

Western Australian  
Electoral Commission

Local Government Elections

# Formality of Ballot Papers Guide

Version 2.0 (HO142) – 29 July 2025



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN  
Electoral Commission



## Our purpose and values

The WA Electoral Commission's purpose is to provide Western Australians with an electoral experience that they understand, trust and can access easily and efficiently. The Commission is guided by its five core values:

### Impartial

Our electoral outcomes will not be influenced by others.

### Professional

Our work will be at the highest standards for ethics, accuracy and efficiency.

### Respectful

Our relationships will be courteous, honest and fair with all.

### Innovative

Our systems and processes will adapt to customers' needs.

### Collaborative

As a team we will consult and test new ideas with customers.

*The Western Australian Electoral Commission acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which our electoral activities take place. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.*

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## 1. Introduction

The scrutiny of all ballot papers is undertaken in a prescribed manner. After the close of the poll the electoral officer's conducting the count will review the ballot papers as to their formality and either reject or admit the ballot paper to the count.

Scrutineers have a right to challenge the admission or rejection of any ballot paper. The grounds for a challenge may be the formality or informality of the ballot paper.

The Returning Officer will check all ballot papers deemed informal and if, in the Returning Officer's opinion, it clearly indicates an elector's wishes the ballot paper can be admitted to the count.

The Returning Officer may review a decision in the course of a re-count of votes and, in determining the formality of any ballot paper, will refer to the Electoral Commissioner's guidelines as well as the *Local Government Act 1995* and *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*, but the resolution of validity will always be circumstance specific. The physical appearance of markings on the ballot paper may well influence the Returning Officer's decision on the formality of the ballot paper.

The final decision on whether a ballot paper is to be admitted to a count rest with the Returning Officer.

Please refer to the Returning Officer if clarification on any aspect of the formality of ballot papers is required.

## 2. Authentic ballot paper

Ballot papers are printed on official paper carrying a watermark image or other security features. However, on rare occasions ballot papers may be produced locally by a Presiding Officer due to operational necessity and are not necessarily informal. Ballot papers so produced (e.g. by photocopying an unused ballot paper) must be initialled by the Presiding Officer or Issuing Officer on the back.

## 3. Determining formality

The scrutiny and count of all ballot papers is undertaken in a prescribed manner. After the close of the poll the Returning Officer conducting the count will review the ballot papers as to their formality and either reject or admit the ballot paper to the count.

Scrutineers have a right to challenge the admission or rejection of any ballot paper at the count. The grounds for a challenge may be the formality or informality of the ballot paper.

## 4. Ballot paper formality principles

When assessing ballot paper formality, the following principles apply:

### 1. Giving effect to the electors wishes

The key words in the legislation refer to accepting a ballot paper that 'clearly indicates the elector's wishes'.

### 2. Marking the ballot paper

In an election where one office is to be filled and only two candidates are named on the ballot paper, an elector needs to mark the ballot paper by writing the numeral '1' in the square beside the name of the candidate whom the elector wishes to be elected.

If only one office is to be filled at the election and three or more candidates are named on the ballot paper, or two or more offices are to be filled at the election, an elector is to mark the ballot paper by writing numeral '1' in the square opposite the name of the candidate for whom the elector votes as the elector's first preference. Electors may indicate further preferences for **some** or **all** of the remaining candidates by writing the numeral '2' in the square opposite the name of the candidate for whom the elector votes as the elector's second preference, and so on, until the elector has finished allocating their preferences. The elector is not required to number all the squares.

3. The *Local Government Act 1995* states that the elector is to use the number 1 to indicate their first choice of candidate. Some variations are acceptable, s4.75 states the Returning Officer may accept a ballot paper that in the Returning Officer's opinion, clearly indicates the elector's wishes as required or authorised by section 4.69 even if the ballot paper is not marked precisely in accordance with section 4.69.

