AEC
Australian Electoral Commission

# 5 steps for running an election

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# 1 Get Started

## Planning and nomination

Teacher's time:
**30 minutes**
Activity time:
**1 week**

**Templates**
Nomination form
Types of election
Class voting timetable

## What makes a good election?

A good election encourages democratic decision making and a respected outcome.
A good election is based on principles that ensure it is free and fair.

**Openness** – from calling the election to declaring the results, keep the school community informed and involved. Decide on clear rules and processes for your election so that everyone knows the election is fair.

**Full participation** – encourage participation and provide plenty of opportunity for everyone to be involved.

**Secret ballot** – voting in secret means voters can make their choice without influence or intimidation. Secret ballot is a key aspect of Australian democracy.

**One vote, one value** – everyone only votes once in each election. Every vote has the same value and the result of the election is honoured.

## Key questions for planning your election:

### 1. What positions are being elected?

Define the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the student leadership positions. This helps students to make an informed decision about becoming a candidate or choosing who to vote for.

### 2. Who can stand for election?

To become a candidate for election, individuals must first nominate. As a teacher, this is your opportunity to influence which students can take a student leadership role. Do not wait until after students have voted to influence the outcome. Use nomination rules to make sure that every candidate is suitable.

Examples of nomination rules:

- Nominees must have participated in at least one extra curricula activity
- Nominees must present a campaign speech
- Nominees must be supported by a teacher

Customise the **Nomination form** with your own rules.

Allow approximately 1 week for students to nominate. Once nominations have closed, check eligibility and announce the candidates.

### 3. Who is eligible to vote?

When considering who is eligible to vote, remember the principles for a good election. To ensure full participation you may decide to make voting compulsory (as in Australian parliamentary elections).

Consider whether teachers are eligible to vote, or which year levels can vote for school captains.

You will need a list of all eligible voters' names – class rolls are a good basis for this.

### 4. What type of election?

There are many different electoral systems used in Australia and around the world. You may like to model your election on a federal or state electoral system (preferential) or use a simple first-past-the-post system.

You may need to elect several positions, each with different candidates or voters. To do this, you can run several elections simultaneously, using a different ballot paper for each.

The AEC can provide advice on what will work best for your school. For more information see **Types of election** or contact us.

### 5. How will the school community be involved?

Keeping the school community informed is an important part of the election. If possible, each class or homeroom teacher should spend some time discussing the election with students. School assemblies and newsletters are also a good way of raising the profile of the election.

For a whole school election, consult with colleagues to plan the involvement of each class. Use the **Class voting timetable** to schedule a time for each class to vote.

# 2 Get Organised

## Pre-election preparation

Teacher's time:
**1 hour**

**Templates**

Printable poster

Ballot paper generator

Instructions for election officials

There are a number of tasks to do before your election. This checklist will help you prepare.

| TASK | DETAILS | TIMING |
|---|---|---|
| **Order Election Equipment Pack** | Get your free election equipment from Get Voting. | 3 weeks before |
| **Announce election** | Put up **Posters** and include information in the newsletter | 2 weeks before |
| **Book location** | A school hall or gym is an ideal polling place, but any space will do. | 2 weeks before |
| **Confirm timetable with class teachers** | Schedule approximately 15 minutes for each class to vote. | 1 week before |
| **Assemble equipment** | See equipment list below. | 1 day before |
| **Print ballot papers** | Use the Get Voting Ballot paper generator to customise your election. Print one for each voter plus some spares. If you are running more than one election, use different coloured ballot papers for each. | 1 day before |
| **Print voter lists** | You will need several copies so that election officials can mark off names as voters receive their ballot paper. | 1 day before |
| **Brief election officials** | Recruit students/teachers for these roles. Refer to **Instructions for election officials** | 1 day before |
| **Set up polling place** | Easy traffic flow, a place to collect ballot papers and somewhere to vote in secret are the key elements. | On the day |

| EQUIPMENT LIST | DESCRIPTION |
|---|---|
| **Ballot box*** | A secure container to hold completed ballot papers |
| **Ballot box seals*** | Used to make sure that the ballot box is not tampered with |
| **Election official badges*** | Allows voters to identify those people involved in managing the election |
| **Polling place posters*** | Let voters know where, when and how to vote. |
| **Voter lists** | Names of eligible voters are crossed off as they receive their ballot papers |
| **Rulers** | Used to cross names off the voter lists |
| **Pens or pencils** | Secure a pencil to each voting table so that voters can complete their ballot paper |
| **Tables and chairs** | Election officials will need somewhere to sit while issuing ballot papers |
| **Ballot papers** | Only election officials should handle ballot papers prior to voting |
| **Voting tables** | These are placed far enough apart to make sure voting is done in secret. |

* Items marked are included in the Election Equipment Pack which can be ordered from the get voting website. Pack should be ordered 3 weeks in advance of the election.

# 3 Get Informed

## Voter education and campaigns

Teacher's time:
**5–30 minutes**

Activity time:
**up to 1 week**

**Templates**

How to vote – preferential

How to vote – first-past-the-post

Instructions for candidates

The lead-up to an election is an exciting time as preparation and campaigning generates interest in the upcoming event.

