

Guide for Schools

# Holding a Student Election



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN  
Electoral Commission

## INTRODUCTION

Student elections play a vital role in fostering a democratic environment within the school. They offer students a platform to voice their opinions, develop leadership skills and actively participate in school governance.

This guide provides step-by-step instructions - from planning and candidate nominations to voting and announcing the results - to assist schools with delivering a vibrant and engaging student election experience. Please read in full prior to planning an election.

## Supporting materials

STUDENT ELECTION\_Nomination\_form\_template

STUDENT ELECTION BALLOT PAPER\_Preferential

STUDENT ELECTION Count\_tallysheet\_Preferential

## Learning Outcomes

On completion of a school election, students will:

- have engaged in the decision-making process of choosing their student leadership through acquiring information from candidate campaigns.
- be able to demonstrate how to cast a vote using the preferential voting system to complete a ballot paper.

## Western Australian curriculum links

Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) knowledge and understanding:

Year 5 onwards.

ACHASSK116

The roles and responsibilities of electors (e.g. enrolling to vote, being informed) and representatives (e.g. representing their electorate's interests, participating in the parliamentary process) in Australia's democracy.

ACHASSK116

The key features of the electoral process in Australia, such as compulsory voting, secret ballot, preferential voting.

## SIX STEPS TO CONDUCTING A STUDENT ELECTION

1. Planning, announcement and call for nominations
2. Prepare the ballot papers
3. Candidate delivery of election speech/presentation
4. Conduct the election
5. Sort, check and count
6. Announce the results

## Step 1: Planning, announcement and call for nominations

### Planning for the election

- Determine the dates for the election period in advance.
- Allow approximately 4-6 weeks from the first day the election is announced until the day the winners are announced.
- Assign an election project owner and support staff.
- We recommend no more than 10 candidates per position, with the ideal number six or less. This will make for an easier counting process.
- Larger schools - determine a way to keep candidate numbers down, for example, stipulate a set number of candidates per class.

### TIP:

**Student voter participation in elections is recommended from Year 5 upwards.**  
**Voting is not a particularly suitable activity for Year 3 & 4 students, and not at all suitable for PP-Y2.**

### Announcement and call for nominations

Clear broad communication is key to the success of the election. Information needs to be provided in a timely manner and via different channels to build awareness and encourage participation.

### All communications need to include:

- **Election date:** The date and time voting will take place.
- **Eligible voters:** The year groups who will be participating as voters.
- **Available positions:** The positions open for nomination and responsibilities of each.
- **Nomination process:** How, when and where to nominate as a candidate and the submission deadline.
- **Who is eligible** to run as a candidate, and suggestions for how candidates can promote themselves.

### Spreading the word

- Produce posters and place around the school in areas most frequented by the voting cohort.
- Announce the election at school assemblies.
- Promote the election in school notices.
- Encourage teachers to discuss it with students in class.

Use the **nomination form template** to create a form that includes the name of the person accepting nomination forms and/or a location where forms can be submitted. Specify closing date and time for nominations. It is recommended to allow around four weeks between calling for nominations and the nomination closing date.

## Step 2: Prepare the ballot papers

- Once nominations have closed, gather nominations forms and separate into piles for each position.
- Prepare ballot papers by following the instructions below.

### Gender representation

To ensure equal gender representation (e.g. electing two school captains, a boy and a girl), separate ballot papers will be needed for male and female candidates.

### Ballot paper preparation instructions

- On a laptop or computer, use the **ballot paper template** to prepare a separate ballot paper for each position, entering:
  - The school's name
  - Position name - including *boy/girl* if needed.
- Prepare separate draws for each of the ballot papers needed for the positions. Place the candidates' names for each position into their respective draws.
- Draw names one by one and record the draw order on the ballot paper for the corresponding position.
- Add the total number of candidates to each ballot paper and delete any unused boxes/lines.
- Print the ballot papers for each position on different coloured paper - this will make the votes easier to sort and count.
- Cut to size.



**BALLOT PAPER**  
[INSERT SCHOOL NAME]  
[INSERT POSITION NAME - include  
*boy/girl if needed*]

Number the boxes from 1 to **INSERT TOTAL NUMBER** of candidates in the order of your choice.

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>INSERT STUDENT NAME</b>

This is a simplified version of preferential voting - the voting system used for the Legislative Assembly (State) and the House of Representatives (Federal).

Students vote by numbering all the boxes on the ballot paper in the order of their choice. For a large number of candidates, one option is to instruct students to only number a reduced set number of boxes e.g. 1-6, however this will make for a more complicated count.

### **Step 3: Candidate delivery of election speech/presentation**

Prior to the election, provide an opportunity for candidates to deliver a short speech or presentation to school staff and the voting students. This is an important part of the process for both candidates and voters.

Election staff team members arrange for a candidate get-together to discuss the important features of a good campaign speech. These may include:

**An introduction with a personal story:** candidates can share a brief story or experience that illustrates their connection to the school.

**Vision and goals:** candidates decide on the school issues that matter to them, and outline what they will advocate for, such as:

- specific physical areas or facilities for refurbishment or improvement.
- inclusivity and a stronger school community.
- environmental projects - proposal of eco-friendly initiatives.
- better mental health support.
- tech upgrades - improvements in school technology.
- Fun events like talent shows or tournaments.