### 4. Initials and other markings

In local government elections electors are entitled to secrecy when casting a vote under the *Local Government Act 1995* and *Local Government (Elections) Regulations 1997*, however, a ballot paper is not rendered informal simply because the elector reveals his or her identity by his or her own choice. This typically may occur where an elector initials a correction.

### 5. Torn ballot papers

Ballot paper that are torn, need to be reviewed to confirm all candidate names and boxes are present. If all candidate names and boxes are present, the ballot paper can be admitted to the count.

## 5. Examples of formal and informal ballot papers

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF ONE COUNCILLOR  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**  
Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who you want to vote for.

**CANDIDATES**

**CANDIDATE, A**

**CANDIDATE, B**

### ***FORMAL***

*The elector's first preference is clearly indicated and is made in line with voting instructions.*

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF ONE COUNCILLOR  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
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**How to vote**  
Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who you want to vote for.

**CANDIDATES**

**CANDIDATE, A**

**CANDIDATE, B**

### ***FORMAL***

*The elector's first preference is clearly indicated.*

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF ONE COUNCILLOR  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**  
Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who you want to vote for.

**CANDIDATES**

**CANDIDATE, A**

**CANDIDATE, B**

### ***FORMAL***

*The tick symbol can be taken as an indication of choice – in the absence of other ballot paper markings.*

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF ONE COUNCILLOR  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**  
Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who you want to vote for.

**CANDIDATES**

**CANDIDATE, A**

**CANDIDATE, B**

### ***FORMAL***

*The cross symbol can be taken as an indication of choice – in the absence of other ballot paper markings.*

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF ONE COUNCILLOR  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**  
Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who you want to vote for.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="X"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="✓"/>

**INFORMAL**

*It is not clear which mark indicates the preference.*

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF ONE COUNCILLOR  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**  
Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who you want to vote for.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="."/>
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**INFORMAL**

*The dot does not indicate a preference.*

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ELECTION OF ONE COUNCILLOR  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**  
Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who you want to vote for.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="2"/>

**INFORMAL**

*The elector has not indicated a first preference.*

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF ONE COUNCILLOR  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**  
Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who you want to vote for.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="←"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="←"/>

**INFORMAL**

*The arrows do not indicate a preference for one candidate over another.*

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF 4 COUNCILLORS  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**

Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**

Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who is your first choice.

If you want to, you may show more choices by writing consecutive numbers in the squares next to the names of the other candidate in the order of your choice, starting with the number 2 up to 6.

You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

**CANDIDATE, A**

1

**CANDIDATE, B**

4

**CANDIDATE, C**

5

**CANDIDATE, D**

2

**CANDIDATE, E**

3

**CANDIDATE, F**

**BALLOT PAPER**  
ELECTION OF 4 COUNCILLORS  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
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You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

**CANDIDATE, A**

1

**CANDIDATE, B**

3

**CANDIDATE, C**

6

**CANDIDATE, D**

5

**CANDIDATE, E**

2

**CANDIDATE, F**

4

***FORMAL***

*The elector's full preferences are clearly marked.*

***FORMAL***

*The elector has allocated a preference for all 6 candidates.*

**BALLOT PAPER**  
 ELECTION OF 4 COUNCILLORS  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
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Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who is your first choice.

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You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="1"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="2"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, C</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="4"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, D</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="5"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, E</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="2"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, F</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="6"/>

***FORMAL***

*The elector has indicated a first preference. As there are two second preferences marked, the ballot paper will become exhausted after the first preference.*

---

**BALLOT PAPER**  
 ELECTION OF 4 COUNCILLORS  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
 Election Date: 18 October 2025

**How to vote**

Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who is your first choice.

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You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text" value="1"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, C</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, D</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, E</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, F</b>	<input style="width: 40px; height: 30px; border: 1px solid black;" type="text"/>

***FORMAL***

*A first preference is clear. As there is no second preference marked, the ballot paper will become exhausted after the first preference.*

---

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**CITY OF TRAINING**  
**TRAINING WARD**  
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Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who is your first choice.