### Voter education

A successful election depends on voter participation. Voters must understand what the election is for and how to vote correctly.

Suggested activities:

- Distribute or display **How to vote** information around the school
- Ask an AEC election expert to visit the school, to run a practice election, hold a how-to-vote session or to speak at assembly
- Make some time in the classroom, homeroom or school assembly to discuss the election and the role of the representatives being elected
- Have a question and answer session for students to find out more about the candidates and the election
- Practise preferential voting using the online voting tool at: http://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/How_to_vote/voting_practice.htm
- Ask candidates to present speeches to the voters. Encourage voters to think critically about the ideas and values each candidate presents.
- Hold a debate/discussion about the qualities that make good representatives or leaders. You can draw on examples from within the local community, cultural groups, historical figures or local, state and federal government.

### Campaigning

Campaigning is how candidates make themselves known to voters and attract votes. Use **Instructions for candidates** to inform students of activities and rules for the campaign.

# 4 Get Voting

## Election Day

Activity time:
**1–3 hours**

The teacher in charge manages the polling place, including:

**Before voting starts:**

- Prepare the polling place. The layout should ensure an easy flow for voters, that voting is secret and that issuing officers have a place to give out ballot papers.
- Make sure all election officials are in their positions and know their roles
- Seal the ballot box. If using Get Voting seals, record the numbers of the seals.
- Put ballot papers and voter lists on the issuing tables
- Ensure there is no campaign advertising inside the polling place.

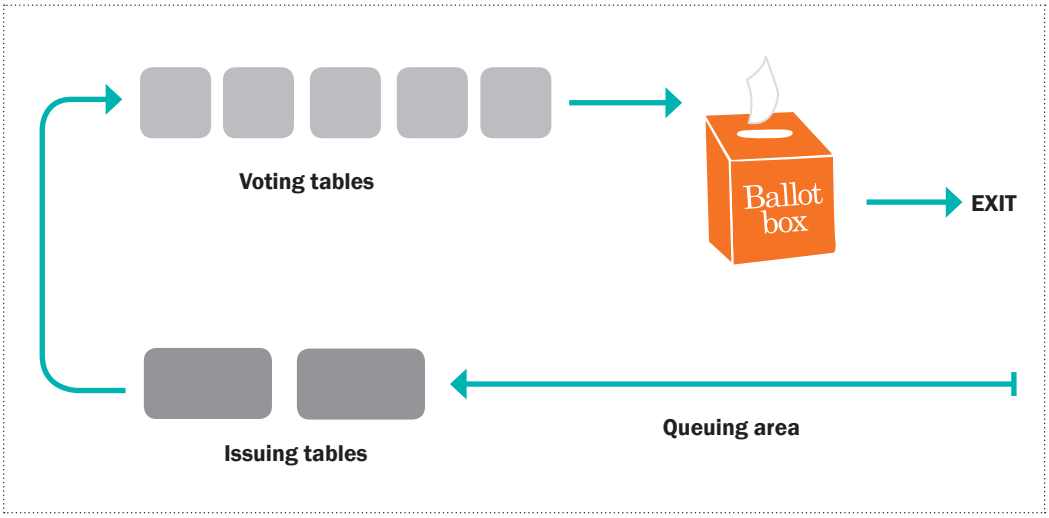
**During voting:**

- Collect any returned or discarded ballot papers
- Keep a lookout for any irregularities or bottlenecks in the process
- Assist voters as required.

**At the end of voting:**

- Close the polling place
- Collect any unused ballot papers
- Take the ballot box to a safe place until it is opened for the vote counting.

**Polling place set-up**



# 5 Get Results

## Counting and announcement

Activity time:
**1 hour**

**Templates**

Instructions for counting – preferential

Instructions for counting – first-past-the-post

Tally sheet – preferential

Tally sheet – first-past-the-post

This is the culmination of your election and it is a crucial time to ensure that the process and the outcome are respected.

### Counting

Openness and transparency during the counting of votes shows that the election is fair. Some ways you may achieve this include:

- Use student helpers to count or witness counting
- Ask the AEC or an independent person to count or witness counting
- Allow student helpers to double check by re-counting the votes at a later date.

The method of counting will depend on the type of election you have chosen. Refer to **Instructions for counting**. Use a **Tally sheet** to keep track of the counting.

The AEC also offers other resources which may assist with counting a preferential vote:

**Down for the Count** http://www.aec.gov.au/Voting/counting/vid_hor.htm

**Voting Tool** http://www.aec.gov.au/Education/Democracy_Rules/interactives/voting_tool/index.htm

You can also ask your local AEC office to help with counting by visiting contact us.

### Announcing the results

Having involved the school community in your election, there will be considerable interest in the results.

Make sure everyone is informed about the outcome and process used to achieve it. Some ways to achieve this include:

- Declare the result at an assembly
- Invite a special guest to make the announcement
- Report on the election process and results in the school newsletter

Congratulate all participants for their efforts and be sensitive to the feelings of unsuccessful candidates. Keep your ballot papers for a recount in case of a dispute or a candidate not being able to fulfil their position.