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Introduction

When undertaking checks on whether a Senate, House of Representatives (HoR) or Referendum ballot paper is formal or informal, four questions should be asked:

- Is the ballot paper authentic?
- Does the ballot paper identify the voter?
- Does the ballot paper have a vote marked on it?
- Is the intention of the voter clear? That is:
  - In the case of a HoR or Senate election, does the ballot paper contain a lawful numbering sequence?
  - In the case of a referendum, does the ballot paper have more than one vote “Yes” or “No” marked on it for each question?

When making decisions on disputed ballot papers, decision makers should attempt to look at as many disputed ballot papers as possible at the same time. This assists with consistent application of the principles in decision making.

If necessary consult with senior management in state or national office (excluding the Australian Electoral Officer (AEO) who may need to be the decision maker if a HoR or Referendum recount is held) for guidance on ballot paper formality. If required, legal advice can be sought.

Senate Scrutiny Processes

The scrutiny of Senate ballot papers occurs at the Central Senate Scrutiny (CSS). The AEO for the state or territory is responsible for the Senate scrutiny and is the final decision maker in regard to Senate ballot paper formality.

On polling night the Electoral Act requires the Assistant Returning Officer (ARO) to count the total number of Senate ballot papers and the number of first preferences for each group above the line (ATL) (s.273(2)(ca) and (d) of the Electoral Act). It is Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) policy for the ARO to also count the number of first preferences below the line (BTL) for each group and ungrouped candidate and to also count the obviously informal ballot papers.

After polling day, the DRO reconciles the number of ballot papers previously counted by the ARO, or undertakes an initial count of any ballot papers that have not already been counted, (s.273(3) of the Electoral Act) before forwarding the ballot papers to the CSS.

All Senate ballot papers need to have their individual preferences entered into the AEC’s computerised Senate count system Easycount – whether the ballot paper is marked above or below the line.

The AEC uses a semi-automated process to conduct the Senate count, scanning Senate ballot papers and using optical character recognition technology to capture preferences. Once captured, these preferences are then verified by a human operator and the formality rules applied.

This occurs progressively over several weeks as the ballot papers are processed through the semi-automated count process at the CSS. Once all the ballot papers have been scrutinised and the quota struck, the distribution of preferences is conducted in Easycount to determine the final results.

House of Representatives or Referendum Scrutiny

For HoR elections and referendums, the DRO is the decision maker. While Presiding Officers, known as Officers in Charge (OICs) and polling place officials will sort and count first preference or ‘Yes’ votes on polling night, any ballot papers for which formality cannot be determined at the polling place will be separated and transmitted to the DRO who will make a determination on their formality.
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 in the case of HoR or Referendum ballot papers or to the AEO in the case of Senate ballot papers 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).

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 only is 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**

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.

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 in the case of HoR and Referendum ballot papers and to the AEO in the case of Senate ballot papers to decide on formality.

Example – ballot paper that may identify a voter

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.

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 numbers 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 question 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

HoR and Senate 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.
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; and
- 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

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

This ballot paper is formal
The third box is an overwritten ‘3’, the fourth box is an overwritten ‘4’.

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.

Example – numbering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Electoral Division of Division Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Two" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="3" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="One" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="4" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="5" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="6" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="7" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="8" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This ballot paper is formal
Numbers can be written as words or figures.

This ballot paper is informal
Ticks or crosses are not a valid first preference mark for HoR ballot papers.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Electoral Division of Division Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SURNAME, Given Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>INDEPENDENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This ballot paper is informal
No discernible figure in the eighth square.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Electoral Division of Division Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number the boxes from 1 to 8 in the order of your choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SURNAME, Given Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>INDEPENDENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**This ballot paper is formal**

The figure in the eighth square reasonably resembles a ‘7’.

**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

This ballot paper is formal
The figure in the fourth box reasonably resembles a ‘1’.

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**

This ballot paper is formal

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

This ballot paper is informal

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

This ballot paper is informal

The voter has not indicated a valid first preference.
Consecutive sequence of numbers

**Above the line**
For an above the line vote (ATL), voters are instructed to consecutively number at least 6 boxes above the black line, in the order of their preference, commencing with the number ‘1’. By voting in this way, voters are preferencing the individual candidates within a group in the order in which they appear on the ballot paper. However, where a voter consecutively numbers fewer than 6 boxes, (including only one box with a first preference) the ballot paper will still be formal, but will exhaust after the last consecutive number.

**Below the line**
For a below the line vote (BTL), voters are instructed to consecutively number at least 12 boxes alongside individual candidates in order of their preference commencing with the number ‘1’. They may continue to express further preferences if they wish.