**Call to Action:** encourage the audience to vote for them.

**Give thanks:** express gratitude for the audience's time.

Election staff members could also arrange a poster/flyer production design session for the candidates.



#### **Tips for speech delivery: candidates**

Encourage students to practice their speeches/presentations, demonstrating:

- Confidence: speaking clearly and confidently.
- Passion: showing enthusiasm for goals.
- Engagement: making eye contact with the audience.

#### **For the audience:**

Encourage students to think critically about the ideas each candidate offers in their speeches.

#### **Step 4: Conducting the election**

- All voting takes place on election day.
- Ensure teachers have scheduled time in the day for their class to vote.
- Teachers can also vote if the school deems it appropriate.

Voting instructions need to be provided to the students, including a demonstration of how to complete the ballot paper in preferential voting format using **clearly written** numbers in the order of a preference.

**IMPORTANT: Instruct students not to include any personal information** or marks on their ballot papers. Votes must be completely anonymous to be counted.

Teachers should emphasize that voting is about selecting the candidate who is best suited for the job, rather than choosing based on friendship or popularity.

There are different ways to conduct the voting depending on the size of the school, the number of ballot papers and the amount of time school staff have to dedicate to the election. Two options are listed below.

#### **Option 1: In-class**

- Provide all teachers of participating classes with the necessary number of ballot papers for their students.
- Teachers may wish to provide a ballot box. These can be made easily from an A4 printer paper box with a neat rectangular slot cut into the lid.
- Teachers allocate a specific time during class for students to vote.
- Teachers remind students that voting is private and ensure the students cannot see each other's votes during and after completion of the ballot papers.
- After voting, teachers collect all ballot papers or retain the ballot box.

#### **Option 2: Set up a Polling Place**

If a central accessible area is available, schools may wish to set up an actual polling place.

##### *Polling place set up*

- Ensure the polling place meets accessibility requirements.
- Announce the polling place location and voting times to participating students. Remind students about the importance of voting privately.
- Use signs to direct students to the polling place, and through the polling place, such as entry and exit signs.
- Set up tables and chairs for students to fill out their ballots, and if possible, provide privacy screens or partitions.
- Provide ballot papers, a ballot box (or boxes) and pens or pencils. (Be aware that voters often inadvertently walk off with the pens or pencils - this can be monitored by your officials).
- Assign teachers or student volunteers as 'electoral officials' to oversee the polling place and assist voters by giving directions, checking names off class lists, issuing ballot papers and guarding the ballot box.

*Polling place set up continued:*

- Allocate one class to vote at a time during a designated voting period.
- Students need to be provided with ballot papers and instructed on where to go to vote and where to deliver their ballot papers.
- Ensure the process is orderly and respectful.
- Ensure ballot papers are collected securely.



## **Step 5: Sort, Check and Count**

### **Part 1: Sort the Votes**

- Download the **Count tally sheet** file. Enter the school and position name onto each spreadsheet required, according to number of positions in the election. Rename each spreadsheet tab at the bottom of the sheet.
- Add the candidates' names into the count tally spreadsheets for each of the positions. NOTE: Names can be entered earlier, as soon as nominations close and candidates are known.
- Determine a designated ballot paper collection and counting area, ensuring it has large tables with ample space for laying out the ballot papers.
- Allocate and label one table per position. For example, for head boy, head girl, boy sports captain and girl sports captain, four tables are needed.
- Make candidate name labels and stick them on the appropriate table, in a row.
- Sort the ballot papers into separate piles for each of the positions and place piles on allocated tables.

### **TIP**

It is good practice to have some form of 'scrutineering'. Scrutineers observe the polling and counting processes to ensure it is done correctly. A couple of volunteer parents/carers (unrelated to any candidate) as well as other teachers/student councillors can undertake this role. Scrutineering is a real election practice - it reinforces voting as a fair and impartial activity.



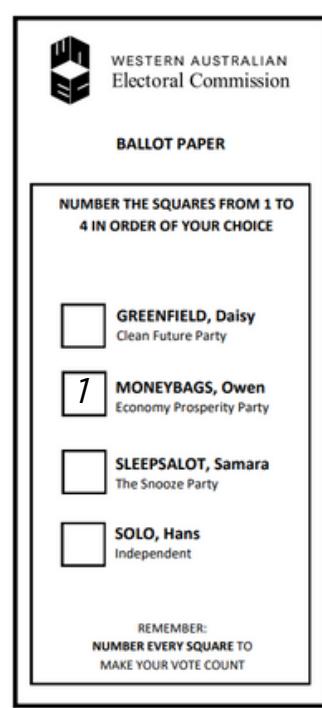
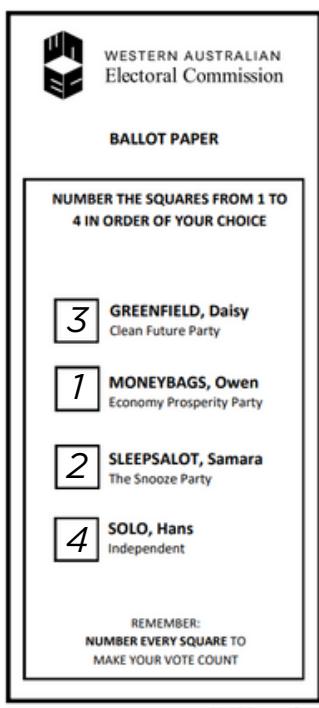
## Part 2: Check formality of votes and determine Absolute Majority

### Check formality of votes

All votes need to be checked to ensure they are **formal**.

