

Your Guide to Electoral Terminology

A resource for migrants, students, educators and anyone
curious about how elections work in Western Australia



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
Electoral Commission

Absentee vote	When someone votes outside the area where they are enrolled. You can vote at any polling place on election day from 8am to 6pm but you will need ID to do so.
Absolute Majority	The number of votes needed for a candidate to be elected using the preferential voting system. It is worked out as 50% + 1 of the total valid or formal votes, or more than half the vote.
Ballot box	A sealed container used at polling places to securely collect completed ballot papers until counting.
Ballot paper	The physical paper on which an elector votes.
Boundary	A line that shows where one electoral district ends and another begins. Districts are reviewed through a process called electoral distribution, which happens about 18 months after each state election. The goal is to make sure each district has a similar number of voters, as populations grow or change.
Candidate	A person who nominates to be elected to Parliament. They may belong to a political party or run independently.
Candidate Agent	A person appointed by a candidate to act on their behalf in relation to election matters.
Compulsory voting	All Australian citizens aged 18 and over must vote in federal and state elections by law. If someone doesn't vote and doesn't have a good reason, they may have to pay a fine.
(The) Count	The process of checking and adding up all votes. It starts on election night at polling places, then includes postal and early votes. Preferences are sorted to determine the final result.
Declaration Vote	A vote when a person's name cannot be found on the roll or they're voting by post. The voter must show ID and complete a declaration form at the polling place.
Democracy	A system of government where people vote for representatives who are elected to parliament.
District	A section of a state where people vote to choose one person to represent them in the Legislative Assembly. Each district has about the same number of voters. Western Australia is divided into 59 electoral districts.

Donkey vote	A ballot paper that has been marked from top to bottom in numerical order. A reverse donkey vote is marked in the same way, but from bottom to top. Donkey votes are valid votes as this order may be the preference of the voter.
Early voting	People can vote before election day if they can't get to a polling place on election day. Early voting can be done in person at an early polling place or by mail.
Eligible	When a person is allowed to vote in an election, they are <i>eligible</i> . If a person meets the following conditions, they are eligible to vote: 18 years or older, Australian citizen, and on the electoral roll.
Election Day	Election Day is the day when people vote to choose their representatives in Parliament. WA state elections are held every four years, on the second Saturday in March. On this day, voters go to polling places to cast their vote.
Elector	A person whose name appears on the electoral roll who is able to vote in State, Federal or Local Government elections.
Electoral Roll	A list of names and addresses of all electors eligible to vote.
Enrol	To register to vote by completing an enrolment form and being placed onto the electoral roll. Compulsory for all Australian citizens over 18 years of age.
Federal Government	The government of the whole of Australia. The leader of the Federal Government is called the Prime Minister.
First preference	The candidate a voter likes the most. In Australian elections, voters number the candidates on the ballot paper. The person they put as number 1 is their first preference. These votes are counted first to see if someone has enough support to win.
Governor	The King's representative in the state. The Governor signs and issues the Writs for state elections.
Formal vote	A vote that can be counted as it has been completed correctly.
House of Representatives	One of the two parts of Australia's Federal Parliament where Members of Parliament (MPs), represent different areas of the country. They discuss ideas for new laws and vote on them. The government is formed by the party with the most members in this house.
How-To-Vote Card	A card, pamphlet, flyer or document (physical or digital) that is shown or given to an elector for the purpose of instructing them on how to vote for a particular candidate or party in an election.

Independent	A candidate or Member of Parliament who is not in a political party.
Informal vote	A vote that cannot be counted because it has not been filled in correctly.
Legislative Assembly	One of two parts of the Western Australian Parliament, the lower house has 59 members, each representing a district. Working with the upper house, members make and pass laws.
Legislative Council	One of two parts of the Western Australian Parliament, the upper house has 37 members, all representing the whole state. Members review laws made by the lower house and can ask for changes if they think it's needed.
Local Government	The government level that provides services to local areas within a state or territory – it can be a City, Town or Shire directed by a Council of elected representatives led by a Mayor or Shire President.
Nominate	When a person officially puts their name forward to be a candidate in an election.
Parliament	The houses made up of elected representatives that are responsible for making laws.
Political Party	A group of people who share similar ideas about how the country should be run. They work together to try to get their members elected to Parliament so they can guide the making of laws and decisions.
Polling place	A place open on polling day where electors can go to vote. Polling places are usually located in community buildings such as town halls and schools.
Postal Vote	A vote that is mailed. Electors may apply for a postal vote and ballot papers will be mailed out. The completed ballot papers must be posted or delivered before 6pm on polling day. Voting by post removes the need to go to a polling place. It is possible to vote from overseas and interstate via a postal vote.
Preferential voting	Voting system used in the Legislative Assembly and the House of Representatives. Voters use numbers to indicate their order of preference of the candidates on a ballot paper.
Representative	Someone who is chosen to speak, act, or be present officially on behalf of others.

Returning Officer	A person in charge of running the election in a district. Returning Officers are responsible for checking candidate nominations, setting up polling places, managing staff, and supervising the vote count on election day.
Scrutineer	A person chosen by a candidate to observe an election to make sure that voting and counting are done fairly and accurately.
Secret ballot	A way of voting that is private. It helps people vote freely without pressure, intimidation or judgement.
Senate	One of the two houses of Australia's national Parliament. The Senate works with the other house, called the House of Representatives, to make or pass laws and check the work of the government.
State Government	The government of a state of Australia. The leader of a State Government is called the Premier.
Temporary Election Workforce (TEW)	Staff hired by the Commission to help deliver elections. Roles range from very short-term, typically lasting from a single day (e.g. election day) to several weeks or months before and after the election period.
Third-party campaigner	Any individual, organisation or other entity that is not a registered political party, associated entity, candidate, Legislative Council Group or Member of Parliament, who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • receives a gift for a political purpose; or • incurs expenditure in relation to an election.
Voting screen	A small booth or divider at a polling place that gives people privacy when they fill out their ballot paper. It helps keep their vote secret, which is important for fair and free elections.
Writ	<p>A formal legal document signed by the Governor that signifies the start an election. It contains important details such as when people can nominate to be a candidate, the date of the election and when the results must be returned. There is one writ for each House of Parliament.</p> <p>When the writ is returned, it is filled out by the Commissioner, together with the elected MPs.</p>