Where there are more than 6 candidates, the ballot paper will still be formal if the voter has consecutively numbered the boxes 1 to 6. In effect the minimum formality threshold for a BTL vote is the expression of the numbers (preferences) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 with no duplications or missing numbers.

Note: s.268A(2)(a) of the Electoral Act would permit the number ‘1’ being expressed as either a singular tick or cross e.g. X, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

**Marked both above and below the line**
For a ballot paper that is marked both above and below the line, the BTL figures take precedence and will count as the vote.

If however the BTL figures are informal, the ATL vote will be accepted, providing it is formal.

Disclaimer: All the Senate formality examples in this publication are for the ‘Election of 6 Senators’ in a state, in the event of a double dissolution election the Senate ballot paper for each state will be for the ‘Election of 12 Senators’.
Example – ATL Senate vote

You may vote in one of two ways

Either

Above the line
By numbering at least 6 of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

Or
Below the line
By numbering at least 12 of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

This ballot paper is formal
The voter’s intention is clear. There is a consecutive sequence in at least 6 boxes (from 1 to 7).

Example – BTL Senate vote

You may vote in one of two ways

Either

Above the line
By numbering at least 6 of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

Or
Below the line
By numbering at least 12 of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

This ballot paper is formal
The voter has indicated their preferences by the consecutive numbers 1 to 12.
Example – ATL Senate vote

You may vote in one of two ways
Either
Above the line
By numbering at least 6 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

Or
Below the line
By numbering at least 12 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

This ballot paper is formal
While the voter has not complied with the requirements of s.239 of the Electoral Act to number at least six boxes, provided there are no other mistakes, ‘vote saving’ provisions mean ballot papers marked above the line with a number one only (or a sequence of numbers less than six) will be included in the count.

Example – BTL Senate vote

You may vote in one of two ways
Either
Above the line
By numbering at least 6 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

Or
Below the line
By numbering at least 12 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

This ballot paper is formal
While the voter has not complied with the requirements of s.239 of the Electoral Act to number at least twelve boxes, provided there are no other mistakes, ‘vote saving’ provisions mean ballot papers marked below the line with at least six consecutive preferences commencing with the number one will be included in the count.
### 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 – BTL Senate

<p>| | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**This ballot paper is formal**

Even though the voter has overwritten two numbers, their intention to number the second and third candidates in Group G with their sixth and fifth preference is clear.

If the overwriting was not clear enough to determine the voter’s intention, the ballot paper would be informal because the voter has not expressed consecutive preferences for at least 6 candidates. If the same situation occurred for preference numbers higher than 6, the ballot paper would be formal, but exhaust where there is clear contention over the number sequence.
Acceptable forms of numbering

For voting ATL and BTL in the Senate, voters may use a consecutive series 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.

Example – numbering – BTL Senate

This ballot paper is formal
Example – use of a tick or cross – ATL Senate

Unlike in the HoR, for voting ATL and BTL in the Senate, ticks or crosses are acceptable as a first preference mark in lieu of the number ‘1’. Only one tick or cross or number ‘1’ may be used to indicate the voter’s first preference.

This ballot paper is formal
There is a single first preference mark (a cross) ATL and consecutive preferences from 2 to 6.

This ballot paper is informal
The voter’s intention is not clear because there are two first preference marks (both a tick and a cross) ATL.
Example – use of symbols – ATL Senate

This ballot paper is informal
While s.268A(2)(a) and s.269(1A) of the Electoral Act allow a singular tick or cross to be treated as a first preference as the number ‘1’ there is no provision in the Electoral Act that allows a circled logo to be treated as expressing a voter’s first preference. The circle must be treated as an additional mark that appears on a ballot paper that does not represent a preference (number). Likewise, asterisks, hashtags, plus and minus symbols cannot represent a preference number.
Missing or repeated numbers

Where it meets the minimum requirements, a ballot paper with missing or repeated numbers will still be formal and will exhaust at the missing or repeated number.

The ATL voter has to mark the number ‘1’, or the number ‘1’ and one or more higher numbers (s.268A(1)(b) of the Electoral Act).

The BTL voter has to consecutively number at least their first 6 preferences (s.268A(1)(b) of the Electoral Act).

Example – missing numbers – ATL Senate

This ballot paper is formal
However, because the voter’s fourth preference is missing only the first three preferences will be included in the count. The preferences numbered 5 to 8 will be disregarded.
Example – repeated numbers – ATL Senate

This ballot paper is informal
The voter’s intention is not clear. The repeated first preference means that no preferences can be counted.

