts will differ.
Writ	In an electoral context, a writ is a document which commands an electoral officer to hold an election or referendum and contains dates for the close of rolls, the close of nominations, the day of voting and the return of the writ. The issue of the writ triggers the election or referendum process.