A vote qualifies as formal if:

- the voter has filled in the ballot paper correctly; and/or the intention of the voter is clear; and
- the ballot paper contains no personal identification information.
- Sort the ballot papers into two piles: formal and informal votes.
- Count the number of formal and informal votes and record on the tally sheet.
- Add the two numbers together to get the total number of votes. Record on the tally sheet.



### Determine Absolute Majority

To be elected, a candidate must obtain the Absolute Majority of the formal votes.

To calculate, use the following formula:

$$\text{Absolute Majority} = (\text{formal votes} \div 2) + 1$$

#### Example

Total number of formal votes is 64

To calculate the Absolute Majority, divide total formal votes by 2, then add 1

$$64 \div 2 = 32$$

$$32 + 1 = 33$$

A candidate must receive 33 votes or more, to be declared the winner.

**NOTE:** If the number of formal votes is odd, the result will be a decimal. In this case, round up to the next whole number.

- Record the Absolute Majority figure on the tally sheet.
- Place all informal votes to one side. They will no longer be included in the count.

### Part 3: Count the votes

- For each position, sort the formal votes into piles according to all first preferences (number '1') for each candidate. Place piles on the labelled tables created in part 1.
- Count the number of first preference votes for each candidate and record on the tally sheet under *first preference*.
- Combine the total number of first preference votes. The total should be equal to the number of formal votes calculated in part 2. This is a good way to check for any miscounts.

Head boy	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4	Total votes distributed	Total valid votes
First preference	2	5	4	4		15

**Example:** Absolute Majority = 9 ( $15/2 = 7.5$ . Round up to 8 and + 1)

If no candidate has received enough votes to be elected (equal to or higher than the absolute majority), commence the distribution of preferences.

Eliminate the candidate with the lowest number of votes and record their first preference votes as a negative in the tally sheet. Redistribute these votes to the second preferences by dividing them into separate piles according to which candidate was chosen as number '2'. Count the number of ballot papers in these second piles and record this number for each remaining candidate under 'first distribution'. Do not add them to the first pile.

This candidate is eliminated, having the least number of votes.

Head boy	Candidate 1	Candidate 2	Candidate 3	Candidate 4	Total votes distributed	Total valid votes
First preference	2	5	4	4		15
First distribution	-2	1	1	0	2	
Progressive total		6	5	4		15

If there is a tie for the candidate with the lowest number of votes, place the names of the tied candidates on slips of paper into a vessel and randomly select one. The name drawn becomes the eliminated candidate and their votes are redistributed.

- Calculate the progressive total by adding the first preferences and first distribution for the remaining candidates.
- Calculate total valid votes by adding all these totals together.

If no candidate has received the absolute majority, continue the counting process by eliminating the next candidate with the least number of votes and distributing them according to the voter's next preference. This may be indicated by number '2' or '3', etc. depending on which candidates remain in the count.

Repeat the process until a candidate has the absolute majority, or more.

You can continue counting until all preferences have been distributed. This will show the order in which all candidates are elected, which is useful if a replacement is required.

### **Exhausted votes**

An exhausted vote occurs when a voter's ballot no longer counts toward any candidate because all the candidates they ranked have been eliminated during the counting process.

Exhausted votes are put to one side. If you wish to record exhausted votes, add a column to the relevant tally sheet and add the vote to the distribution row where it became exhausted.

Exhausted votes generally only occur if voters have been instructed to number some, not all of the boxes on the ballot paper.

### **Tied results**

If results are tied, there are options for deciding the result, such as:

- run the election again
- select a winner through a random draw (names in a hat)
- ask a suitable person to have a casting vote
- allow the winners to share the position.

IMPORTANT: decide how a tie will be resolved BEFORE counting begins.

## Step 6: Announce the results

Announcing the election results is a key moment that should be clear, respectful, and inclusive. A well-delivered announcement promotes transparency, celebrates participation, and upholds the integrity of the election. Communicating the results can be done in a number of ways. Choose a few from the suggestions below.

Ensure all candidates, the election project team, and all helpers and volunteers are thanked for their participation.

### Announcement suggestions

- Announce the results at a school assembly. Include a short speech from the winners if appropriate.
- Share the results during the school's daily announcements. Add a congratulatory message.
- Post results on the school's official Instagram, Facebook, or website. Include photos of the winners if appropriate.
- Include the results in the school newsletter.
- Post a display on school bulletin boards.
- Record a video with teachers or students revealing the winners.
- Combine the announcement with a celebration like cupcakes or a pizza lunch. Encourage students to mingle and congratulate the winners.