Example – missing numbers – BTL Senate

This ballot paper is formal
However the missing number ‘10’ breaks the voter’s preference sequence, so only the boxes marked 1 to 9 can be included in the count. The remaining preferences are disregarded.
Example – repeated numbers – BTL Senate

You may vote in one of two ways

Above the line
By numbering at least 6 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

Or

Below the line
By numbering at least 12 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

This ballot paper is informal
The repetition of the number ‘3’ means that the voter has only clearly expressed two preferences, rather than the minimum requirement that the voter express at least six consecutive preferences from 1 to 6.
Placement of votes

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

Example – placement of votes – ATL Senate

This ballot paper is formal

The voter’s intention is clear.
Example – placement of votes – BTL Senate

You may vote in one of two ways

Above the line

By numbering at least 6 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

Or

Below the line

By numbering at least 12 of these boxes in the order of your choice (with number 1 as your first choice).

This ballot paper is formal

There is a consecutive series of discernible numbers from 1 to 12. 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 obvious.

Example – variations in handwriting – ATL Senate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>PARTY</th>
<th>UNGROUPED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SURNAME</td>
<td>Given Names</td>
<td></td>
<td>SURNAME</td>
<td>Given Names</td>
<td></td>
<td>SURNAME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTY</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
<td>PARTY</td>
<td>UNGROUPED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURNAME</td>
<td>Given Names</td>
<td></td>
<td>SURNAME</td>
<td>Given Names</td>
<td></td>
<td>SURNAME</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This ballot paper is formal

The figure in the third box reasonably resembles a ‘1’.
Group or candidate name substitution

If the voter crosses out or replaces a political party or group’s name or a candidate’s name on a ballot paper, that ballot paper may be informal.

Example – group name substitution – ATL Senate

This ballot paper is informal

The voter has not indicated a valid first preference for any available group.
Example – candidate name substitution – BTL Senate

This ballot paper is informal
The voter has not indicated a valid first preference for any of the available candidates.

Example – candidate name substitution – BTL Senate

This ballot paper is informal
By expressing preferences for “substituted candidates” the voter has not complied with the minimum requirement to express at least six consecutive preferences from 1 to 6.
Example – candidate name substitution – BTL Senate

This ballot paper is formal
While the voter has substituted the names of two candidates, they are additional marks and are disregarded. The voter has not expressed any preference for the ‘substitute candidates’ so the additional marks are irrelevant to the consideration of formality. The voter has complied with the requirement to mark the ballot paper in accordance with s.239(1) of the Electoral Act.
Referendum guidelines

Referendum ballot paper tests

A voter filling in a referendum ballot paper is obliged to indicate their vote by either:

- writing the word ‘yes’ on the ballot paper in the space provided if the voter approves the proposed law, or
- writing the word ‘no’ on the ballot paper in the space provided if the voter does not approve the proposed law.

The prescribed method of recording a vote in a referendum is to use the words ‘yes’ or ‘no’ written alone (i.e. without qualification). In all cases, however, ballot papers must be admitted where the voter’s intention is clear (s.93(8) R(MP)A). Words with the same meaning as ‘yes’ or ‘no’ (e.g. ‘definitely’ or ‘never’), an indication of either ‘Y’ or ‘N’, as well as ticks are all capable of clearly demonstrating the voter’s intention.

A vote at a referendum will be informal if any of the following apply:

- no vote is marked on the ballot paper (s.93(1)(b) R(MP)A)
- it has more than one vote mark on the ballot paper (s.93(1)(c) R(MP)A)
- terms are used that convey indecision and uncertainty, such as ‘I guess so’ or ‘not sure’, or
- a cross is used on a referendum ballot paper which has only one question, since a cross on its own may mean either ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

A ballot paper is not informal merely because a ballot paper with the wrong state or territory was issued to the voter.
Use of multiple marks

Where a voter has marked a ballot paper in numerous ways, the vote is formal as long as conflicting answers have not been given. For example, a tick and a ‘yes’ in the one box will be formal, as the intention of the voter is to indicate approval for the question.

Example – use of multiple marks

This ballot paper is formal
The intention of the voter is clear that they approve.

This ballot paper is formal
The intention of the voter is clear that they disapprove.

This ballot paper is informal
The intention of the voter is not clear.
Change to wording on ballot paper

If the voter changes the wording of the referendum question, whether by adding or deleting words, the voter’s intention regarding the question is made unclear and the vote is informal.

Example – change to wording on ballot paper

Use of symbols on ballot paper

If a voter marks a ballot paper with words, symbols or figures or a language other than English, the ballot paper can be accepted if it is established that the voter’s intention is clear to the DRO as the decision maker. The DRO is not required to investigate or research the matter further if the intention is not clear.