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You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	C
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	D
<b>CANDIDATE, C</b>	A
<b>CANDIDATE, D</b>	F
<b>CANDIDATE, E</b>	B
<b>CANDIDATE, F</b>	E

***FORMAL***

*The voter's intention with respect to the order of preference is clear. The alphabetical sequence indicates a preference order.*

---

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Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who is your first choice.

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You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	IV
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	II
<b>CANDIDATE, C</b>	
<b>CANDIDATE, D</b>	I
<b>CANDIDATE, E</b>	
<b>CANDIDATE, F</b>	III

***FORMAL***

*The voter's intention with respect to the order of preference is clear. The roman numeral sequence indicates a preference order.*

---

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You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

**CANDIDATE, A**

**CANDIDATE, B**

**CANDIDATE, C**

**CANDIDATE, D**

**CANDIDATE, E**

**CANDIDATE, F**

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You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

**CANDIDATE, A**

**CANDIDATE, B**

**CANDIDATE, C**

**CANDIDATE, D**

**CANDIDATE, E**

**CANDIDATE, F**

**FORMAL**

*The tick symbol can be taken as an indication of the first preference. The ballot paper will become exhausted after the second preference.*

**FORMAL**

*The elector has indicated a first preference. As there is no second preference marked, the ballot paper will become exhausted after the first preference.*

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ELECTION OF 4 COUNCILLORS  
**CITY OF TRAINING**  
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Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who is your first choice.

If you want to, you may show more choices by writing consecutive numbers in the squares next to the names of the other candidate in the order of your choice, starting with the number 2 up to 6.

You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<b>Mr Trevor Trainer</b>	3	
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>		✓	
<b>CANDIDATE, C</b>		4	
<b>CANDIDATE, D</b>		5	
<b>CANDIDATE, E</b>		2	
<b>CANDIDATE, F</b>		6	

**FORMAL**

*The voter's intention with respect to the order of preference is clear. The elector's signature does not invalidate a ballot paper.*

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If you want to, you may show more choices by writing consecutive numbers in the squares next to the names of the other candidate in the order of your choice, starting with the number 2 up to 6.

You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	1		
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	6		
<b>CANDIDATE, C</b>	4		
<b>CANDIDATE, D</b>	2		
<b>CANDIDATE, E</b>	3		
<b>CANDIDATE, F</b>	5		

**FORMAL**

*The voter's intention with respect to the order of preference is clear. The number written outside of the squares does not invalidate a ballot paper.*

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**TRAINING WARD**  
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If you want to, you may show more choices by writing consecutive numbers in the squares next to the names of the other candidate in the order of your choice, starting with the number 2 up to 6.

You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="X"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="✓"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, C</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="4"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, D</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="5"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, E</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="2"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, F</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="6"/>

***INFORMAL***

*It is not clear if the tick or cross indicates the elector's first preference.*

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 ELECTION OF 4 COUNCILLORS  
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Write the number 1 in the square next to the name of the candidate who is your first choice.

If you want to, you may show more choices by writing consecutive numbers in the squares next to the names of the other candidate in the order of your choice, starting with the number 2 up to 6.

You do not need to write a number in all the squares.

**CANDIDATES**

<b>CANDIDATE, A</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, B</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="✓"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, C</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="AD"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, D</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="5"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, E</b>	<input type="checkbox" value="✓"/>
<b>CANDIDATE, F</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

***INFORMAL***

*The elector's first preference is unclear, as there are two ticks.*

*Note: an elector's initials or signature does not invalidate a ballot paper.*



## **Western Australian Electoral Commission**

Level 2, 66 St Georges Terrace, PERTH WA 6000

GPO Box F316, PERTH WA 6841

**Phone** (08) 9214 0400 or 13 63 06

**Email** [waec@waec.wa.gov.au](mailto:waec@waec.wa.gov.au)

**Web** [elections.wa.gov.au](http://elections.wa.gov.au)

### **Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS)**

13 14 50 and then ask for (08) 9214 0400

### **National Relay Service (NRS)**

Speak & Listen number 1300 555 727

SMS Relay number 0423 677 767