Example – use of symbols on ballot paper
Ballot papers with more than one question

Referendum ballot papers with more than one question require each question to be considered as if it was on a standalone ballot paper, i.e. it is possible for the answer to one question to be formal and the answer to another question to be informal.

On referendum ballot papers with two or more questions, crosses are also capable of clearly demonstrating the voter’s intention, but are only formal if at least one other question on the same ballot paper is answered with a tick.

Example – ballot paper with more than one question

This ballot paper is formal for both questions
The voter’s intention is clear having used a tick and a cross.

This ballot paper is informal for both questions
The voter’s intention is not clear having used two crosses.
Feedback welcome

The AEC welcomes your views on the usefulness of the Ballot paper formality guidelines and any specific information provided in these pages. We invite you to send your feedback by email to elections@aec.gov.au with the subject line ‘Feedback on ballot paper formality guidelines’.
Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Returning Officer (ARO)</td>
<td>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’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)</td>
<td>The independent statutory authority established in 1984 to maintain and update the Commonwealth electoral roll, raise public awareness and conduct federal elections and referendums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Electoral Officer (AEO)</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By-election</td>
<td>An election held to fill a vacancy in the House of Representatives resulting from death, resignation, absence without leave, expulsion, disqualification or ineligibility of a member.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate</td>
<td>A person standing for election to the Senate or House of Representatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified list of voters</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918</td>
<td>The legislation governing the Commonwealth electoral process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisional Returning Officer (DRO)</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisions (electorates)</td>
<td>For representation in the House of Representatives, Australia is divided into voting areas known as divisions or electorates. One member is elected from each division. (For representation in the Senate, each state and territory is one electorate. All states are multi-member electorates and have the same number of Senators. Territory representation is determined by the federal parliament)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early vote</td>
<td>A postal vote or a vote cast at an early voting centre, an AEC divisional office or via a mobile polling team in the lead-up to election day. They are cast by electors who will not be able to get to a polling place on election day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral Commissioner</td>
<td>The Statutorily appointed officer who performs the functions of the chief executive officer of the AEC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh scrutiny</td>
<td>A re-check of House of Representatives or Referendum votes cast conducted by the DRO in the days following election day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>House of Representatives (HoR)</td>
<td>One of two houses of the federal Parliament of Australia, whose members are elected on a population basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
<td>A ballot paper is generally considered informal if it is not filled out correctly in accordance with the Act and the instructions on the ballot paper. It cannot therefore be included in the scrutiny.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing officers</td>
<td>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 the poll.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing point</td>
<td>The part of the polling place where ballot papers are issued to electors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Officer in charge (OIC)</td>
<td>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).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary vote</td>
<td>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 election day. These votes are counted on election day after the close of polling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling official</td>
<td>There are two categories of polling officials, those who are required to work in the period before election day to assist with mobile and early voting and those who are required to work in a polling place on election day only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling place</td>
<td>A place appointed to take the votes of electors from that state or territory on election day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First preference mark</td>
<td>The mark – a tick, a cross either ATL or BTL on a Senate ballot paper may be used in place of a 1 to indicate a voter’s first preference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferential voting (full)</td>
<td>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 consecutively. This is the method used when voting in a House of Representatives election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferential voting (optional)</td>
<td>The system of voting where the voter can vote for their preferred candidate/s. These systems can also operate with further rules/minimum thresholds. This is the method of voting in a Senate election, where the voter completes the ballot paper ATL by putting the number ‘1’ in the box next to the group of candidates who is their first choice, the number ‘2’ in the box next to their second choice, and so on up to at least 6. BTL voting is for individual candidates and the voter must preference at least 12 candidates. The voter can indicate further preferences both ATL and BTL if they so wish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum</td>
<td>A proposal to alter the Constitution put to the vote. The Constitution can only be altered by a ‘double majority’ – a national majority of electors from all states and territories and a majority of electors in a majority of states passing the proposed amendment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>One of two houses of the federal Parliament of Australia, which has 76 Senators, 12 from each of the six states and two each from Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrutineers</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrutiny</td>
<td>The counting of votes, which leads to the election result.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tally Room (TR)</td>
<td>A website election results system, which provides election information and results in a user-friendly format.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-candidate-preferred</td>
<td>These figures show where preferences have been distributed to the likely final two candidates in a House of Representatives election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Vote saving’ provisions</td>
<td>‘Vote saving’ provisions at sections 268A and 269 of the Electoral Act allow some Senate votes that have not been marked in accordance with voting instructions in section 239 of the Electoral Act to still be included in the count.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writ</td>
<td>In an election context, a writ is a document which commands an electoral officer to hold an election and contains dates for the close of rolls, the close of nominations, the day of the election and the return of the writ. The issue of the writ triggers the election process.</td>
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